50 Years of Policing in Devon & Cornwall

1967-2017
On 1 June 1967, the end of an era was marked for the independent police forces of Cornwall, Devon and Plymouth when they were merged by Government mandate to form the ‘Devon and Cornwall Constabulary.’ The historic union of the region’s constabularies heralded a colourful mixture of cynicism, hope and good-humour from the rank-and-file. Differences had to be set aside as county and city boundaries no longer existed, new working practices and uniform accoutrements began to appear, and local identity started to erode.

The 50th anniversary of the formation of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary was marked on 1 June 2017. In the months leading up to the occasion, a concerted and comprehensive effort was made to identify and interview retired and serving officers from the pre-amalgamation era to the present day to capture their thoughts, feelings and memories of the past half-century.

This booklet features excerpts from those interviewed by staff and students from the University of Plymouth’s School of Law, Criminology and Government. It provides a frank and fascinating snapshot of policing in Devon and Cornwall including an unprecedented glimpse of the career of Plymouth’s first policewoman. Our thanks go to the police officers of Devon and Cornwall, both serving and retired, for giving their time, photographs and thoughts for this project; to Devon and Cornwall Police, especially Sue Chivell, Admin Services Manager, for transcribing the full interviews and to our students and colleagues for conducting them. Front cover: top image courtesy of R. and S. Middleton; middle and bottom images courtesy of S. Dell.

Mark Rothwell, Author and Police Historian

Professor Kim Stevenson, Project Co-ordinator
A pioneer in policing in the South West, Eileen Normington (née Milo) was the first member of the Women’s Auxiliary Police Corps in Plymouth and later one of the city’s first sworn women constables. Eileen joined the W.A.P.C. on 3 September 1939, on the first day of the Second World War. Twenty-four hours later, she was in uniform interviewing prospective members of the new auxiliary force. Eileen was retained post-war and sworn as a constable, serving in traffic and CID in her later career. She retired in 1960 and celebrated her 100th birthday on 30 June 2017.

“THEY PUT IT OUT ON THE WIRELESS THAT THEY WANTED WOMEN TO GO UP TO THE POLICE STATION TO WORK... WE WENT UP, MY FRIEND AND I... AND GAME FOR ANYTHING... I LEFT MY NAME AND ADDRESS.”

Answering the Call for Women Volunteers, 1939

Living and working at the Police Station

“I was put into a new office which was called the War Department... they put an Inspector of police in, and me to do any office work.

We used to sleep in, you see... someone was always living there. We had the firewomen from the fire brigade. You had men and women separately... and fire brigade women slept in and some policewomen slept in. They were always on call.”

W.A.P.C. Eileen Milo in 1939. (Eileen Normington Collection)
“It’s hard to think that I was born at the same time as the first policewomen appeared on our streets during the years of the Great War. In my own service from 1939 until 1960 in the Plymouth City Police I became one of the first two sworn female officers in the city force. I saw many changes in the decades in which I served myself. Whatever would it be like if one of those first policewomen in 1915 came ahead 100 years and saw the work which women in the Police Service do now? So much has altered for the better for us ladies in the Force nowadays. Pay, hours, conditions and the ability to marry without having to give up your job to name but a few significant changes. But I wasn’t alone during those challenging times when Plymouth was being bombed night after night and we girls held the fort at Police Headquarters Control Room, even when an unexploded bomb was dropped through our ceiling!”

Leonard Oatey and Phil Bunt

Service History

Leonard Oatey joined Cornwall County Constabulary in 1950 and served until 1966. His service included a tour in the Isles of Scilly, as well as postings in Truro, Bodmin, Helston and Liskeard. Leonard transferred to Wiltshire Constabulary in 1966 and retired in the rank of Superintendent in 1980. His son-in-law Phil Bunt joined Avon and Somerset Constabulary in 1975 and transferred to Devon and Cornwall Constabulary three years later, serving the remainder of his career there until 2005.

“When I joined the RAF at 18 I had no intention then of becoming a policeman. It was only when I did my National Service that I suddenly realised I didn’t want to return to clerical work at the China Clay Company in St Austell. I joined Cornwall Constabulary on 4 April 1950 and because I was a bright young constable, I did a year on the Scillies! It was lovely.”

Leonard Oatey on joining the Cornish police force

“I’m very much from a police family. My father served in the Cornwall Constabulary and was the first man appointed as a police driver when the traffic department was formed in 1938. My uncle served with him and his son joined as well so at one point there were four of us called Oatey in the Force, which was certainly unique. My two daughters both became policewomen in Cornwall as well.”

