Essex County Constabulary was established in 1840 in the old militia barracks – called New Court then but now known as Old Court – in Arbour Lane, Chelmsford. They supplied accommodation for the Chief Constable and his wife and living quarters for at least eight officers. There were also two kitchens, two parlours, an office, three cells and stables for four horses.

By 1900, New Court had become too small and was too far from the town centre to take prisoners so the County Standing Justices’ Committee decided to build a new police station in the centre of Chelmsford and a new headquarters in Springfield. Land for the new headquarters was acquired from farmer George Bolingbroke for £1,250. Chelmsford architect George Clare, of Clare & Ross, won the competition to design it. And the beautiful red-brick Edwardian buildings still form the central part of Essex Police Headquarters today.

Opened in 1903, under Chief Constable Edward Showers, the buildings – now referred to as New Court – were grouped in a crescent. They also provided administrative and residential accommodation, together with landscaped gardens. And there were many ‘mod-cons’, including electric lights, hot and cold running water, central heating (from coal-fired boilers) and a telephone. The total cost of the new Essex County Constabulary Headquarters, including all furnishings, was £18,000.

The new Chief Constable’s House had 11 bedrooms, a dining room, a study and a wine cellar running the width of the house. An administration block was built for 11 officers, including the Chief Constable and Deputy Chief Constable. (DCC). It also included living accommodation for the junior clerk – who was the sergeant in charge – the chief clerk – who was the superintendent – and the DCC. The first DCC to reside here was Raglan Somerset.

The Chief Constable’s Groom’s House is now the Gate House. When all the gardens at the rear of the administration block were cleared and turned into allotments during the late 1930s, a strange structure at the end of the Deputy Chief Constable’s Garden was demolished. This roofed brick and stone edifice had bars on three sides and was previously assumed to be a temporary ‘lock-up’ for prisoners before they could be transported to Chelmsford Police Station. But it has since been discovered that DCC Somerset had had a hobby – he kept monkeys and this had been their cage!
By 1931, the DCC’s home had been turned into offices for the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Photographic Department.

Behind the clerks’ offices ran a corridor, off which lay Stationery and Uniform stores plus a Records Room which was lined with slate and totally fire-proofed. Above the Chief Clerk’s House is a clock. It originally struck quarter-hours but today it only strikes the hours.

The Recruits’ Block provided accommodation for the sergeant drill instructor and had a parade ground at the rear. The Guardroom was where new recruits – 12 at a time – underwent formal training. Each recruit had their own bed–space/cubicle and these rooms were situated immediately above a large kitchen, bathroom, toilet and a mess room for eating and recreation – which gave the sergeant access to the recruits’ quarters.

A larger garage was built for the new motor patrols on the paddock next to the drill yard, housing three fast cars and 10 motorcycles. The mobile section offices were based in the ground floor of the Stable Block, which now had two storeys.

As Essex County Constabulary grew, new land, east of headquarters, was purchased in 1935. A new police house “suitable to DCC standards” was built at the end of Kingston Crescent for the first permanent Assistant Chief Constable, John Crockford. Today, this is known as T Block and houses the Criminal Justice Department (CJD). Behind this, a skid pan was built for the new Driving School, which was formed in 1936.

In 1937, the rest of the land was given over to recreational activities, with a bowling green, cricket field and tennis courts. Before this, the only on-site sporting facility were the tennis courts on the crescent in front of the Chief Constable’s House. A wooden cricket pavilion was hand-built by Sgt B. Jenkinson in September 1956.

In 1953, two new extensions – costing £31,000 – were built at the rear of headquarters, on top of allotments owned by the force. The Driving School and Clothing Stores occupied one wing – where Essex Police Museum is today – and the Photographic Department and the Canteen were together in the second building, where Scenes of Crime is located today.

Another expansion of the Driving School shortly afterwards saw an additional yellow ‘pre-fab’ building built behind the original Driving School classrooms. This School of Motor Instruction proved short-lived, however, and it was demolished in 1960 to
make way for a new three-storey building, which included the new Assembly Hall and expanded Clothing Stores.

The School of Motor Instruction c 1953-1959

The Driving School’s new (current) building opened in 1963, situated on the sports field near the skid pan. As there was a need for a vehicle repair workshop, a garage was built nearby and was fully functioning by 1971.

The Police Cadet School, at the end of Kingston Avenue, was opened by Princess Anne on October 20, 1969, and was home to male cadets training to be police officers. It is now called Essex Police College and provides training courses for police officers and staff.

In 1972, planning permission was given for a staff car park. This was built on top of an over-sized orchard, sited behind the Chief Constable’s garden, which itself had been developed from a gravel pit—hence the name Orchard Car Park.

John Nightingale was the last Chief Constable to reside at Essex Police Headquarters. He had one of the downstairs rooms in the Chief’s House converted into a garage but, when he retired in 1978, the bedrooms and garage were converted into offices. The same year, the large, hexagonal building, now known as A Block, was opened. It housed a new control room and staff offices, replacing the old Chief Constable’s Garage and Workshop, which had been demolished four years earlier. However, almost two decades later, with technology rapidly changing, the control room needed upgrading. The Force Information Room (FIR) opened on July 18, 1997, standing on what was the old bowling green on the sports field.
What we offer

Essex Police Museum is an informal and friendly place to find out about the police and what they do.

OPENING TIMES
Wednesdays, 1 - 4:30pm
1st Saturday of each month, 10:30am - 3pm

GROUP VISITS
Adult and children’s groups are welcome to book daytime or evening visits. Please contact the curator for details. Group visits are free but donations are gratefully accepted.

SCHOOLS SERVICE
School visits are free. We provide an education service linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum and QCA Schemes of Work. We offer sessions for groups of 30 children; other activities can be arranged to accommodate larger groups. Please contact the curator or see our website for further information.

Where to Find Us

DIRECTIONS
Bus no. 47, 54 or 56 from the bus station in the town centre (opposite the train station).

PARKING
Parking is available on Saturdays only. We recommend you park at the public car parks in Wharf Road or at Riverside Ice and Leisure (Victoria Road) on Wednesdays.

CONTACT US
Essex Police Museum
PO Box 2, Headquarters, Springfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 6DA
Tel: 01245 457150
Fax: 01245 453456
Website: www.essex.police.uk/museum
E-mail: museum@essex.pnn.police.uk
Twitter: @epolicemuseum