

12 Anachronisms and arrivals – the smaller borough forces

THE DEVELOPMENT OF policing in England and Wales is often presented as a relatively straightforward, even natural progression starting with the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835 and the Rural Police Acts, 1839/40 and culminating in the County and Borough Police Act, 1856. The reality was a more complex and more dynamic process that continued to play out into the last decades of the nineteenth century. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the experiences of smaller borough forces, charting the appearance of new borough forces in some areas and the disappearance of others. The amalgamation of smaller forces into the WRCC – Barnsley and Keighley in 1856 and Pontefract and Ripon in 1887 – can be seen as rationalisation of provision. Similarly, the creation of separate forces in Dewsbury (1863) and Rotherham (1882) but also Barnsley (1896) can be viewed as logical responses to the growth of these towns. But even this depiction is problematic. Why did the Pontefract and Ripon forces not disappear earlier? Why were the Rotherham and Barnsley forces not created sooner? On closer examination other awkward questions arise. Why did Batley, so similar in socio-economic terms to neighbouring Dewsbury, not establish its own force? And why, if Barnsley re-established its own force, did Keighley not follow suit?

In 1875, outside of the five great and middling towns, there were five other borough with their own forces, ranging in size from c.30,000 (Dewsbury and Wakefield), through c.20,000 (Doncaster) to less than 10,000 (Pontefract and Ripon).¹ The WRCC was responsible for the policing of twelve towns, including three municipal boroughs, with populations ranging from c.12,000 (Idle, Liversidge and Shipley) to over 20,000 (Barnsley, Batley

and Rotherham).^{*} By 1900, the two smallest borough forces had been amalgamated into the WRCC and two boroughs (Barnsley and Rotherham) had their own forces, leaving seven towns, notably Batley and Keighley with populations of c.30,000, still policed by the county force.^{**}

Wakefield

In comparison with dynamic industrial centres such as Halifax, let alone Bradford, Wakefield was more important as the administrative centre of the West Riding, as well as being the site of the WRCC headquarters. Demographic growth was modest – its population roughly doubled in the second half of the nineteenth century, topping 50,000 in 1901 – and it experienced fewer of the socio-economic tensions seen in several other nearby towns. Like Halifax, it was incorporated in 1848. The newly-established watch committee oversaw the creation of a twenty-one strong force, including three sergeants and sixteen constables. Incorporation was about more than policing, but there had been complaints about the failure of the two police officers to work in ‘union and harmony’ with the nightwatchmen and their inability to safeguard property.² The chief of police, John Brierley, was later reprimanded by the town magistrates for ‘seldom being found at the police office ... [and] not paying a proper obedience to the town authorities.’³ While the newly-created force coped with routine matters, it struggled to contain larger-scale disturbances. In late 1849 ‘an effigy of the late Mayor was paraded through the streets, preceded by men bearing torches; a band of musicians and a considerable number of drunken and disorderly people.’⁴ The yeomanry and police from Leeds had to be called in to quell the disturbance but proposals to augment the force were resisted, with some councillors calling for a reduction in numbers.⁵ Few went as far as Councillor Green – ‘putting down the whole force’ – but numbers were cut by one in 1854.

* The other towns were Bingley, Birstall, Gomersal, North Brierley and Pudsey.

** The other towns were Harrogate, Morley, Ossett, Pudsey, and Todmorden.

The one truly contentious issue – other than the wisdom or otherwise of allowing officers to grow moustaches – was the 1854 police bill with its proposal to amalgamate borough forces into county forces, which aroused strong local opposition against ‘unwarrantable attacks.’ At a public meeting called by the mayor of Wakefield, opposition to Grey’s ‘obnoxious’ bill evoked memories of ‘our forebears,’ who had ‘struggled for, fought for, and bled for’ local privileges.⁶ A few spoke in favour, only to be shouted down, and the majority voted to petition parliament against the proposed legislation. Even the more moderate 1856 act, which allowed boroughs, irrespective of size, to amalgamate with their county forces was viewed with suspicion. Local politicians in Wakefield, like their counterparts in Huddersfield, made clear their opposition to colonel Cobbe’s attempts to incorporate as many smaller boroughs into the WRCC as possible. Nor did those fears entirely disappear. As late as 1866 and in a debate over the enforcement of the Cattle Disease Act, a proposal for close co-operation between borough and county forces in the matter was opposed on the grounds that ‘allowing the county police to come into town [would be] the thin end of the wedge.’⁷

Wakefield retained its force but independence was no guarantee of unanimity. Expenditure levels and perceived value for money were central to the debate, even before 1856. Arguments became more heated as the borough force was deemed ‘insufficient in numbers to meet the everyday requirements of the borough,’ with the town inadequately protected at night and at day, on each of the first three inspections. At least one participant in the local debate, councillor Green argued that ‘the shortest and best course would be to turn all the force over to Colonel Cobbe and the county force.’⁸ The benefits that would accrue, he continued, would save ‘the town a great deal of money and the council a great deal of trouble.’ Although the amalgamation option was not taken up, Green’s comments are a reminder of the range of policing options. The proposed augmentation of ten men entailed a significant increase of expenditure, even with the government grant, and was only approved in 1860 after long and acrimonious debates. Nor did arguments over the size of the force disappear. In 1863 some councillors remained convinced that the Wakefield police were ‘too numerous and require reduction,’ and numbers were cut by four (15 per cent) 1866.⁹ Under external pressure, numbers were increased by six in 1868 and by a further seven two years later, bringing the force to thirty-seven.

The 1860s and 1870s were problematic decades in terms of recruitment and retention, exacerbated by low pay and poor conditions of service. Posts went unfilled, beats were overlong and protection geographically patchy. Variations were worryingly high. In 1869 six men resigned and a further three were dismissed, a combined total roughly equivalent to 30 per cent of the force. As the watch committee minutes bear witness, 'a large number of officers' were fined and reprimanded for 'neglect of duty and particularly for drunkenness.'¹⁰ 'The present police,' one councillor complained in 1865, 'were almost in a state of insubordination.'¹¹ Worse was to follow when 'altercations between the inspectors and the men under them' became known.¹² Councillors, notably alderman Holdsworth, spoke of the police being in 'a very unsatisfactory condition,' plagued by 'great disorganisation,' which saw the chief constable's orders being disobeyed.¹³ Such were the recruitment difficulties that men, known to have been dismissed from police service, were re-appointed. An exasperated HMIC Elgee told the town clerk that 'you don't improve [the force] by getting dismissed men.'¹⁴ But there were leadership failures at the top of the force and in the watch committee. The long-serving superintendent McDonald was replaced in 1868 but, while more active, his successor James Chipstead was unable to improve the discipline. Nor were the police successful in dealing with crime. During his inspection in 1871 and again in 1876, Elgee drew attention to low number of arrests in relation to reported felonies.¹⁵ As the *Wakefield Free Press* observed Chipstead was 'not ... one of the cleverest or most far-seeing' of men.¹⁶ Yet it was not until September 1877 that the watch committee grasped the nettle and ordered the superannuation of the superintendent, 'incapable from age and infirmity of body and mind.'¹⁷

His replacement was Charles Clarkson, one-time chief constable of Halifax. Once again, he proved himself to be a strict disciplinarian and a determined enforcer of the law. Men with poor disciplinary records, such as PCs Lambert and Stewart, both with serious drink problems, were allowed to resign. Even PC Bleasby, 'a good constable,' but who 'could not let servant girls alone,' was given the same option to avoid dismissal.¹⁸ Clarkson also sought to improve morale and create the *esprit de corps*, so lacking when he took office, by arguing for improved pay and better educational and recreational facilities.¹⁹ In contrast to his time in Halifax, Clarkson stressed the role of the police as 'the guardians and not the oppressors of the public,'

and exhorted his men to ‘use no more violence than was necessary’ and even telling them that ‘a kind word from a policeman would quell a disturbance ... [whilst] the display of a tyrannous kind of authority might cause a tumult.’²⁰ In his annual report for 1888 he again stressed that ‘the police are forbearing and do not make arrests unless absolutely necessary.’²¹ Clarkson was held in high regard by many local politicians. Councillor Mander spoke warmly of ‘an able and respected chief constable,’ under whom had developed ‘a good police force ... as efficient and well-disciplined as any in the West Riding of Yorkshire.’²² Clarkson himself drew attention to the very few cases of assaults on the police, compared with the 1860s and 1870s when colliers and navvies fought with police, and that there had been ‘no accusation of undue severity or brutal behaviour of any kind.’²³ In an unprecedented show of support, a mass meeting, estimated at 5000 people, mainly from the working classes, demonstrated their support for Clarkson.²⁴