A Police Family

Thoughts on Amalgamation

“Being in Wiltshire I wasn’t around for the amalgamation with Devon but I know my Cornish colleagues were very apprehensive about it, small as the force was. But it worked very well. A lot of sergeants in that force became Inspectors after the merger.”
Phil Bunt on working in Force performance and the value of sergeants

“In the 1990s, the Government became fixated with targets and performance indicators. Forces were put under pressure to crunch data and somehow improve the performance of the Force based around this data. Our Deputy Chief Constable, David Philips, oversaw the ‘quality of service unit’ and was an inspiration. He was totally pragmatic and had no real time for the number crunching but believed that if we were to have such a unit it would also have to improve the quality of service to the public. He was really fixated on the idea that managers weren’t managing; sergeants weren’t doing their jobs. Sergeants were the people who could make a difference and I remember the HMI talking to us years before and telling us that the sergeant was the most important rank in the force. Really good sergeants could make all the difference to what happened on the ground both in terms of the results that the officers got but also the quality of service that members of the public got.”

Phil Bunt’s early aspirations and impressions of the police

“I’d always expressed an interest in being a police officer from when I was young and my parents never stood in the way of that. My dad left the door open to me joining the family firm, but I never did. I was conscious of the police growing up, mainly from what I saw on the television; Dixon of Dock Green and Z-Cars and that sort of thing. When I was about 12 my father took me around Newquay Police Station where I met Sergeant Tommy Fox. My father told him ‘the boy is interested’ and my view of the police became even more positive after that.”
Sydney Rowsell

Service History

Sydney ‘Syd’ Rowsell joined Exeter City Police in 1952 and served in the City of Exeter where he reached the rank of Sergeant. In 1969, following the police amalgamations of 1966 and 1967, he was posted to Middlemoor Headquarters and worked in the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary public relations and crime prevention departments. Syd was also involved in the formation of the Force Museum. He retired in 1973.

Joining the Force

“My wife was mad keen to start a family…and our first son was due in February…and I was working on the council at the time…sort of a dead-end job. With fatherhood so close coming up I thought well, I’d better shake myself. A friend of mine was in Exeter Police…and he arranged an interview for me. I took the interview with the chief constable and chief clerk and they accepted me.”

Meeting the Beatles in 1963

“I rated myself as a good driver, a safe driver, and then in contrast to that I must admit that I overstepped the mark one night… speeding…and I damaged the police car. It was memorable in so far it was bonfire night, November 5th…and I bent the patrol car quite badly… a Superintendent received a report from the traffic Inspector and he said, ‘I recommend PC Rowsell be returned to foot patrol at once.’ And the Chief Constable endorsed it ‘yes.’ So I went back on the beat for six months and the week after I went back on the beat, the Beatles came to Exeter…and I was at the ABC in Exeter…and I met the Beatles in their dressing room there. So being slung out on the beat enabled me to meet the Beatles!”

Dealing with abusive ‘customers’

“You’ve got to be prepared to be insulted. Many of them doubt your parentage and tell you in no uncertain terms what they think of you. There were certain breeds…they’ve grown up with criminal families…and that’s their way of life…and they’re anti-police, anti-authority, anti-everything. So that’s one of the things that you have to do…you have to develop a very thick skin
“For my first 9 years I worked the beat and you were, unless some incident was developing, on your own all the time. A lone figure, which in the main was respected by most people. Most of the population were supportive... and they respected a police officer in uniform and they would co-operate if you needed help or needed information. They would help, and you sort of cultivated that rapport between yourself and the public. People would come up and talk to you... you wouldn’t stand about talking to the same person for hours on end... but you had that direct contact with the public which of course, when everyone went mobile, was lost.”

Relationship between Police and the Public
After two years’ National Service in the Air Force I came back to Cornwall and joined the Cornwall Constabulary. At the time I was courting a young lady in Penzance and we were all set to get married, but just after I’d got out of the services and joined the force I received the proverbial ‘Dear John’ letter. The odd thing is I came back to Cornwall because of this young lady, who’d gone off with someone and moved to London! But such is. Subsequently I met my wife and we’ve been married for 58 years!”

To Cornwall by Fate

The Public Perception of the Police

“The perception of the police by the public has changed. In our time, the police really could do no wrong and you were held in very high regard. Nowadays, people are more concerned about their rights rather than their responsibilities and there is a disregard for authority and included in that is the police.
“I JOINED THE CORNWALL CONSTABULARY IN ‘56 WHEN MAJOR HARE WAS CHIEF CONSTABLE. THE OLD CORNWALL FORCE WAS HELD, BY AND LARGE, IN GOOD RESPECT. I LIKE TO THINK I WAS PART OF IT. I DON’T THINK THE RESPECT IS THERE NOW LIKE IT USED TO BE. I REMEMBER GOING ON THE PARADES JUST BEFORE AMALGAMATION. WE HAD ONE PARADE IN BODMIN AND ONE IN TRURO. IN THOSE DAYS, VIRTUALLY EVERYBODY HAD DONE NATIONAL SERVICE AND KNEW HOW TO MARCH.”

