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**FORMBY POLICE STATION**

1894 - 1994

## FORMBY POLICE STATION

# CENTENARY

1894 - 1994

Back in 1892 the County Council purchased a piece of land from the Reverend Lonsdale Formby and John Formby Esq. of Formby for the sum of £100.

Plans were drawn up for a police station, with cells, to be built on a site on the corner of Church Road and School Lane, Formby in March, 1893.

A police station costing £2,074 4s. 0d. was built on this land and was taken into Constabulary occupation on the 13th October, 1894. This amount exceeded the original budget by some £125.

Seven officers were working out of Formby Police Station at the turn of the century serving an estimated population of 5,524. The area at this time was mainly rural with several farms and small holdings covering the district.

These premises were in use by Lancashire Constabulary until 1st April, 1974 when, under Local Government Reorganisation, they were transferred and became the responsibility of the Metropolitan County of Merseyside.

## UNIFORM

About the time Formby Police Station was opened the style of tunics altered to become smarter and more military in appearance.

Between 1903 - 13 collar shields (*also called 'collardogs'*) were taken out of use, as was the belt buckle plate bearing the County Arms. A black 'snake' belt replaced it. White metal whistle chains replaced the black ones worn previously.

In 1913 a new style of helmet was introduced. It had a white metal badge and the top, formerly a rose, changed to the present pattern. Black helmet plates were still worn on night duty.

From the 1930's police officers were issued with flat caps. These were only to be worn when riding bicycles. Police officers received a bicycle allowance to enable them to purchase and then maintain their own bicycles also when riding the bicycles they would wear 'gaiters' to protect their trousers.

*(Sergeant Bell in photograph far left).*



The Home Office made recommendations in 1934 that uniform throughout the country should be standardised. Lancashire adopted these suggestions although implementation was not immediate.

In 1949 a start was made on changing the style of tunics from dog collars to open necks, but the changeover was not completed until 1957/58. Latterly, dog collars were worn only on nights. Collar numbers moved to the shoulder with the introduction of open neck tunics.

Uniform has progressed to such an extent that now police officers wear a flat cap whilst driving patrol cars, a helmet when walking and even a hard protective riot helmet with visor for public order situations. The array of uniform is extensive and is designed to cover any situation an officer might find himself in.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

Formby Police Station was originally used as a station house. A Sergeant lived in the north side of the building and a constable in the south side. The sergeant's accommodation consisted of three bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor and a living room and kitchen on the ground floor. The toilet was outside in the rear yard. There was also a separate private entrance for his family.

The constable's accommodation was more sparse, his consisted of a ground floor living room, a small cooking area (it couldn't be classed as a kitchen) and two first floor bedrooms and bathroom. He also had an outside toilet in the rear yard.

The building has not changed very much in one hundred years. There have been minor alterations, like the private entrance being bricked up, interior toilets and minor alterations to the Enquiry Office area.

At the rear of the building was originally a line of toilets, coal bunkers and storerooms running along the boundary wall to what is now the garage. originally the garage was half the size it is today and used by Weights and Measures officials. Local tradesmen would bring their scales and weights to be checked by the Ministry on a regular basis.

### MINI-FORTRESS

A local resident, Geoff Bell, remembers that he lived in the Police Station from 1937 - 1943 as a young boy. He recalls how he lived with his father, mother and older brother. His father was Sergeant 634 Tom Tomkin Bell

This of course, was during the Second World War, and he remembers waking up in his front first floor bedroom to see an armed soldier patrolling on the balcony at the front of the Police building.



*Sergeant 634 Tom Tomkin Bell*

Across the rear yard wall were a line of coal bunkers and toilets. The roof covering these had to be reinforced in order to carry a small anti-aircraft gun. From all reports Formby was hit several times by stray bombs from the blitz on Liverpool.

Positions had to be found for rifles; that is 'gun slits' on the balcony (these still exist) and holes in the southern perimeter wall that were able to be opened to provide firing positions.

Sandbags were placed at the front of the station during the Second World War nearly up to the top of the windows. The entrance was staggered so that gun shots couldn't be fired directly through the front door. Armed guards were on duty throughout the war years and the police were issued with firearms during air raids. In fact when the yard gates were closed it became quite a little fortress.



## THE WAR YEARS

During the Second World War, when food rationing was at its height, stories of the 'bending of the rules' were plentiful. One such story was about a local butcher who took possession of two illegally slaughtered pigs in the back seat of his car. His young son was instructed to sit on them to conceal them on their journey from Altcar back to Formby. As they trundled towards Formby the butcher suddenly braked and came to a halt. Leaning across to the passenger side he said "Get in Bob, we'll give you a lift". Into the seat fell Bob Greehalgh, the Formby detective. You can imagine the fear that descended upon the son sat on the pigs in the back seat. Fortunately Bob Greenhalgh got out at Formby police station none the wiser.