Despite tangible improvements in the 1880s, a more disciplined force than under McDonald and Chipstead, and relatively few serious offences, Clarkson came under pressure from moral reformers in town. Sabbatarians pressed for firmer action on Sunday trading, which in turn led to a clash with the local Tradesmen’s Association, and from nonconformists concerned with ‘the widespread evil of betting and gambling,’ especially in public houses during prohibited hours.²⁵ The presence of ‘an intolerant Liberal caucus’ led to dissension with the watch committee and the town council at large.²⁶ Members of the watch committee were accused of permitting ‘gross infractions of the law,’ treating the law ‘as a plaything to serve the private ends of privileged parties.’²⁷ Despite claims that Clarkson had been ‘prevented from fulfilling his duty ... because men in authority have had interests at stake which would suffer by a rigid enforcement of the law,’ Clarkson’s resignation was accepted by the watch committee, a decision which ‘created profound dissatisfaction ... [and] evoked a heartfelt sympathy for the Chief Constable.’²⁸ There is a certain irony in the fact that Clarkson’s fall in Wakefield mirrored that of Pearson in Halifax. Despite Clarkson’s reputation and the popular support in some quarters, public and political opinion swung quickly against him and his supporters on the watch committee. The new chief constable was exhorted to reassert discipline, ‘not ... of late years a prominent characteristic,’ and the newly-elected watch committee averred there would be ‘no more winking at offences under the Licensing Acts, no more condonation of practices which

everyone have known to be illegal ... carried on with impunity before the very eyes of the police.²⁹ The truth of the matter remains unclear but Clarkson's defence, that it was 'never his policy ... to harass or irritate any tradesman, publican or private person ... unless absolutely necessary for the weal of the general public,' hints at a degree of toleration, a willingness to overlook all but the most egregious breaches of the law.³⁰

Thomas Harris became chief constable in the summer of 1889. He made an immediate impact on the force. By the end of 1891, from a force of forty, four men had been dismissed, four required to resign and another four discharged with a gratuity. He also made an impact on the town as the number of prosecutions for drunkenness increased by 150 per cent in the early 1890s. Opinion in the town was divided and Clarkson's suicide in July 1890 added to the bitterness of local politics. Defenders of the new order, such as councillor Nicholson, praised the new chief constable for creating 'a police force not only in name but in reality.'³¹ Long-term defenders of Clarkson, such as alderman McGirr, condemned a 'system of espionage ... a most objectionable system and more in keeping with Continental practices,' as policemen visited public houses twice and thrice a day to check for gambling, while newer, working-class voices complained of the attempts to turn Wakefield into 'a new Jerusalem.'³² Despite his determination to stamp out pub-based gambling, Harris, in his evidence to the royal commission on the licensing laws, was forced to concede that 'dishonest trade' was still conducted by some publicans and that getting evidence on illegal betting was extremely difficult. In part this reflected the strength of popular support for gambling in its many forms; in part it reflected what Harris conceded to be the difficulty of maintaining 'the efficiency of a small force.'³³

The experience of Wakefield policing highlights three important points. First, and particularly in a small force, leadership was of considerable importance. While recognising the limitations of any individual, the performance of the chief constable, whether the failure of Chipstead in his later years, or the success of Harris in his early years, impacted on both the performance of the force and the enforcement of the law. Second, the pressures exerted by Sabbatarians, temperance and anti-gambling reformers impacted directly on the police, though Wakefield was not unique in this regard. Third, as Harris acknowledged, there were problems associated with small forces. Although not fundamentally different from the basic challenges

facing larger forces, there were particular problems in attracting and holding on to able men, at all levels. Pay was often higher in larger, nearby forces and promotion opportunities greater.³⁴

Policing Dewsbury and Batley

In the discussions about the remit of the WRCC in 1856/7, little was said about the unincorporated town of Dewsbury. In previous years it had been policed as part of the Dewsbury division, with a superintending constable. Some seventy men were appointed to the division by 1859. The early years were characterised by considerable instability.³⁵ The extent to which this contributed to the movement for incorporation that emerged in summer 1860 is unclear but by late 1861 leading proponents of incorporation, notably George Fearnley, subsequently mayor of the town, 'found fault with the present body of police in Dewsbury.'³⁶ His main complaint was that the town was used to train up novice officers, who, when instructed and likely to be useful, were sent elsewhere. The promise of a cheaper, more stable and more efficient borough force was part of the wider campaign, stressing the importance of local control and greater efficiency, which came to fruition in April 1862.³⁷ It soon became apparent that the practicalities of creating a separate force had not been thoroughly thought through. The policy, as far as it existed, was to depend upon the WRCC for facilities, such as offices and cells, but also personnel. A request to the Home Office that superintendent Martin of the Dewsbury division of the WRCC be permitted to be simultaneously head of the borough force was declined as illegal. In October 1862 John Thomas, one-time head constable of Huddersfield, but now a sergeant in the WRCC was appointed along with a further nine constables.

For a town of some 18,000 the number of police was grossly inadequate, as HMIC Elgee made clear in his reports throughout the 1860s and early 1870s. Only in 1874, when numbers were belatedly increased from twelve to twenty-five, that the force was deemed 'numerically efficient.' Although Dewsbury's politicians had told Cobbe that the WRCC men could and should be withdrawn, Cobbe insisted on keeping his men in the town, a decision confirmed by the county magistrates in 1863.³⁸ The refusal to augment the new force meant that Dewsbury was ineligible for Treasury

support for over a decade. The folly of such intransigence led to frustrated outburst by some local politicians, who were aware that a relatively small investment would bring in money to pay for more men. 'They [the members of the watch committee] could have twelve more men, by paying for six,' a frustrated Alderman Blakeley opined.³⁹ Eventually, in autumn 1873, the watch committee voted to increase the force from twelve to twenty-five, citing the need to tackle the anti-social behaviour of 'roughs' in 'Little Ireland,' that is Daw Green. The debate over policing rumbled on for several years and was more than a concern for the rates. Some simply denied the existence of any problem, notwithstanding a police/population ratio that deteriorated from 1:1500 to 1:2000, even arguing that 'there was a deal more paid by the Corporation for servants than there ought to be.'⁴⁰ Others saw it as a problem of leadership under both Thomas and his successor, superintendent Millar.⁴¹ 'There was,' councillor Auty argued, 'no necessity for increasing the force if the present police were efficiently managed'⁴² Not every supporter of augmentation felt the time opportune and, even then, 'advancing the salaries [of the police] was not a very pleasant thing to do.'⁴³ More nuanced observations were made by the indefatigable councillor Fothergill. He opposed augmentation of the town force but argued frequently that a better paid force would result in 'a more sober and superior class of officers.'⁴⁴ But, he continued, this would only be a partial solution because the problems, especially in the Daw Green district, required moral and educational action that the police could not offer. Describing the predominantly Irish and poverty-stricken area of Daw Green, in the casual racism of the day, alderman Hinchcliffe spoke of 'an Arab population in the neighbourhood who paid no attention to morality.'⁴⁵ The answer depended upon the actions of parents, teachers and even the local catholic priest. Such arguments helped preserve the policing *status quo* but the recurring problems of disorder and increasing pressures from ratepayers finally persuaded the town council to act in 1873.