Pride in the old Cornish force

The last parade of the Cornwall Constabulary. Conducted on a rainy day in Truro, May 1967. (Mark Rothwell Collection)
Keith ‘Solly’ Solomon joined Cornwall County Constabulary in 1961 after a period of service in the Merchant Navy. After training and acclimatisation at Chantmarle in Dorset, Keith was posted to Falmouth. He later served the Cornish towns of Liskeard, Newquay, St Columb Major and St Austell before taking retirement in 1981. In 2007, at the age of 70, Keith was appointed Police Chaplain and served the Cornish districts of North Cornwall and Restormel. He retired from the chaplaincy in 2012.

“Cornwall was a poor county, so we had to make do with what we could get. When I joined, I had cast off uniform to wear. My cape had four stamps in it; uniform was repaired, re-stamped and reissued again, so four previous owners to me.”

Making the best of what they had

“The best part of my police education in those days was in the police canteen. You’d hear an officer say he’d had this situation come up and you’d have a discussion between four or five officers. By the time you’d finished you’d solved the problem and improved upon it. That was great, that was.”

Problem solving at Chantmarle
“To sum up my service, I’d say that I had to follow my own instincts most of the way through and I was never one to be put upon. But by-and-large, I enjoyed my service and I am happy that I was able to serve – even if it was sometimes contrary to Judge’s Rules, and I stopped many a lad from spoiling his future life and career by not being too ‘correct’ in my attitude. A series of Christmas cards over the years from the family of the man and his two sons who had assaulted me, and who I caused to be gaol, is my confirmation that although I might not have been always right. I did try to do my best.”

Excerpt from ‘Telling the Tale – A Policeman’s Reminisces or I Did It My Way!’ by Keith Solomon
A practising solicitor by day, Jane joined the Special Constabulary in Tiverton in 1964 and served for 19 years. Jane was one of the first women in the region to join the specials after the rules around appointing women specials were relaxed nationally.

“\textbf{I WAS SWORN IN AT TIVERTON IN 1964. IT WAS VERY ENTERTAINING TO GO TO TIVERTON AS THE FIRST LOCAL SPECIAL FEMALE. WHEN I WAS MEASURED UP FOR MY UNIFORM IT WAS DONE IN A BIG ROOM IN FRONT OF ALL THE REST. I WENT UP TO THE DESK TO BE MEASURED AND THE TAILOR WENT BRIGHT RED AND SAID ‘I THINK WE’LL GO IN THE STORE ROOM!’}”

“At the time I was accepted into the specials, I was going out with a jock in the Fleet Air Arm and he thought it was hilarious, and so did the rest of his squadron. They didn’t take it as the honour it should have been. I was definitely treated differently because I was a woman. It was different to being a man in the specials. I was not trusted by the regular police to do traffic control, but they were very nice to me. I have no complaints at all.”

“\textbf{What’s expected of women is different to what was expected of me at the time. But I have no complaints at all, it was of its time really. I was too busy thinking of enjoying myself!”}

\textbf{Being a woman in a man’s world}
Richard Medland

Service History

Richard joined Plymouth City Police as a cadet in 1967 and served through amalgamation until 1993.

“As a young officer, I found I had a gift for reaching out to people quickly to diffuse a situation. I didn’t have to call the lads to help me every time there was a difficult situation and I didn’t have to physically handle it myself. All I had to do was get in touch with them very quickly and I had a gift for it. There was this one time when I caught a drunk Irish labourer staggering to his car and I said to him ‘You’re not serious are you?’ He replied, ‘You going to stop us?’ I said, ‘You do understand that if I don’t, I’ve got a duty to make sure others do? I advise you to get a taxi.’ He grumbled and walked away. The following Sunday morning I encountered him sober in the street and he thanked me for what I did.

I once attended a troublesome character with mental health issues at Vospers Garage in Plymouth. Instead of doing the macho thing, I talked him down. The manager turned to me and said, ‘You’ve got something. Don’t lose it.’”

Discretion and diplomacy

“One of the most important decisions I made was to become community constable. There were officers well-suited to breaking up violent mobs, I wasn’t. So, I think I chose wisely and worked through relationships rather than by force.”