## DECORATED

One of the prisoners Sergeant Bell's wife had to cook for was a captured German pilot who had parachuted to safety over Altcar. He was captured and locked in the cells awaiting his collection by the army authorities. The story goes that he donated his Iron Cross Medal to the officers at the station as a token of his gratitude for being well treated. This medal took pride of place on the wall of the office for many years. Unfortunately it cannot be located today.

## THE GAS CHAMBER

Mr. Bell also recalls his mother having to cook meals for any prisoner that may be lodged in the cells and to feed the stray dogs that were housed in the kennels in the rear yard.

A somewhat macabre memory concerned these stray dogs. It was the order of the day that stray dogs be kept in the kennels until collected, if by the elapse of seven days they had not been claimed by their owners, new homes would be found for them. The unfortunate ones that didn't fall into either category met their fate in the gas chamber.



This comprised of a small room at the rear of the Police Station in which the dog was placed. Coal gas was then released into the room and the dog passed away. Mr. Bell can remember smelling that coal gas despite there being a tall chimney to take away any pungent smells.

You can imagine the national outcry there would be today if such a practice were to exist. Happily the majority of the strays were claimed.

## THE VILLAGE BOBBIES

They had no need for Walkie Talkies  
 No need at all for Panda cars,  
 Our bobbies here used Shanks' Pony  
 And never went to Seminars.

No brass hats breathing down their necks here,  
 No forms in triplicate to write,  
 Just leisured strolls around the village,  
 Keeping watch by day and night.

We knew them all and they knew us then,  
 Respected, held in high esteem,  
 These seven men were our protectors,  
 Reliable, trusted, first rate team.

Then formby was a quiet backwash,  
 Open doors, no bolts and bars,  
 Crime was almost nonexistent,  
 And hardly any motor cars.

Fred Beswick was the tall and lean one,  
 Small moustache and big flat feet,  
 We all felt safe with Fred amongst us,  
 Pounding round his Formby beat.

Norman Brooks, the quiet shy one,  
 Played piano in the band,  
 But don't forget he's still a copper,  
 Toe the line, or feel his hand!

Bob Greenhalgh was the big rotund chap,  
 Crime detection was his game,  
 Sergeant Coulthard at his station,  
 Watch your step - they knew your name!

George Davidson and big Bill Hoptroff,  
 Were the men we all admired,  
 Plus PC Rooke, the mounted policeman,  
 All hoped they'd stay until retired.

In such a law abiding village,  
 Seven policemen seemed a lot,  
 But pay was low and no inflation,  
 Meant the best was what we got.

Men of honour, poorly paid then,  
 Unsocial hours, but quite content,  
 Our Formby bobbies were our mentors,  
 And we missed them when they went.

*by Joan Rimmer*



## BETWEEN THE WARS

John Tyrer is a 101 year old gentleman who lived in Formby until the mid 1940's and he recalls many stories, one of which being two old ladies from Seaforth who used to come along the tide to Formby collecting wood. One named Brigit and the other Celia. They used to sell it for firewood. One particular day they had done so well that they went to the Railway Public House, Duke Street, Formby.

Brigit got drunk and fell into a guttering in Brows Lane. Someone told the police, one of whom went to a second hand shop and borrowed a handcart, lifted her on to it and she was pushed through the village shouting "See my man in Livery". She was taken to the police station to sober up.

This was the talk of the village for many a week as nothing of this nature usually happened in Formby.



During the war a policeman was allocated a look-out post to supervise the locals who volunteered as air raid look-outs. John Tyrer was one such volunteer and George Beswick was the Supervising PC.

A sergeant Willis used to play his bagpipes in Ravenmeols Lane pre-First World War. It was quiet until he arrived.

## BAD APPLES

During and after the Second World War the Conservative Club was a popular rendezvous for our off-duty policemen whose quiet Formby postings must have been the envy of their colleagues in other areas of the Lancashire county Force. Crime was almost non-existent until an unprecedented spate of burglaries in 1947 left the whole village in a state of nervousness. People had never been in the habit of locking their doors until these break-ins were now making it necessary. It was a puzzlement to everyone and something quite alien to this hitherto law abiding and close knit community.



The police stepped up their regular patrols, and one night PC Fred Beswick accidentally stumbled upon a barrel of apples hidden behind the War Memorial, and obviously the stolen property of Rimmers Greengrocers just across the road. Fred reported his find to both the owner of the shop, Jimmy Rimmer and also to his Detective friend, Bob Greenhgh. Bob instructed Fred to stand guard over the apples and to stay well hidden in the bushes in the certain knowledge that the thief would soon return for his booty.