Although adjudged 'numerically efficient' in 1874, there remained problems, not least the management of large-scale augmentation. The Dewsbury force was not the most attractive proposition in the mid-1870s. There was 'considerable difficulty' in recruitment and as a consequence, several new recruits 'did not seem likely to make efficient constables.'⁴⁶ HMIC Elgee's fears were well founded. In his 1877 report he drew attention to the 'frequent changes among the constables' and the continuing difficulty

in recruiting 'suitable men to replace those who left.'⁴⁷ The size of the force continued to be problematic. On the advice of HMIC, a further four men were added to the establishment in January 1879, giving a police/population ratio of 1:850. Despite continuing population growth, the size of the Dewsbury force remained unchanged for ten years, resulting in a worsening of the police/population ratio to 1:1000, before a series of small increases resulted in a force of thirty-seven men by the turn of the century. Although never deemed inadequate, the force remained 'very small' in light of the continued growth of the town. The problems of recruitment and retention continued into the late-nineteenth century. Night-time beats remained too long in the 1880s and variations remained high. In 1886 three men were dismissed and a further three resigned from a force that numbered twenty-nine. The following year a further three men were dismissed and five more resigned. Only in the 1890s, under a new chief constable, captain Despard, did matters improve. Annual variations averaged under two between 1890 and 1894 but seven men were dismissed in the mid-1890s when, in 1896, variations rose to 20 per cent. A key factor was the limited opportunities for promotion in a small force not noted for the generosity of its pay levels, which led ambitious men to look to the larger forces, especially nearby Leeds. There was a further factor – the particular dangers of policing in Dewsbury. There was a level of anti-police sentiment in a town with a large Irish presence and a number of particularly violent strikes.

Finding the right man to lead the force proved difficult, particularly in the latter years of the century. Following the resignation of the much-criticised superintendent Millar in 1887, five men held the post in the next decade. James Arrowsmith (1885-7) moved to Bootle, attracted by the challenge of heading a larger force and by better pay. His successor, commander Scott (1887-90) moved to Salford for the same reasons. His successor, T Weatherall (1890-3), after an undistinguished term of office, resigned on health grounds. The appointment of captain Despard (1893-6) was controversial. He was the only candidate *not* to have any police experience but he was soon looking elsewhere, finally being appointed chief constable of the Lanarkshire force, where he served for thirty years. In 1896 the watch committee looked within the ranks of the town force, promoting inspector Shore, who had been in post since 1886. Seeking to explain this turnover of chief constables, the local press seized on the pre-occupation with drill,

which effectively meant the appointment of a man with military experience, and the exclusion of others with greater police experience. This was but one part of the problem. The town council was persistently unwilling to increase the size of the force. It was also less than generous in terms of pay. This meant the force, and its senior men, were working at the limits of resources. There was little incentive for chief constables to stay. Indeed, ambitious men saw Dewsbury as a stepping-stone to a larger force and greater remuneration. The benefits of Dewsbury as a testing ground were reaped by other forces but for the town it meant a lack of continuity and direction.

Overall, policing in mid- and late-Victorian Dewsbury was problematic. The town was policed and its force deemed efficient by the standards of her majesty's inspectors but, even in the late-1890s, there were barely enough men to police the town effectively. Manpower was stretched. Night beats in particular were too long, while pay rates for constables and sergeants were consistently lower than in nearby Halifax and Huddersfield. The resultant high rates of turnover led to the employment of many inexperienced men and poor leadership did not bring improvements in discipline and efficiency seen elsewhere.

In nearby Batley incorporation in 1868 also provoked a long-running debate about the best way to police the town. There was much wrangling over costs with detailed statistics bandied about freely but inconclusively. In 1875 a resolution was achieved after the town clerk, having collected information from sixteen similar-sized towns, argued that a borough force offered better protection but at a (slightly) higher cost.⁴⁸ There were criticisms of the WRCC in Batley, highlighting its lack of local knowledge and their short-term periods of service. As well as being more efficient, and better suited to the needs of the town, it was argued that a borough force would complete the process of change in local government set in train by incorporation.⁴⁹ Opponents of a separate borough force advanced a number of predictable arguments – the county force were good enough, a borough force would push up rates and the time was inopportune – but there was also a powerful argument for staying with the WRCC that looked beyond the local interests of Batley. Rather than having a collection of forces subject to local authority, councillor Jubb argued that 'they all ought to be connected together throughout the county to detect crime.'⁵⁰ But the most telling contribution came from outside the town. The town clerk had consulted the

Home Office and HMIC Elgee in 1878. In response, Elgee replied that ‘the existing arrangements with the West Riding Constabulary [was] preferable, both in respect to efficiency and economy to the appointment of a Borough Police Force.’⁵¹ The question had been resolved but did not die away entirely. In 1887 an editorial in the *Batley News* mounted a scathing attack on the local council for ‘deliberately ignoring the ratepayers’ expressed wishes,’ and the betrayal of the town’s independence,’ all in the name of what proved to be ‘an excuse of false economy.’⁵² But no campaign sprang up. There was occasional mention of inadequate policing at local election meetings and even a wistful regret that the town lost ‘shrewd and able’ officers, promoted elsewhere in the county but nothing more.⁵³ There were also more pressing issue in local politics – water and gas supplies, and particularly sanitation. And there was the evidence from Dewsbury that maintaining a separate borough force was far from a panacea.

The Dewsbury force in action

The newly-formed Dewsbury force experienced a baptism of fire. Within months it was called upon to deal with riotous behaviour among local colliers and to cope with a crowd of irate Irish navvies, estimated to be some 4000 strong, attempting to rescue one of their number who had been arrested for murder.⁵⁴ Worse was to follow. A bitter strike at Oldroyd’s mill led to attacks on ‘black legs’ and their police protectors, which led to the trial of seven men for riot and assault at York Assizes. The crowd, initially estimated at 2000 but growing to 4000 by the time of the trial, swamped the local police who had to be assisted by men of the WRCC, Huddersfield and Wakefield.⁵⁵ The rioting, which lasted for two or three days, was the worst since ‘the memorable “plug” riots’ of 1842.⁵⁶ Popular anger, not exclusively directed at the police, was exacerbated by the subsequent death in prison of one of the young rioters.⁵⁷ These were exceptional incidents. More common were the continuing number of cases of drunkenness and assault, particularly in Daw Green with its large and poverty-stricken Irish population. With at least twenty beerhouses, ten of which were on the high street, it had a reputation for drunkenness, violence and immorality that equalled, if not exceeded that of the Castlegate area in Huddersfield. Poverty-related crimes – begging,

petty thefts and prostitution as well as gambling –were also regularly reported in the local press. More often than not drunken men and women, often repeat offenders, fought each other in twos or threes but there were also largescale fights involving fifty or more participants which involved the police. Stereotyped and scapegoated, the Irish inhabitants of Daw Green were seen to embody all that was bad about Irish immigrants.

Of particular concern to the police were the criminal activities of the ‘Young Forty’ (or ‘Young Forty Thieves’) gang, which terrorised Daw Green from the late-1860s to the early 1880s. The ‘Young Forty’ comprised some forty-five to fifty young men and was substantially larger than the Huddersfield ‘Small Gang,’ which operated at roughly the same time. John Moran was referred to as the ‘captain of the Young Forty,’ but there appear to have been several leading figures, including Francis Sullivan, Tom Robinson and the Curley brothers, Peter and Michael. Gang members were drawn from the first generation of British-born Irish. They came from some of the poorest and most overcrowded areas. The list of crimes committed by the gang ranged from using abusive language, drunk and disorderly behaviour and gambling to criminal damage, larceny and a variety of assaults, including attacks on the police and at least one incident of indecent assault. Seven individuals, aged from eleven to sixteen were accused of indecent assault in 1870 but it was alleged that this was ‘not the first outrage ... it was not safe for respectable females to go along the High Street in the evening.’⁵⁸ During the next decade the gang exercised a reign of terror. Attempts to bring order on the streets by the police were negated not simply by their hostility – ‘for a policeman to go [into Daw Green] was like walking into a slaughterhouse’⁵⁹ – but also by community protection. There were ‘those in the neighbourhood ever ready to shelter any one whose hand had been raised against the “Bobby”’⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, attempts to prosecute members were thwarted by witness intimidation. Equally predictable was the oft-repeated complaint by superintendent Millar that he had insufficient men to bring order to Daw Green. As with the ‘Irish Small Gang’ in Huddersfield, prison sentences thinned gang membership. The ‘Young Forty,’ as a gang disappeared in the 1880s but many of the not-so-young members were regularly in prison. Francis Sullivan was sentenced to prison on twenty-five occasions between 1879 and 1895. Others looked for an alternative life-style but with limited success. Patrick M’Donagh joined the 10th Regiment of Foot only to desert in 1875. Michael Curley ‘for some times past [was] living the

life of a professional fighting man, and going about the country with sparring booths' but was convicted of assaulting a police constable in 1883.⁶¹ As his physical prowess declined with age, he lived out a life in poverty. In 1894 he was back in prison for not returning to the workhouse when on leave.