“I’m very proud that I can still walk through the streets in Barnstaple and a man in his forties can come up to me and greet me with apparent respect. I may have locked him up a long time ago or been his Youth Club Leader at some point. Either way, it’s a respect.”

The rewards of community policing
Reg Davison

Service History

Reg joined Cornwall Constabulary as a police cadet in 1966 at the tender age of 17. Following the amalgamation of 1967, his tenure as a cadet was extended by five months owing to rules imposed by the Chief Constable of the new force, he graduated to constable level in March 1968. Save for a spell in Devonport, Reg served his whole career in Cornwall, spending 22 years in CID and retiring in November 1997. Thereafter Reg rejoined in a civilian capacity where he has remained ever since, racking up 52 years of continuous service as of 2018.

How the Cornwall force developed its recruits

“In Cornwall they put you on lots of attachments to different things to develop your personality. I did community service volunteers and was one of the two deputy managers of Hornsea YMCA in Crouch End, North London, for three months. I also did Outward Bound in the north of Scotland, Morayshire. It was a 26-hour train journey from Cornwall. As a police cadet we also used to go hiking across Bodmin Moor and in the summer spend a month on Dartmoor where we lived under canvas, literally. We arrived, and one month later, we left!”

Public Perception of the Police

“When I joined, the police were the premier public service and you had to have higher qualifications to become a police officer, and the public respected you more than the other public services. In my view, that’s completely turned on its head. You’ll always have your people that hate the police, but certainly when I joined there was still that respect for a police officer. The fire brigade has lobbied very successfully over the years and now everyone sees the fire brigade as being so much better than the police. We’ve lost a lot of respect for one reason or another, which is a shame.”
“Tape recording changed your interview style. Contemp’ notes ruined interviews but tape recording, for me, brought it back. Another technological thing for me was bringing CCTV into custody centres because we were all scared stiff about it, but it was a good thing because you behaved perfectly, your prisoner didn’t, and there’s your evidence.”

How technology aided police processes

“I was a detective in Falmouth at the time and was used to the local solicitor’s offices each prosecuting and defending. In effect you’d turn up at court with your case and the lawyer would turn up and under one arm he’d have a bundle of prosecution files and under the other arm he’d have a bundle of defence files. So, on the same day, the lawyer would be both prosecuting and defending. Being a small town, we all knew each other, everyone knew everyone and we all knew the magistrate’s clerk staff. Everyone liaised, and it worked. As soon as the CPS came, it just went out of the window.”

How the creation of the Crown Prosecution Service in 1986 affected police

What makes Reg proud

“I think the fact I can go into Falmouth on a Saturday morning with my wife now and people still remember me. I haven’t been stationed at Falmouth since 1988. People still remember me, villains, decent people…they still come up to me and want to talk to me. I must’ve done something right I suppose!”
Andrew Pierce

Service History

Andrew joined Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in 1972 and served in Plymouth, Tiverton and Bodmin, Barnstaple, Exeter and HQ. He served most of his career in CID and retired in 2004 in the rank of Detective Superintendent.

Early brushes with the law

“My personal interaction with the police as I was growing up was fairly consistent, there was no conflict. At one point I was walking down High Street in Barnstaple with a friend and we were being a little bit noisy and this woman police sergeant appeared from nowhere and told us off sick! I remember her later, when I was in the job, she ended up a superintendent and was quite a formidable character. There was an instance about the same age, when I was about 16, when I shot a boy with my air rifle. He’d been annoying me all day and I saw an opportunity in the dusk to accidentally shoot him in the rump, which I did! His parents and my parents discussed the matter and dealt with it. The police were informed, but they were entirely happy that the matter was being dealt with appropriately. This would have been about 1968.”

Inspiring words from a fellow officer

“HE SAID: COPS SHOULD WIN OSCARS EVERY DAY, BECAUSE YOU PLAY A ROLE AND PEOPLE ACCEPT YOU PLAYING THAT ROLE BECAUSE THAT’S THE WAY YOU ACT IT – WITH PASSION AND BELIEF.”
“When PACE was first mooted, we thought it was the end of policing as we knew it. But the training Devon and Cornwall did for PACE was excellent. There was an issue about interpretation and I arrested two guys for burglary and they had not long been out from borstal. I said to the custody sergeant ‘I’m objecting to bail on these two as they’ll commit further offences.’ The sergeant responded, ‘That’s not a ground under PACE.’ And I said, ‘It is, because PACE says that a reason for objecting to bail was that if you grant bail it could cause loss to another person.’ The sergeant said, ‘That’s far too wide an interpretation, I’m not having that.’ So I said, ‘I’m appealing to the Superintendent then!’