Bob then clocked off duty and went into the Conservative club where he met a fellow officer and relayed the saga of the apples to him. The two policemen stayed at the club until closing time and then together went across to the freezing Fred who was still patiently guarding the apples in the shadowy undergrowth. "No sign of anyone yet" said Fred. "Just stick it out" replied Bob "He's sure to show up soon" and with that Fred's two colleagues departed leaving him on duty.

The next morning poor Fred, frozen to the marrow, left his lonely vigil and clocked off duty having seen no sign of the burglar. It was many weeks later when Formby and the Police force itself were shaken to the core that Fred realised the reason for his fruitless night's work, when the burglar was caught red-handed robbing a newsagent's shop in Freshfield and was identified as the very policeman who had been Detective Constable Greenhalgh's drinking companion in the Conservative Club. — From 'Formby Remembered'

By JOHN A. RIMMER

This incident shocked the entire community and the serving policemen's wives were so ashamed that they shut themselves in their homes for several weeks. They would not venture outside the tight little community for fear of being 'tarred with the same brush'.

## **MOUNTED SECTION**

The Mounted Section was lodged at Seaforth until the Second world War. Then, because that area was getting heavily blitzed, it was decided to transfer the horses to Formby. They were stabled in buildings at the rear of Chapel Lane (the rear of the Gas Showrooms). There were also stables off Paradise Lane.

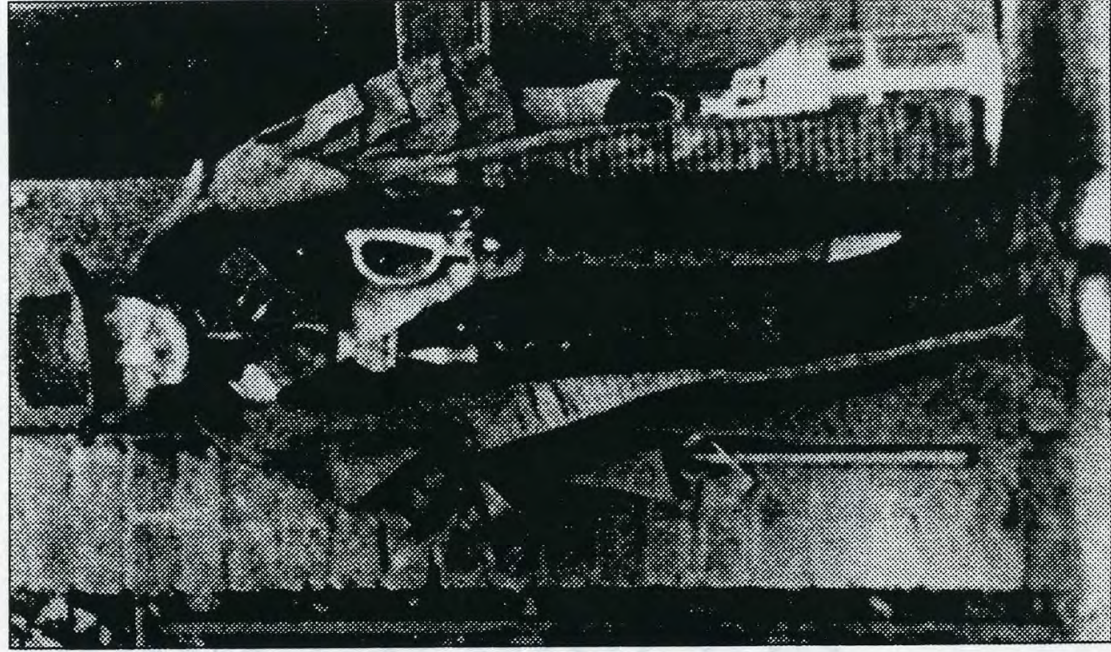
The Mounted Section was used extensively during the war period patrolling the beach and wooded coastal areas. This was to check for any possible invasion or alien landings.

The Mounted Section was still in existence at the end of the 1950's.

**MERSEYSIDE**

In 1974 the recommendations of the Boundary Commission were implemented and much of the traditional Lancashire became part of Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cumbria. Policemen serving in these areas were transferred to the new Forces. This resulted in Formby becoming part of Merseyside. Formby originally formed part of the Southport Sub-Division, and over the years, from 1974 Formby has been attached to Crosby and Seaforth and now in 1994 it again forms part of the new Southport area.





*Last of the 'Charlies' (Nightwatchmen) 1890*