Away from the criminality of the 'Young Forty,' and the wider incidence of drunken and disorderly behaviour, the police struggled to preserve order on the streets. Gambling was rife. Pitch-and-toss was an every-day occurrence in the streets, even in the market place, as was 'tip cat.' Men betted on knur and spell, dog races and prize fights, several of the latter taking place within the Borough Park. Similarly, begging in the street remained a cause of concern for watch committee members and members of 'respectable' society. Even with an augmented force, the police struggled to control the streets of Dewsbury. There was little love for the police. Reminiscent of the costermongers interviewed by Mayhew, 'it was a very prevalent thing for men to try to get a kick at an officer.'⁶² Anti-police sentiments were strongest in the 1870s but as late as 1892 the *Batley News* spoke of men from Daw Green who still 'pay no regard to the police forces, borough or county.'⁶³ And the situation was no better in Batley, policed by the WRCC. The large Irish population was equally problematic, if not more so. There were several large-scale disturbances between Irish men and women and the police, in one of which a constable was killed.⁶⁴ Prostitution and street gambling remained sources of concern.

Dewsbury in the last-third of the nineteenth century was nominally a policed town. In the first decade of its existence the town's police force was wholly inadequate. There was a short fall in both quantity and quality. There were repeated accusations that officers turned a blind eye to out-of-hours sales and drunkenness. Treating of policemen by licensees was a recurring problem but there were also incidents of police expecting to be given a drink when they entered a pub or beerhouse. In one sense, this was a show of strength (as was demanding money from prostitutes) but in another sense it reflected the weakness of the police, particularly where anti-police sentiment was strong. On the streets, and away from the clamour of the council chamber, the police arrived at a series of pragmatic compromises that minimised hostility but also minimised prosecutions. In theory, the police had considerable power to control the lives of those they policed; but in practice, the policed could constrain the actions of the police, particularly,

though not exclusively, in towns like Dewsbury, which combined a tradition of radicalism with an influx of immigrants, many of whom had little love for figures of English authority.

Policing Barnsley, Keighley and Rotherham

These three small towns were governed, in part at least, by improvement acts – dating from the 1800s in the case of Rotherham and the 1820s for the other two – which, though they contained provision for watching, were more concerned with sanitary matters. None were unpoliced by 1856, but the most vulnerable to amalgamation into the WRCC was Keighley. The local improvement commissioners had been reluctant to increase numbers. In 1848 they finally decided to double the number of watchmen – to four. Five years later they reformed the night watch, extending the time period to the hours between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m., and appointing James Kershaw as superintendent. There was also a superintending constable stationed at the Keighley lock-up in 1853. Although there was no great local dissatisfaction with policing arrangements, the limited number of men to police a town of some 18,000 people made it vulnerable to Cobbe's advances.⁶⁵ In an attempt to avoid amalgamation, advice was sought from Barnsley but to no avail. With the establishment of the WRCC, the town force disappeared and a Keighley division established, comprising twenty-two men, half of whom were responsible for the town.

In Barnsley, the working of its Police and Improvement Act was more problematic. There was growing criticism of the commissioners from the mid-1830s onwards and concern at the low number of men (five) for a population estimated at 13,000. A reformed night watch for the winter months was introduced but its captain, John Savage, became the centre of a vicious local debate in the early 1850s.⁶⁶ There were also financial considerations with some commissioners critical of the fact that the nearby Rotherham force was less expensive. On the eve of the 1856 police act, the town was policed by a sergeant, two day constables and seven night constables under a superintendent. Despite local dissatisfaction, there was opposition to Cobbe's proposals for consolidation but again to no avail. With the advent of

the WRCC, the Staincross division was allocated thirty-nine men, though less than half were stationed in Barnsley itself.

In 1835 the Rotherham improvement commissioners appointed John Bland as superintendent of police. He was to lead the town police for over twenty years, ultimately joining the WRCC when the Rotherham force was consolidated. Despite being held in high regard as an individual, there was criticism that the force he led was inadequate. In the late 1830s it comprised five watchmen and a sergeant for twenty-one weeks over winter and four watchmen and a sergeant for the rest of the year. Nonetheless, there was no willingness to increase expenditure on the police. Indeed, there were vocal critics on the commission who wanted to see police numbers reduced. Responsibility for policing was taken over by the local Board of Health in 1852, under the Police Clauses Act which had been incorporated. The town force now comprised a superintendent, Bland, an inspector, a sergeant, two day constables and seven night constables. In addition, there were two day and night constables for 'the agricultural districts, on the edge of town. Bland was concerned with the problems of finding and retaining suitable men at the rates of pay on offer. With the introduction of a county force imminent, local opinion hardened. 'The district,' according to a report in the *Sheffield Independent*, 'is now sufficiently watched by night as well as by day, to the entire satisfaction of the inhabitants.'⁶⁷ The assertion was not enough to preserve this small force. Once again, local judgment was over-ridden by the government and the Home Office, which had more stringent, though still rudimentary, criteria for efficiency and was actively seeking to reduce the number of small police forces across the country.

The short-term impact of amalgamation with the WRCC was mixed. In quantitative terms there was an improvement of the ratio between police and population in Keighley but there was also considerable turnover of personnel. Some men were dismissed as unsuitable and ineffective, others resigned, unwilling to become part of a larger entity with less of a local focus. Further, transfers to other divisions added to early instability. Of the first cohort in the Keighley division, twelve, or 50 percent, served less than a year. Four served for five or more years, one of whom was dismissed and another died in service. Only Joseph Greenwood served more than ten years, during which he became a first-class constable and was promoted to the merit class. Almost as many men (eleven) were transferred as were dismissed or resigned.

Of these eleven, three went on to a longer career elsewhere in the county. There were eleven men in the division with previous police service, including four Keighley nightwatchmen. The policy, although understandable, was not a success. Only James Gawthorpe, previously a paid constable at Harden, served for more than five years. It is no coincidence that three of these men were aged forty or over when appointed to the WRCC, and three more were in their late 30s. Any continuity with the past was soon gone and the division, and the town of Keighley, was soon policed by outsiders. Nor was the situation helped by problems at the top. John Cheeseborough, a man with links to the town, served as superintendent for five years but there was a dismaying turnover of inspectors. Two (Hey and Shuttleworth) were dismissed and another (Sykes) shot himself after only six months in the division. Only William Gill, who later became deputy chief constable, had a successful career. Nor did the establishment satisfy the inspectorate. HMIC Woodford pointed out the need for more men as early as 1857 and his successor, Elgee, was highly critical of the inadequacies of police accommodation and cells in Keighley for much of the 1870s. Yet, despite the earlier professed commitment to a town force, there was little sign that local politicians, either on the local board of health or later, the town council, had any great desire to establish an independent force for the town. The pressures for change that emerged in Barnsley and Rotherham, did not appear in Keighley. 'Civic pride' arguments, influential elsewhere were muted while economic concerns remained a powerful barrier to change. There was a general acceptance, satisfaction would be too strong a word, with the manner in which the town was policed as part of the county constabulary.

