It was during the late 1820s and 1830s that the policing system we would recognise today emerged in England and Wales, to replace the outdated and inefficient system that existed until that time. Sir Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police had been formed in 1829 and was used as a model for police forces over the next 25 years. In 1835, The Municipal Corporations Act required each new chartered borough council to form a Watch Committee and, within 3 weeks of their appointment, to employ constables to preserve the peace within the borough. Hence Colchester Borough Police was one of the first of the provincial constabularies to be established, some six years after the formation of the Metropolitan Police. As well as Colchester, Saffron Walden, Maldon and Harwich availed themselves of the provisions of the 1835 Act.

In 1836, a full time police force was formed in Colchester, consisting of a superintendent and 19 men. They were originally based in accommodation next to the Moot Hall.

In 1844, the force was accused of 'failing to suppress prostitutes and disorderly public houses'. Constables were requested to keep a watchful eye on public houses but unfortunately, this resulted in some dismissals for drunkenness.

The force moved its base to the Town Hall in 1845 and, in 1857, the strength of the force was increased to 22 men.

Colchester was, as it is today, a garrison town and, as a result of friction between the police and military in the town, in 1860 the army were given two rooms in the green market (West Stockwell Street) as a base for military patrols.

In 1963, Colchester Borough Police received a good report from the Inspector of Constabularies. The following is an extract from the report:

'Of the 104 public-houses within the borough, three were proceeded against and fined; and of the 34 beer-houses within the borough, two were proceeded against, and one was fined. The head constable acts as assistant relieving officer for vagrants, of whom 1,650 were relieved during the year, being an increase of 126 over the number relieved during the previous year. Two constables were dismissed during the year. Twenty-three known thieves and 38 suspected persons are reported to reside within the borough. A small library, presented by a lady, has been established. The station house is clean and secure, and everything appeared in good order. The force is efficient.'

In 1884, probably as a result of traffic congestion in the town, the force moved toward the mechanisation of the twentieth century when the Head Constable was provided with a tricycle.

In 1886 the force was again increased, this time to 33 men, including two plain-clothes officers.
A river patrol, consisting of a sergeant and three constables, was formed in 1890 and increased in 1892 by four additional constables. Their main role was to protect the Colne fisheries. The River Police eventually had access to three boats, the Alert, the Brisk and the Viking. One of the rules of the River Police was that every officer should be a good swimmer and officers were allowed to bathe whilst on duty.

A tragic incident occurred in August 1899, involving a young officer by the name of Henry Wright. Henry had left his home town of Lowestoft at the age of 21 to join the Colchester River Police. On Tuesday 1st August 1899, he failed to hand over his patrol boat at the end of his shift at 5pm. Eventually, following a search, the boat was found at the mouth of Pyfleet Creek with Henry Wright's uniform in it. Henry's body was found two days later. The coroner recorded a verdict of accidental death.

By 1914, the River Police had increased again in size and its ranks then included an inspector. It was finally disbanded in 1942.

**Pictured right** is PC 16 Thomas Soloman Potter, known as Sol, a well known member of the borough force who served from 1899 until 1926. For much of his service, his beat covered the Hythe Quay and New Town area. Sol died on Boxing Day 1944. His descendants still live in the town today.

In 1907 the Borough force was increased to 49 men and, in 1912, Captain Hugh Stockwell took over as Chief Constable. At this time, the first matron was appointed to look after female prisoners. Captain Stockwell only served in the capacity of Chief Constable until 1915, when he returned to active service with his old regiment. During his absence Captain E.M. Showers, who had previously retired as Chief Constable of Essex, took his place.

Some members of Colchester Borough Police, taken about 1900. All of the officers have regulation moustaches. The two on the right, wearing flat caps, are from the River Police. The officer second on the left, fourth row from the front, is PC Sol Potter.
In 1919, Stockwell (now a Lieutenant Colonel) returned to the force, now with a compliment of 77 officers, and remained in post until 1947. 1940 saw the force move to the soldiers' rest home in Queen Street (today a Chicago Rock Cafe), which is where it stayed throughout the amalgamation of Colchester Borough Police with Essex County Constabulary in 1947, until the move to a new purpose built station in Southway which is still in use today.

Colchester Borough Mounted Section, led by Sergeant Wynn, (in front of Colchester Castle) and reviewed by the Chief Constable Mr. S. R. Midgley, c. 1910. The Borough did not own horses, but loaned them from the local cavalry for ceremonial occasions.

An early photograph (exact date unknown) of borough officers on parade in what appears to be a summer uniform, complete with straw helmets. Only one officer, second from the far end in the back row, is dressed in the normal dark uniform, complete with a leather belt worn outside his tunic. A further interesting point of note is that, on the summer uniforms, the collar numbers are clearly shown on their epaulets rather than on their collars.

Boxing

Colchester Borough Police is probably best remembered in the town today for the success of their boxing team during the 1930s. Chief Constable Colonel Stockwell was keen to recruit sportsmen, particularly boxers, into the force. This practice, coupled with the recruitment of a particularly knowledgeable trainer, Syd Humphreys, jelled to produce what was accepted as one of the best police boxing teams in Europe.

One of the borough's star performers was PC 60 Arthur (Jock) Porter, who won the European Police Heavyweight Championship twice. He is pictured right undergoing roadwork, accompanied by his trainer Syd Humphreys and watched by three colleagues, PCs Bateman, Edwards and Gheddes.

Jock joined the borough force in 1937 and served with them until 1942. He was a clever boxer who could punch his weight and 'mix it' with the best of them.
This team photograph (taken in 1937) shows that at least fourteen members of the force were boxers. From left to right: (back row) Syd Humphreys (Trainer), Tom Bateman, Freddie Besch, Horton, Len Isom, Tom Ledger, Freddie Cook and Tom Storey; (front row) Reg Spiller, Johnny Edwards, White, Arthur 'Jock' Porter, Jock Morrison, Harry Raven and Tom Frisby.

The legacy of the Colchester Borough Police boxing team was passed down through the years into the late 1950s and early 1960s, when PC Jock McGhee was training young hopefuls at the King George V Club, situated between East and West Stockwell Street.

Syd Humphreys also continued his involvement with boxing in the town for many years after the amalgamation of the borough force with Essex County Constabulary.

My connection with the borough boxers goes back to 1960 when I joined the King George V Club and met Jock McGhee. The borough boys used to train in the club gymnasium and, over the next few years, I was to train in the same gym and ring.

I had my last bout in the old Corn Exchange in High Street, Colchester, the site of many borough police victories.

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