The establishment of regular police in rural England coincided with the development of the camera. Photographic history has not been over kind to the Essex Police Museum. Early photographs of the Essex Constabulary (which was formed in 1840) and of the four borough forces (Colchester, Harwich, Maldon and Saffron Walden) are rare.

A mystery that Essex Police and its museum are presently unable to resolve is; “what was their working headgear?” From the various documents in the Essex Record Office we learn that the Essex County Constabulary were issued with top hats in 1840. It is likely that, in line with civilian fashion, this was the “stove-pipe” hat worn by the Metropolitan Police. The dictates of fashion, though slow, would have ensured the issue, within a few years, of a more modern top hat with a reinforced top. There are sometimes references to “caps”. From the time of the American Civil War in the 1860’s a kepi was used by many of the European uniformed services. We are fortunate that our portfolio of photographs is always increasing, but it is fair comment to suggest that Victorian Essex policemen often fought shy of the camera when their heads were covered. This may have been at the suggestion of the photographer. Our nearby constabularies, Hertfordshire and Suffolk, were soon photographed on parade. Not so, apparently, our local lads.
A Devonshire correspondent, in search of his family tree, told us of a sepia photograph of his great-great-grandfather, an Essex inspector. He then forwarded a colour photograph that he had himself taken of the picture of John Harris Bausor (pronounced Boresir). With the aid of a friend who owned an air-brush and the expertise of our Police Headquarters studio, Bausor, who died in 1861, is produced for you.

John Harris Bausor was born in Nottinghamshire on 9th March 1811, the son of John Bausor and Phebe Harris. He first became a boy sailor on H.M.S. Buzzard (Captain Smith), then by 1831 was an Able Seaman of H.M.S. Charybdis (Captain Crawford). When the Essex Constabulary was formed in 1840 he was an Able Seaman on H.M.S. Vollage. His parents later moved to Chelmsford. In the 1841 census they were living in Duke Street, where the father was a “Wine Cellarman.” It would be pleasant to speculate that half-pay naval Captain John B. B. McHardy, who lived in nearby King Street, frequented the licensed premises. It was unlikely that he would have done so for a “noggin and tales of the sea.” McHardy, in that same census of the 7th June 1841, described himself as “gentleman.” This despite having been Chief Constable of Essex for over a year. Perhaps the social standing was not high enough? John Harris Bausor was shown as “policeman”. He had exactly one weeks service.

The Captain was looking for good recruits. His determination to secure the highest standards had resulted in a rapid turn over of recruits. The 100 constables and 15 superintendents of the original intake were, in 1841, being supplemented by the new rank, that of inspector. There is evidence that McHardy received a letter of introduction from a former naval colleague and that Bausor was the subject. After training at Springfield, Constable 5 Bausor received an interesting posting. With only 100 constables to cover the vast county, the former sailor was sent to the remote South-East Essex island of Foulness.
It may be that this was an indication that McHardy was evolving as a policeman. His experience as a former coastguard must have strongly influenced him. It can be conjectured that he thought smuggling of such importance to the policing of the county that he deployed some men to counter it. The nearest town to Foulness was Rochford. Within a short time Bausor was brought inland to the ancient village of Prittlewell. At the south end of that village was a fishing hamlet called Southend, where Constable 60 Gillery P. Compart was stationed. In 1843 Compart resigned and on 1st July 1844 Bausor was promoted Inspector and posted to Leigh-on-Sea. The rank of Sergeant did not exist at that time in Essex. The sepia photograph may have been taken at any time thereafter, until his untimely death in 1861. A single man in 1841, he then married Margaret Ann and began a family. 11 children are recorded to them.

In 1847 a career move took him to Great Dunmow, another to Bocking in 1849. From 1850 to 1855 the family were at Great Chesterford. At about that time the police of the town of Saffron Walden ceased to exist. Captain McHardy had risen on the navy list and was now an Admiral. Fifteen years after inspectors were first promoted he instituted the rank of sergeant. There must have been moves resulting from this innovation and these brought the inspector to Billericay in 1857. In 1859 came his final posting, to the Dengie Division. It required a commander and there was no apparent intention to appoint a superintendent. Bausor became the inspector at Latchingdon. On 24th April 1861 he died at Purleigh, whilst in service, of a “malignant ulcer of tongue and throat.” His wife received a payment of £75, being one year's salary. “Present at his death” was the Purleigh policeman, Constable 104 George Verlander. The latter had only been a policeman since 25th June 1860. The height given on Verlander’s papers of 5' 7" is significant as he was to be discharged on 30th April 1863 because his actual height was half an inch shorter. Our photograph of John Harris Bausor takes the museum forward. It is the earliest known likeness of an Essex Constabulary Officer and helps to confirm a theory that our early police uniforms did not have significant badge distinctions. Rank was indicated by the quality and cut. It is apparent that each rank wore a crown on their collars to denote that their authority came from the Crown. The great regret is that no hat can be seen.

Within a year of the “Charge of the Light Brigade” and the Admiral's appointment of the first nine sergeants in Essex, a member of the Saffron Walden Police was photographed. This picture of 1855 may be older or newer than that of Bausor. Constable Thomas Dewberry (or Dubarry) wore, in 1855, a reinforced top hat of a shape that was contemporary to that in civilian use. It can be safely assumed that it would not have been in the height of fashion, police uniforms were slow to change. The Saffron Walden police ceased to exist in 1857. The death certificate of William Campling, the High Constable of the town, who was murdered in 1849, shows his occupation as “surveyor.” As in the case of McHardy in 1841, the rank of Chief of local police was not mentioned. As a posed picture, it is considered likely that Dewberry wore his best hat.

The next photograph in our collection dates from 1872 or after. In that year William Barnard joined the Essex Constabulary as Constable 39. The museum possesses both a “tin-type” photograph of him, wearing a distinctive cone shaped reinforced top hat, and a group photograph pre-1909, in which he is shown as superintendent at Saffron Walden, shortly before his death.

Charles Foster Robinson served from 1862 to 1893, mostly as an Inspector at Ongar. He wears a kepi.
Chief Constable, Major W. H. Poyntz (1881-1888). Poyntz was a former Marine Light Infantryman and his training and dash may have been concentrated upon the ageing force of Admiral J. B. B. McHardy. The French continued to use the kepi and this is the hat which is associated with senior officers. The picture of Charles Foster Robinson of Ongar and Great Bardfield illustrates the working hat of the senior officer. Did the constables and sergeants have them?

One other mystery remains in the faded picture of a Constable which was found among the museum’s Colchester papers. The hat is the flat topped helmet associated with postmen until after the 2nd World War, yet the officer wears a whistle. His badges do not appear to be those of the Colchester Borough Police (1836-1947) and, of course, the Essex Constabulary had a Colchester Division. It might also be of an officer of an outside force, such as the Railway Police.

Each time we are able to identify a photograph, our history becomes a little clearer. New photographs appear with pleasing frequency. My colleagues at the museum will now begin to produce material about many of the badges and helmet plates that were issued after the helmet was established.