This was not the case in Barnsley. As in Keighley, there was a quantitative improvement following assimilation into the county force but a similar churn of men. Over half (twenty-five of thirty-nine) left within a year and only seven served more than five years. Again, the authorities looked to men with prior police experience – 50 per cent fell into this category – but again with mixed results. Just over half were dismissed or resigned after a short career and only two were promoted, one to inspector and one superintendent. The rest were pensioned after long careers as the workhorses of the division. There were still many in Barnsley itself who hankered after the days of the Barnsley Police Act. The fact that there were few Barnsley-born men in the first cohort rankled and there were a number of incidents, such as the dismissal of the

popular PC Wetherill, that added to the feeling that the interests of Barnsley were not properly considered.⁶⁸ But although Barnsley became a municipal borough in 1869, and notwithstanding developments in nearby Rotherham in the early 1880s, the demand for a separate Barnsley force did not become a major issue in the 1870s, not least because it was estimated that a force of sixteen men would be required in place of the ten men of the WRCC presently stationed in the town.⁶⁹ The balance of the argument did not swing until the early 1890s, when the old arguments – that Barnsley's needs were not being met by the strangers to the district in the WRCC – resurfaced with greater force. Despite some concerns about the financial costs, others argued that expenditure could be better controlled (and the police better managed) with a borough force. It was even claimed that there was strong support 'among the working men of Barnsley for the establishment of a borough force,' though this might have been wishful thinking on the part of the *Barnsley Chronicle*.⁷⁰ In November 1893 the council voted in favour of a borough police force by ten votes to eight. Wider opinion was also divided. The anonymous contributor to the *Chronicle's* 'Notes and Queries' column claimed that support for a borough force was confined to 'a narrow and not entirely disinterested circle.'⁷¹ In fact, practicalities, particularly the need to find adequate cell space, were the biggest problem. Sharing county property was not a long-term solution. And then there was the size of the establishment to be considered. In discussions with the Home Office, HMIC Croft made clear that fifty men would be needed. The council, conscious of costs, decided, after a lengthy discussion and on the recommendation of the watch committee, that forty 'would be ample.'⁷² By the autumn of 1896 the Barnsley borough force was ready to take to the streets. The forty men was significantly larger than the thirty or so men of the Barnsley division of the WRCC allocated to the town in the 1890s but still left Croft sceptical of their adequacy as a force.⁷³

By this time, in nearby Rotherham, a borough force had been in existence for almost two decades. The advent of the county force had been unsuccessfully resisted by members of the Rotherham Board of Health, who continued to argue for the re-establishment of 'the old system of policing,' as late as summer 1860.⁷⁴ The early experience of the new county force was little different from that in Barnsley or Keighley. 60 per cent of the first cohort had gone in the first year, 80 per cent by the fifth. Married men with

families were more likely to resign, men with previous police experience more likely to be dismissed. Inevitably, there were men who went on to a successful career, some remaining in the division. There was also strong leadership from superintendent John Gillet, who led the division from 1857 to 1880. Nonetheless, to a greater degree than elsewhere and from an earlier date, there was dissatisfaction in Rotherham with the WRCC. Echoing earlier anti-police sentiments, there were complaints that the county police were 'busybodies in uniform,' willing to lie to gain a conviction but unwilling to deal with serious crime in the town.⁷⁵ Their insensitivity towards prisoners, marched 'half-naked and in handcuffs' to the railway station, aroused hostile comment, as did their inability to deal with threats to order, such as the election riot of 1865.⁷⁶ Following reports of police violence and accusations of lack of police discretion, the *Sheffield Independent* opined that 'the people of Rotherham have no great respect for the police force at the best of times,' let alone in the aftermath of the riot.⁷⁷ It was not just in the pages of the liberal press that the argument was made that Rotherham was too big and too important to be treated like a village and that a separate borough force would ensure effective local control. Success was far from guaranteed. The advocates of a separate borough force would have to argue their case repeatedly for the next seventeen years before they carried the argument.

Rotherham police reformers faced several obstacles. First, the WRCC was not an unchanging entity. Of particular significance was the decision in 1868 to split the old Upper Strafforth and Tickhill division, thereby creating two new divisions, Sheffield and Rotherham. This recognition of the importance of the rapidly-expanding town was reinforced by decisions to increase the Rotherham division establishment in 1874 and again in 1878. The increases were not enough to satisfy critics of the WRCC, but it made it more difficult to argue that Rotherham's needs were being overlooked. A further barrier to police reform was to be found in the wider world of town politics. Rotherham's politicians had a variety of major problems to tackle. The sanitary condition of the town was urgent, not least after the smallpox epidemic of 1872, and there were other pressing questions, such as the quality of the water supply and the provision of gas, not to mention providing a new market and slaughterhouse, let alone a free library. As a consequence, police reform at times lost its saliency, being at the forefront of local politics only in the early and mid-1870s and again in the early 1880s.

In the 1870s police reformers stressed the inadequacies of the Rotherham division force. With only twenty-two constables in a town of some 30,000 they were unable to deal with drunken women brawling in the streets, prostitutes congregating in Wellgate and the flood of beggars, allegedly driven out of Sheffield by a more efficient force.⁷⁸ It was also argued explicitly that the men sent there for training and retained in the town were ‘the whole of the “scum” of the riding.’⁷⁹ More tactfully, to the complaints of tradesmen about over-zealous policing of obstructions in the streets, was added a wider critique of an out-of-touch and unsympathetic county force. Such manifest shortcomings, it was argued, could be remedied only by the town having control of its own police force. Defenders of the *status quo* advanced three main counter-arguments. First, there was the simple denial of any need for change. ‘There were few towns,’ argued councillor Gummer, ‘so free from crime’ as Rotherham.⁸⁰ Second, was the acceptance of the need for some police reform but a denial that now was the time, especially given other pressing issues such as public health. Third, and most powerful was the claim that police reform was too expensive, too much of a burden on ratepayers. The introduction of a borough force would (allegedly) see the police rate doubling from 2d in the pound to 4d.⁸¹ Added to which was the £5000 to £6000 costs of building accommodation for the police and cells for prisoners. And all, as councillor Neil argued, for a mere ‘ten or twelve extra’ men, who, as his colleague alderman Guest noted, would probably be no better than the men presently policing Rotherham.⁸² These were powerful arguments that delayed police reform until the early 1880s, by which time new arguments were presented. The themes of police inadequacy and insensitivity were less prominent and were buttressed by an appeal to local civic pride. The need for local control was now presented as ‘the last link in the complete management of the town.’⁸³ And to add force to the argument, the town clerk produced details of towns smaller than Rotherham that had their own police forces. The arguments against were largely unchanged. A memorial from ‘some sixty manufacturers, shopkeepers and other ratepayers’ prayed that ‘the matter [of a borough police] should remain in abeyance until after the inevitable sewage question had been dealt with.’⁸⁴ The added burden on ratepayers was also foregrounded. Opinion was shifting but there were still lengthy and acrimonious arguments and narrow votes that finally resulted in the decision to create a borough force. The accident of personality, in the form of a mayor

prepared to use his casting vote on more than one occasion, was critical in a council that remained evenly and bitterly divided. There was one further point – a growing awareness on the part of leading opponents that the tide of opinion was turning decisively. Councillor Jenkins, a long-time critique of police reform, conceded ‘it was time for hard words to end.’ The council had voted for a borough force and ‘however objectionable the police may be (and he did not elaborate on this point) ...they were now committed to having them [borough policemen] and they ought to make the best of them.’⁸⁵ On the first of July the new, thirty-two-man force started its duties.

The Barnsley and Rotherham forces in action

The new Barnsley force combined relative youth with experience. Chief constable Turner was 31 years old and had eight years of police experience in Rotherham and Dewsbury. His two inspectors, both in their late-20s, Butler and Harrap, had seven and nine years’, respectively. Further, three of the four sergeants had at least five years’ experience. In contrast, three quarters of the constables had served less than one year.⁸⁶ From the outset there was doubt as to its numerical adequacy of the force. The watch committee recommended an agreement with Sheffield corporation for ‘temporary additional police services from time to time as required.’⁸⁷ To attract men, improved pay rates were approved but annual variations in the late-1890s at roughly 12½ per cent, were significantly higher than in the more-established and larger forces in Halifax and Huddersfield. Nonetheless, the sceptical HMIC Croft was sufficiently satisfied with the men and their management to deem the force efficient.

Such approval was more surprising given the well-known inadequacy of police premises, including cells. The existing police station was sited on the wrong side of town, away from the Sheffield-road end of town, where most arrests were made, As a consequence, prisoners were paraded through town, followed by mobs of people.⁸⁸ In 1898 HMIC Croft, ‘very agreeable and pleasant’ in manner, made it clear that the continued independence of the force was at stake.⁸⁹ The response was tardy. The proposed new police station became part of a wider plan for other municipal buildings, notably a new town hall. Financial concerns were one element in the delay but there were also local politicians, notably alderman Bailey, who wanted the borough

force to be disbanded and the town's policing to be returned to the WRCC.⁹⁰ He was not alone in criticising the borough police. The *Barnsley Chronicle* pointed out shortcomings and openly wondered 'whether we are better with the Borough than we formerly were with the County Force,' while among its letter-writers there were strongly-worded accusations of police inadequacy.⁹¹ Ultimately, hard-line opponents of the borough force were unsuccessful, their proposal seen as 'too drastic,' but their presence was another reminder of the ongoing argument about the most effective and economical form of policing.

