



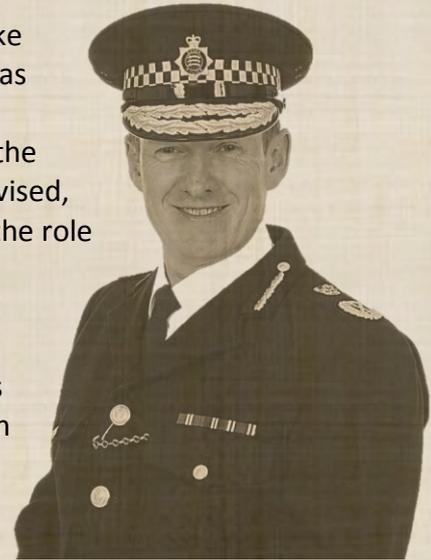
History Notebook 58

Chief Constables of Essex

by Maureen Scollan, MA., PhD

The chief constable is an important official in a county force like Essex Police. Obviously the role itself has changed as society has developed, and organisations such as the police have become more accountable. This history notebook will briefly examine the ways that chief constables in Essex were appointed and supervised, and then include mini-biographies of those officers who held the role between 1840 (when the Essex Police was established) to the present day.

Several different types of local policing schemes under various Acts of Parliament existed before the 19th century. The man in charge of a group of constables in a parish or manor might be described as the 'chief' or 'high' constable - sometimes in the same document! Few, if any, of their responsibilities would be recognised by a modern chief constable.



Stephen Kavanagh

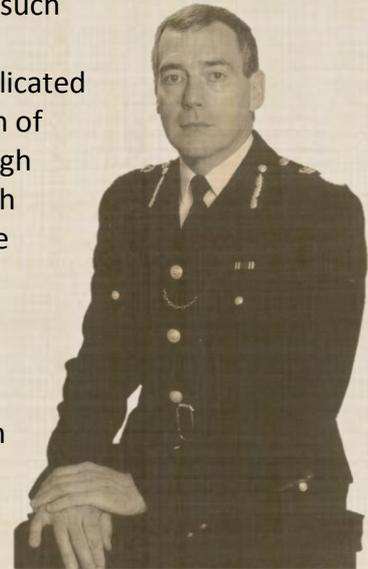
A law passed in 1836 was called the Municipal Corporations Act, and it gave towns with the status of a borough the opportunity to set up a watch committee of local residents, with constables and a 'chief constable' being appointed for the area. Several towns in Essex had the status of a borough (not directly comparable to the present-day use of the term). Four of those boroughs - Colchester, Maldon, Saffron Walden and Harwich - set up watch committees under the Act and appointed a handful of constables on a part-time basis who were only paid expenses. It was not compulsory to appoint such constables; so many communities continued their own arrangements under different Acts of Parliament. Harwich and Saffron Walden police were incorporated into Essex Constabulary in 1857; Maldon in 1889 and Colchester in 1947. British Airports Police at Stansted Airport became part of the county force in 1975. Other counties had similar amalgamations.



Edward Showers

This history notebook will only refer to the chief constables of the Essex County Constabulary, which was founded in 1840. A compulsory amalgamation with Southend Borough Police in 1969 meant a cumbersome change of title to the 'Essex and Southend on Sea Joint Constabulary'. The name of 'Essex Police' was adopted in 1974.

Essex was one of the first county forces to be set up in 1840 before such bodies were compulsory throughout England and Wales; that only happened in 1857. Objectives for such police forces were less complicated than those today, and mainly included the prevention and detection of crime and the maintenance of public order. As there were not enough police officers to cover every part of Essex the older system of parish constables continued to run in parallel with the county force, before finally dying out just before the First World War.



David Stevens

An earlier history notebook (no. 12) looked in some detail at the setting up of the Essex force in February 1840, and the methods of the first chief constable who was a naval officer on half pay. Captain John Bunch Bonnemaision McHardy was Chief Constable of Essex for 41 years before retiring in October 1881; he died in December 1883 at the home of his married daughter and her husband in Bath, although he is buried in the grounds of Holy Trinity church in Springfield. A public house in Arbour Lane, Springfield, next to the original police headquarters, has just been renamed 'The Admiral McHardy' in his honour.

At the time of writing there have only been 12 chief constables of Essex Police, and their periods of service have grown progressively shorter since McHardy's 41 years. The introduction of fixed-term contracts for such chief officers means that nowadays most only serve for around five years. Several English forces now have women chief constables, but so far Essex has had three women who have held the rank of assistant chief constable.