The concerns that were expressed about police inadequacies in the late-1890s were largely focussed on the moral state of the town, rather than on serious crime. Pitch-and-toss was ubiquitous and the police seemed powerless to prevent it. As late as 1901, there were complaints of a hundred-strong crowd, of all ages and including children, gambling on "the Midden."⁹² To make matters worse in public houses and beerhouses 'gambling is openly practiced,' tolerated even encouraged by landlords, safe in the knowledge that police action was unlikely. In June 1899, the licensee of the Shepherd's Rest beerhouse and seven other men were prosecuted for playing dominoes for beer, in what appeared to many as a token gesture. 'It seems somewhat strange,' in the words of the *Barnsley Chronicle*, 'that an insignificant beerhouse keeper in an obscure part of town' should be prosecuted when the practice was so widespread.⁹³ In an echo of events in Halifax a generation earlier, the explanation for many critics was that the 'drink interest' had captured the watch committee and that both chief constable Turner and his successor George Butler turned a blind eye to the problem.⁹⁴ Barnsley, in the opinion of the *Barnsley Chronicle*, was 'one of the hottest gambling hells in England.'⁹⁵ The moral panic over gambling overshadowed the extent to which a desire for decorum saw police action against drunks and, to a lesser extent, vagrants; and a desire for order in the streets saw the prosecution of 'furious driving' by carters, cabmen in the town.

The newly-formed Rotherham force comprised thirty-five men, including five sergeants and thirty-eight constables, a significant increase on the two sergeants and eighteen constables of the WRCC. At its head was the experienced John Pollard, who joined the WRCC in 1867 and had been acting-inspector, later inspector in the Rotherham division since 1877. His inspector, Henry Baker had ten years' police experience, the last seven in Rotherham. The force was largely unchanged until 1891 when numbers were

increased by 20 per cent in response to population change. Further minor additions took the force to fifty-three by the end of the century.⁹⁶ Although not singled out as a problematic force, night beats were deemed to be too long and eight beats were doubled as late as 1900. Annual variations in the late 1880s averaged about 20 per cent. Between 1887 and 1889 twenty-one men departed, fourteen either dismissed or compulsorily resigned. 1889 was particularly problematic with a third of the force leaving. The situation improved thereafter but there was a further spate of dismissals and compulsory resignations in the mid-1890s. As in both Dewsbury and Barnsley, finding appropriate accommodation was difficult but in Rotherham it took much longer to resolve the situation. As late as 1891 accommodation was still 'quite inadequate,' especially the 'dark and ill-ventilated cells.' Work on new facilities dragged on through the 1890s but, eventually, in 1897 the work was completed and the offices and cells deemed satisfactory.

The advent of the new force was met with less than popular approval. "The roughs of Rotherham," opined the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, seem to consider the recently-formed borough police force [of Rotherham] the objects of assaults of the most violent description."⁹⁷ The so-called "Short pipe gang" was one of a number of loosely-organised groups of young men responsible for a number of thefts and assaults on members of the public, as well as on the police in the summer of 1882.⁹⁸ There had been a number of similar incidents in previous years but the arrival of a new force gave added impetus. Indeed, the police played their part. While admonishing people not to take the law into their own hands, the mayor was forced to admit that there had been 'complaints of the policemen being over-zealous and over-officious' and physically mistreating prisoners,⁹⁹ A number of widely-reported cases were brought and a number of prominent 'trouble-makers' jailed, though the police had difficulty in finding witnesses willing to give evidence. The "Short pipe gang" disappeared from view, though individual assaults on the police remained a recurring feature. As in other towns, several of these incidents arouse out of police attempts to break up gambling schools. The concern with street gambling, vagrancy and drunkenness were central elements in the drive 'to enforce by-laws for the good government of the town' that had been one of the more powerful arguments for the introduction of an independent force.¹⁰⁰

Prosecutions for drunkenness fluctuated markedly from year to year but sharp increases in 1883, 1891 and 1899 added to police unpopularity but a more serious problem stemmed from the enforcement of the licensing laws. The chief constable, Pollard, adamant that constables should not be seen drinking in public houses, was known to be sympathetic to the drinks interest, which was well served by the Sheffield, Rotherham and District Licensed Victuallers' Association. But there was support for teetotalism among local magistrates and councillors, including the mayor, alderman Kelsey, who was known to be a member of the Blue Ribbon movement.¹⁰¹ What unfolded was a complicated but unseemly spat which created bitter relations within the senior ranks of the police and between local politicians and the police.¹⁰² There followed allegations of secret meetings, even a map targeting certain licensed properties, and of instructions from the mayor and his close allies regarding inspector Baker's recommendations to the upcoming Brewster sessions. The municipal elections in 1883 were dominated by the drink question. Advocates of the drink trade spoke of 'teetotal bigotry and prejudice' and warned of the 'wholesale extinction' of off-licenses.¹⁰³ The honesty of Baker's evidence was called into question. Pearson and Baker were at odds, threatening legal action, and, after a private meeting with the mayor, the chief constable and a small number of councillors, at which he admitted that he might have given some erroneous evidence, Baker was charged with gross misconduct by the mayor. Refusing to resign when ordered to do so, he was dismissed in December 1883.¹⁰⁴ The whole affair was damaging for the standing of the police, in particular chief constable Pollard. Baker became something of a local hero.¹⁰⁵ A memorial drawn up by several hundred Rotherham inhabitants not only praised Baker and sympathised with him in 'trying and peculiar circumstances' but protested 'against the harsh and unfair treatment which [Baker] has received from the Watch Committee and most of the Town Council.' In a final twist, it transpired that Baker had a new job as a traveller for a company that was part of the Holywell Brewery.¹⁰⁶

Pearson eventually returned to his post but never fully recovered his health or his authority and died four years later. Discipline declined and when captain L R Burnett, formerly acting chief constable of Wolverhampton, took over in 1888 he took firm action and eleven men were dismissed or ordered to resign in the following months. Thereafter, there were no major scandals. Particularly, under the leadership of James Enright (1891-1907), attempts

were made to improve police morale. Improved pay in 1891 was not unimportant, but so too was the development of social networks within the force, through sporting associations and even the annual, celebratory dinner. For a relatively newly formed force, these social bonds were an important part of its sense of identity and morale.

While the establishment of a borough police force made sense in terms as ‘the “last link” in the complete management of the town,’ there were very real practical problems, especially in the early years.¹⁰⁷ It is not surprising that the *Barnsley Chronicle* was sceptical of the newly-formed borough force while in Rotherham it was not until its second decade that it became a more disciplined and relatively stable force. Both Barnsley and Rotherham, as indeed, Dewsbury, were policed but police impact was limited and popular support more limited than in the larger towns by the late-nineteenth century.

The persistence of small forces

Since the 1830s, police reformers had sought to cajole smaller boroughs into amalgamating their forces with that of the county in which they resided. This reforming impulse was resisted in many towns which were jealous of their rights and suspicious of London and the centralizing tendencies of reformers. Palmer, quoting the local press in 1856, argues that the debate on police reform had shifted decisively away from concerns with the threat to liberty. The ‘old fears,’ as the *Norfolk Chronicle* noted in March 1856, were ‘an anachronism, mere hypothesis and exaggeration,’ Only ‘lecturing firebrands’ now made such arguments.¹⁰⁸ There is a danger of overstating the demise of the ‘old fears.’ As late as 1863, responses to the Police Amendment bill, proposing the amalgamation of the City of London police with the Metropolitan police, arouse interest outside the capital. In Yorkshire, there was a fear that the bill was ‘the thin edge of the wedge to enable the Government to obtain control over the entire police system.’¹⁰⁹ The most outspoken criticism came from the *Yorkshire Gazette* with its condemnation of the ‘Boa Constrictor of Centralization.’¹¹⁰ It continued that if the proposal – ‘the diabolical project’ – were not defeated ‘other cities and towns will speedily be sacrificed to the same insatiable taste for centralization.’ Such ideas could be dismissed as provincial paranoia but they played a part in the

determination of politicians in Pontefract and, especially Ripon in resisting the pressures from the Home Office.

Pontefract, with its long-standing governing charter dating back to 1607, established a 'new police' force in 1836 with four men. By the time of the first annual inspection (1857) there were two constables and two or sometimes three nightwatchmen to police a population of just over 5000. HMIC Woodford was unimpressed and the force was deemed to be inefficient in the first three years. The report for 1858 was excoriating, calling on 'the local authorities ... to cast aside all prejudices and [look] only to the common good' and amalgamate with the county force.¹¹¹ The Pontefract authorities were unpersuaded. An additional constable was appointed in 1860, thereby achieving the Government's numerical efficiency mark. The number rose to eight in 1868 but the new inspector, Elgee, was unimpressed. 'The recently appointed men seemed below average,' he noted, adding that 'difficulty had been met with in obtaining suitable candidates.'¹¹² But although advising that pay scales should be aligned with those in the county force, he appears to have given up on the idea of amalgamation. It was not until April 1889, under the provision of the 1888 Local Government Act, that it was amalgamated with the WRCC. In that year, the WRCC appointed twenty extra men, 'mainly to meet the requirements of the borough of Pontefract.'¹¹³

The limitations of governmental powers were even more apparent in the city of Ripon. Local politicians were jealous of their distinctive local privileges and were determined not to succumb to governmental pressure. A two-man force was created in 1848 and three decades later it was doubled in size, at which level it remained until its demise at the end of 1887, having been adjudged 'inefficient' at every inspection. There was no office, no books were kept and the cells were inadequately ventilated. Watching at night was 'supported by voluntarily contributions.'¹¹⁴ As with Pontefract, there was a call for 'sacrifice on the part of the local authorities' in Ripon. The sense of frustration is plain to see in the annual reports. The city council spent many hours discussing the location of the cattle market, the need to keep dogs on leads, and even the playing of musical instruments in the Market Place by the Salvation Army, but little time on police matters. On receiving 'the usual annual complaint [from the Home Office] as to the inefficiency of the Ripon police force, the council 'resolved to refer the Home Secretary to the previous resolution of the Council on the subject.'¹¹⁵ As late as February 1887, the

watch committee rejected the Home Secretary's strong recommendation to amalgamate.¹¹⁶ The only positive response was a watch committee recommendation, after a 'long and animated discussion,' to appoint two extra constables in 1876 but even this was insufficient. There was limited discussion of the costs of policing, prompted by HMIC's observation that amalgamation would reduce costs but the council opinion was that 'the present police force is all that is required for the safety of the city.'¹¹⁷

In fact, the crux of the matter was political. In 1876 'a majority of the Corporation' believed that an increase in police numbers to qualify for a grant from the Treasury, would result in 'undue restrictions' on the council, as well as encouraging frivolous cases.¹¹⁸ In 1884 the mayor made clear that local opinion was strongly against 'the central authority possessing control which might be exercised locally.'¹¹⁹ And worse might follow, 'if Ripon lost control of its police, the City Court might follow as well as the Liberty Quarter Sessions.'¹²⁰ There was some movement in early 1887 but the council could not decide between an augmentation of the force to retain its police, or amalgamation. In the end, it mattered not. Ripon, with a population of 8000 was too small to remain independent under the provisions of the upcoming Local Government act. The force ceased to exist in December 1887 and was absorbed into the WRCC and an additional four men were added to augment the previous four-man force.¹²¹

Neither of these two towns could be described as being policed in any meaningful sense. Ripon was unprotected at night and the ill-health of seventy-year-old Sergeant Wilson left the city under-policed during the day. It was not simply the inability to deal with large-scale events, such as the 1885 Pontefract election. Routine policing was light touch. The number of indictable offences reported to the police – averaging around ten per annum – was low, the number of arrests made lower still and not all of these came to trial for want of evidence. More people were arrested and convicted for drunk and disorderly behaviour, as one would expect, but again the numbers were relatively low. In Pontefract, which had just over forty public houses and beerhouses, annual arrests averaged just over ninety; in Ripon, with a similar number of licensed premises, arrests averaged forty per annum, convictions thirty. The fact that Ripon, and to a lesser extent Pontefract, could resist Home Office pressure for thirty years is a measure of the strength of localism and the fear of centralization that persisted in this part of Yorkshire but it is

also a measure of the weakness of central government and its agencies.¹²² The disappearance of two very small forces in the late-1880s was a step towards a more rational policing structure across the county but there were still the anomalies of equal-sized boroughs, some of which had independent forces while others remained under the WRCC.

Some conclusions

The evolution of policing in these small towns highlight patchiness and unpredictability of outcome. The survival of very small forces in Pontefract and Ripon contrasts with the disappearance of larger forces in Barnsley and Keighley. The decision to establish a borough force in the growing town of Dewsbury contrasts with the decision not to do so in nearby and equally dynamic Batley. The later creation of forces in Rotherham and Barnsley contrasts with its absence in Keighley. Only Wakefield, large enough to retain its independence in the mid-1850s and modestly prosperous thereafter, appears 'normal.' Accidents of politics and personality were crucial at the local level. Principle – opposition to the 'Boa Constrictor of Centralization' found in much of the conservative regional press, especially in the northerly part of the riding and the adjacent north riding¹²³ – played a part, as did a sense of civic pride but so too did hard-headed economics. There was no single, or simple, path to a modern policed society but rather a series of calculations or compromises in which expectations of security were weighed against economic costs and judged against wider political values and priorities. One of the most striking feature is the persistence of the 1856/7 settlement. Dewsbury's break from the WRCC was problematic and served to confirm the wisdom of remaining with the WRCC in Batley. Even the emergence of separate forces in the burgeoning industrial centres of Rotherham and Barnsley, rather than being seemingly inevitable came after much bitter debate and late in the day. While there was agreement that some form of 'new' policing was both necessary and desirable, there continued to be considerable scope for debate about the appropriate form and level of policing. Debate did not end in 1856.

The practical problems of creating and maintaining an effective force were, in essence, common to all boroughs but were more acute for the smaller forces

with fewer promotion opportunities and generally lower wages. Recruitment problems were more persistent and variations, though improving, remained higher than in the larger forces into the late nineteenth century. Even in small towns, larger and more complex forces required managerial and administrative skills. Again, attracting and retaining well-qualified men was problematic. There were able chief constables but the more ambitious looked to move to larger and more prestigious forces. Similarly, policing priorities did not vary fundamentally between forces. Property was to be protected, public order and decorum maintained. Police work was dominated by relatively mundane matters. The pre-occupation with the threats posed by drunks, gamblers, navvies, itinerants and vagrants reflects a desire for a stability in a visibly changing society, which was as strong in Dewsbury or Rotherham as it was in Bradford or Leeds. But with vacancies in the ranks and over-long beats, many smaller boroughs were poorly protected. The persistence of gambling in the streets and lanes as well as in pubs and beerhouses highlights the limitations of police power; a situation not helped by support for the drink interest by certain influential local figures in several towns. Finally, while the police were able to assert their authority against marginal groups, notably vagrants and beggars, there were limits to police power. Gambling schools were disrupted but regrouped; witnesses were not always easy to find, even when large crowds were involved, and certain areas and groups remained mistrustful of, if not openly hostile to the police even in the 1890s.

Endnotes

- 1 The West Riding was unusual but not unique in this respect. The Lancashire county constabulary was responsible for the policing of five municipal boroughs with populations in excess of 10,000 (including Burnley and St Helens) and 28 similar ‘towns of place’ (including Heywood, Leigh and Widnes).
- 2 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 2 August 1839
- 3 *York Herald*, 3 April 1847
- 4 *Leeds Mercury*, 1 December 1849
- 5 See *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 4 June 1853, 2 July 1853 and 8 December 1854
- 6 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 29 February 1856
- 7 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 9 March 1866
- 8 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 8 May 1857
- 9 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 4 June 1863
- 10 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 9 September 1864
- 11 *Wakefield Free Press*, 10 June 1865
- 12 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 9 June 1865
- 13 *Wakefield Free Press*, 10 June 1865. There were also claims that officers were fiddling expenses.
- 14 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 21 April 1871
- 15 1870 was a particularly bad year with arrests in only a quarter of all recorded cases of felony but 1872 was equally bad and overall, in the early 1870s there were no arrests in roughly two-thirds of such cases.
- 16 *Wakefield Free Press*, 15 September 1877
- 17 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 15 September 1877
- 18 Wakefield Register of Officers and Constables, 1833 -1914 accessed via Ancestry.
- 19 As well as a recreation room and library, the men enjoyed a ‘splendid bath room [with] such a lavatory as there was not another in England.’ *Wakefield Express*, 24 May 1879
- 20 *Wakefield Express*, 24 May 1879
- 21 *Wakefield Free Press*, 13 October 1888
- 22 Report of Policeman’s Supper in *Wakefield and West Riding Herald* and *Wakefield Free Press*, 14 October 1882. Similar sentiments were expressed five years later, *Wakefield Free Press*, 12 & 29 October 1887
- 23 Annual report 1888, *Wakefield Free Press*, 13 October 1888. See *Wakefield*