In the 19th century chief constables were county officials who were responsible to a committee of magistrates, also known as Justices of the Peace. After county councils were established in 1889 a 'Standing Joint Committee' (SJC) of elected county councillors and JPs supervised the way the force was organised, although the chief constable retained operational control. A Police Act of 1964 renamed the SJC as the Police Authority, which was made up of two thirds elected councillors and one third JPs. In November 2012 all police authorities in England were abolished and replaced by an elected Police and Crime Commissioner in each force area. The Commissioner has wide powers which include setting the annual policing budget, and a five year police and crime plan based on local priorities. The Commissioner also appoints the chief constable and can (if necessary) dismiss him or her. It is a very new role which is still being developed.



William Poyntz

ABBREVIATIONS USED

- ACC - assistant chief constable
- CC - chief constable
- DCC - deputy chief constable
- SJC - standing joint committee
- JP - justice of the peace, otherwise known as magistrates

CHIEF CONSTABLES OF ESSEX

1 JOHN BUNCH BONNEMAISON McHARDY



Born 3 December 1801 in the Bahamas. Served in the Royal Navy and Coast Guard. Reached rank of admiral. First CC of Essex from February 1840 October 1881. Died 3 October 1883.

2 WILLIAM HENRY POYNTZ

Born Dublin 23 October 1838. Served in Royal Marine Light Infantry. CC of Nottingham 1871-1881, and CC of Essex between November 1881-July 1887. Died 1892.



3 EDWARD McLEAN SHOWERS



Born 1846 in Moulmein, India. Served in 95th Derbyshire Regiment. Superintendent in Devon Police 1884 and CC of Exeter. Became CC of Essex between July 1888-April 1915. Retired but due to the First World War became acting CC of the Colchester Borough Constabulary 1915-19. Died December 1925.

4 JOHN ALFRED UNETT

Born October 1868. Served in Third Hussars from 1889 until he was attached to City of London Police in 1905. Superintendent in Hertfordshire 1909-12; CC of Preston Borough Police 1912-15. CC of Essex 1915- December 1932 when he died in office.



5 FRANCIS JONATHAN PEEL



Born December 1897. After war service in the Royal Field Artillery graduated from Cambridge University. Joined Liverpool City Police as a constable in 1920 and rose through ranks to chief inspector in 1928. ACC Bath City Police in 1931. CC of Essex between May 1933-December 1962. Knighted 1959. Died December 1979.

6 JOHN CYPRIAN NIGHTINGALE

Born September 1913. Graduated from University College London and joined the Metropolitan Police as a constable in 1935. Selected for accelerated promotion. Awarded British Empire Medal in 1941 for bravery. War service in Royal Navy. Became ACC Essex in 1958 and CC in October 1962. Knighted 1975. Retired 1978. Died 2002.



7 ROBERT SIDNEY BUNYARD



Born May 1930. Formerly a teacher. Joined Metropolitan Police 1952. ACC Leicestershire 1972. DCC Essex 1977 then CC 1978-1987. Became Commandant of Police Staff College at Bramshill. Knighted 1991.

8 **JOHN HALCROW BURROW**

Born July 1935. Served in Kings African Rifles 1953-55. Joined Metropolitan Police 1958. University College London gained LL.B (Hons) in 1967. ACC and then DCC of Merseyside 1977-1983. CC of Essex February 1988- June 1998.



9 **DAVID FREDERICK STEVENS**

Born March 1951. Served in Surrey Police for 20 years before becoming DCC of Bedfordshire in 1994. CC of Essex July 1998 - June 2005.

10 **ROGER BAKER**

Born 1959. Joined Derbyshire Constabulary in July 1977 and worked in uniform and CID before becoming ACC of Staffordshire 2001-03, DCC of North Yorkshire 2003-05. Became CC of Essex in July 2005, retiring in 2009. Shortly afterwards became one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary.



11 **JIM BARKER-McCARDLE**

Born 1961 in Southend. Joined Kent Police in 1981 and served throughout that county in both uniform and CID, becoming ACC in 1999 and DCC in 2004. Appointed CC of Essex August 2009 and retired in May 2013.

12 **STEPHEN KAVANAGH**

The present Chief Constable of Essex was appointed in May 2013, having been born in the county where his father was a serving officer. Mr Kavanagh joined the Metropolitan Police in 1985 and worked through the ranks becoming a Deputy Assistant Commissioner in November 2012.



FURTHER READING

Martyn Lockwood - *The Essex Police Force a History* (The History Press, 2009)

Maureen Scollan - *Sworn to Serve: Police in Essex 1840-1990* (Phillimore 1993)

Martin Stallion and David S Wall - *The British Police: Forces and Chief Officers, 1829-2012* (Police History Society, 2012)

David S Wall - *The Chief Constables of England and Wales: the socio-legal history of a criminal justice elite* (Ashgate 1998)

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