- and West Riding Herald*, 1 July 1876, 'Ruffianism in Wakefield on Saturday Nights,' for examples of anti-police hostility.
- 24 *Wakefield Free Press*, 18 May 1889
- 25 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 5 & 19 March and 15 October 1887
- 26 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 12 November 1887
- 27 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 27 April 1889
- 28 *Wakefield Free Press*, 11 May 1889
- 29 *Wakefield Express*, 13 July 1889
- 30 *Wakefield Express*, 5 October 1889
- 31 *Wakefield Free Press*, 8 March 1890
- 32 *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 4 February 1893
- 33 Annual report for 1892, *Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 21 January 1893
- 34 Large-scale events, such as elections and even the Yorkshire Show, held in Wakefield in 1870, required outside help. This was a problem experienced elsewhere, notably Doncaster's annual race week. A high spot in the racing and social calendar, race week attracted people from across the county and beyond. Every year arrests and prosecutions soared as a variety of people found themselves in court for relatively minor charges of drunkenness, gambling, assault and petty theft but also more serious charges of horse theft and even rape. No borough force could have coped with such an insurge of people and Doncaster looked primarily to the county but in addition there were 'detectives and other officers from London and most of the provincial towns in the provinces.' *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 1873. A combination of covid restrictions and personal illness precluded a more detailed consideration of the Doncaster force.
- 35 See chapter 3.
- 36 *Leeds Mercury* 27 November 1861. The pro-corporation movement also called upon John Crossley, mayor of Halifax, to explain the policing benefits that had incorporation there.
- 37 *Leeds Mercury*, 2 September 1862
- 38 *Leeds Times*, 11 April 1863
- 39 *Batley Reporter and Guardian*, 8 June 1872. A similar situation had occurred in Middlesbrough in 1856 but local politicians saw the benefit of bringing in the Treasury grant. D Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town: The Development of the Police in Middlesbrough, c.1840 – 1914*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p.37
- 40 Councillor Reynolds, *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 6 January 1872
- 41 *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 6 August 1870
- 42 *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 11 October 1873

- 43 Councillor Howroyd, seconding the motion to increase salaries for constables, sergeants and the superintendent. *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 6 January 1872. The proposal to increase Superintendent Millar's annual salary by £10 aroused opposition.
- 44 *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 6 January 1872
- 45 *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 6 August 1870
- 46 HMIC annual report 1874
- 47 HMIC annual report 1877
- 48 *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 6 August 1875
- 49 *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 8 September 1871
- 50 *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 8 September 1871
- 51 *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 5 October 1878
- 52 *Batley News*, 29 October 1887
- 53 *Batley News*, 1 March 1895 and *Batley Reporter* 23 May 1896
- 54 *Huddersfield Examiner*, 8 March 1863 and *Leeds Mercury*, 22 June 1863
- 55 *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 20 May 1865 and *Yorkshire Gazette*, 20 Mat 1865
- 56 *Wakefield Free Press*, 20 May 1865
- 57 *Huddersfield Examiner*, 28 October 1865
- 58 *Bradford Observer*, 14 February 1870 and *Newcastle Courant* 18 February 1870
- 59 *Dewsbury Reporter*, 24 October 1874
- 60 *Batley Reporter*, 27 September 1873
- 61 *Huddersfield Examiner*, 27 July 1883
- 62 *Dewsbury Chronicle*, 10 June 1876
- 63 *Batley News*, 22 July 1892
- 64 *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 22 April 1878
- 65 For a positive view of policing in 1850s Keighley see P Bramham, 'Successful failures: Policing Keighley, 1840-1860,' unpublished MA dissertation, University of Huddersfield, 1986 but even he concedes the limited manpower available, p.76.
- 66 Savage later claimed that he was unpopular, particularly with publicans, because he was not prepared to turn a blind eye to their law-breaking. *Barnsley Chronicle*, 6 December 1879
- 67 *Sheffield Independent*, 23 August 1856
- 68 *South Yorkshire Times*, 7 June 1895
- 69 *Sheffield Independent*, 3 January 1871
- 70 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 21 May 1892 and see also 2 January 1892
- 71 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 21 March 1896

- 72 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 7 September 1895 and 6 & 11 June 1896
- 73 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 6 June 1896 and HMIC annual report 1897
- 74 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1860
- 75 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1860 and 3 September 1864
- 76 *Wakefield Free Press*, 22 October 1864 and *Sheffield Independent*, 29 July 1865
- 77 *Sheffield Independent*, 19 July 1865
- 78 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1874, 3 July and 4 August, 1874 and *Barnsley Independent*, 21 November 1874
- 79 *Sheffield Independent*, 5 February 1874
- 80 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1875
- 81 *Sheffield Independent*, 5 February 1874
- 82 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1875
- 83 *Sheffield Independent*, 13 March 1882
- 84 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 1882
- 85 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1882
- 86 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 17 October 1896
- 87 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 28 November 1898
- 88 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 19 February 1898
- 89 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 19 December 1898
- 90 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 1 October 1898
- 91 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 19 February 1898 and 28 December 1901
- 92 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 5 October 1901. See also 15 September and 27 October 1900
- 93 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 17 June 1899
- 94 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 14 May & 24 September and 26 November 1898 and 1 April & 17 June 1899
- 95 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 24 September and 15 October 1898
- 96 The force itself expanded at a faster rate than the population of the town. While the Barnsley force's police/population ratio worsened from 1:855 to 1:1027 in 1901, that of Rotherham improved from 1:934 in 1891 to 1:793 a decade later.
- 97 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 8 August 1882
- 98 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1, 4 & 8 August 1882
- 99 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 11 August 1882 and *Sheffield Independent*, 20 July 1889
- 100 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 11 March 1882
- 101 The Blue Ribbon movement, or Gospel Temperance was an American

- movement that had considerable impact in England in the 1870s and 1880s. See L I Shiman, 'The Blue Ribbon Army: Gospel Temperance in England,' *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (December 1981), pp. 391-408
- 102 *Sheffield Independent*, 6 September 1883
- 103 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 22 September & 29 October 1883
- 104 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1883, *Sheffield Independent*, 1 and 5 December 1883
- 105 *South Yorkshire Times*, 16 May 1884
- 106 *South Yorkshire Times*, 16 May 1884
- 107 *Sheffield Independent*, 13 March 1887
- 108 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 1 March 1856. The passing of the 1856 Police Act is discussed in S Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780 -1850*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 510 -516
- 109 *Whitby Gazette*, 16 May 1863. It also condemned Grey's desire for 'direct and undivided control.' See also the more implied criticism in *Malton Gazette*, 9 May 1863.
- 110 *Yorkshire Gazette*, 9 May 1863
- 111 HMIC annual report 1859. It also pointed out that a division of the WRCC had its headquarters in Pontefract.
- 112 HMIC annual report 1877
- 113 HMIC annual report 1885
- 114 HMIC annual report 1860
- 115 *Yorkshire Gazette*, 12 April 1884 and *Leeds Mercury*, 16 April 1885. See also *Richmond and Ripon Chronicle*, 18 April 1885 for city council simply noting the 'annual complaint' from the Home Office.
- 116 *Northern Echo*, 26 February 1887
- 117 *Yorkshire Post*, 5 December 1883
- 118 *York Herald*, 17 April 1876
- 119 *Yorkshire Gazette*, 12 April 1884
- 120 *North Star*, 12 May 1887
- 121 The majority of amalgamations into county forces took place in Cornwall (6) and Devon (7).
- 122 Similar opposition to amalgamation with the North Riding County Constabulary was to be seen in Richmond.
- 123 See for example, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 9 May 1863, *Richmond and Ripon Chronicle*, 16 July 1880 & 24 September 1881, *Malton Gazette*, 9 May 1863, *Whitby Gazette*, 16 May 1863