In any event, what we should always do is interpret. We should always interpret the law reasonably to our advantage as investigators and prosecutors until a court tells us differently.”

*Getting to grips with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984*

**Interviewing in the pre-tape recording era**

“I am grateful that tape recording interviews was not the norm when I was an operational DC and DS, because I quite often got the giggles in interviews! I particularly worked with a colleague, DC Jim Foley, who was a brilliant detective with a marvellous sense of humour [and ended up as DCI]. But he was also able to ‘deadpan’ no matter what the situation – I’m the reverse! I have a sense of humour, but I’m a giggler, and several times when Jim and I were DCs together I had to leave the interview room because the swine would make me laugh.”
Marilyn joined Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in 1975, in the latter period of policewomen’s departments, largely serving in Torbay and Okehampton. She retired in 2006, and thereafter returned to the Force in a civilian capacity in the employ of March on Stress, the provider of the Force’s Trauma Risk Management mechanism (TRiM.)

“MY POLICE TRAINING WAS INTERESTING. IT WAS AT THAT TIME (1975) THAT I CAME TO UNDERSTAND THAT FEMALES WEREN’T REALLY WELCOMED IN THE POLICE. THERE WAS A LOT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND A LOT OF RESISTANCE TO THE ROLE OF A FEMALE OFFICER.”

“When I joined the police, I wanted to be a police officer, not a police woman. The latter were only supposed to look after women, children and dogs, and I didn’t want that. I wanted to be a police officer and go and do the same as the men did. Integration with the men took place on 1 March 1976, so I was only in the Policewomen’s Department for a short time. After the integration, I was the only operational woman constable left, as all the others had been posted to back office functions and the new Juvenile Department, which could have easily just been the old Women’s Department renamed.”
“The highlights of my career? Working in the male environment, I know it had a lot of disadvantages, but it also had a lot of advantages. I’ve never seen wearing a police uniform as a position of power, you negotiate and converse with the public. I joined the police because I wanted to make a difference. Being able to deal with people from all walks of life with different crises, I was proud of that. I was involved in crowd control during the Queen’s Silver Jubilee when the Royal Yacht came in to Torquay, that was a highlight! But just being involved in policing and all the different issues that went with it at that time was probably the major highlight.”

The highlights of a police career

“Beginning my police career 8 years after amalgamation, I wasn’t initially aware of any animosity between members of the old constituent forces. That didn’t happen until 1988 when I was moved to Okehampton. I was puzzled as to why a PC was wearing a crown on his tunic and, of course, I then realised he was wearing the Cornish uniform.

A few of them I heard talking about the good old days in Exeter and Plymouth City Police, but other than that there was no animosity shown. It was a case of ‘Let’s just get on, muck in and crack on with it.”

The echoes of amalgamation, two decades on
Barry joined Devon and Cornwall Police in 1978 and served in Barnstaple, Crownhill, Tavistock, Exeter and Torbay, with a stint at Chantmarle in Dorset as an instructor. He retired in 2008 in the rank of Superintendent.

“The Eureka Moment

“I remember being in Barnstaple in 1978 and thinking oh I hate this job (BHS sales rep) and I remember looking out of the hotel window having a cup of tea and seeing some coppers walking around. That was my Eureka moment.”

“One of the harshest bits of my career came after three and a half years’ service when I was offered a position on the Plymouth Task Force by the Chief Superintendent. I met the Inspector and he said, ‘I’m telling you now, I don’t want you, you’ve jumped the list and I don’t want you on here.’ That was my welcome from him. Then I met the sergeant who said, ‘We’re looking to kick you off because you’ve bucked the system.’ I thought well I haven’t bucked any system, I was offered. After the first week, nobody spoke to me. The only officer that did speak to me was a policewoman who was getting a hard time as well because they didn’t want women in the task force. They were ‘anti-me,’ but not necessarily because they suspected I was gay. It was pretty hurtful, and they made gay slurs as a way of attacking me.”

The darker side of 1980s police culture
Policing the Miners’ Strike

“We went up from Devon and Cornwall in prison vans, which the Federation wouldn’t allow nowadays! I remember the Labour Party were very anti-police because they thought we were violent. But in fact, we got on very well with the pickets wherever we went. David Owen was MP for Plymouth at the time and I wrote to him saying how disheartening it was that we were doing this fantastic job, with long hours, and all we do is get criticised saying we’re beating people up. He actually wrote a nice letter back saying most members of Parliament support the police.”
Paul joined Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in 1979 and served in Camborne, Cullompton, Exeter, Abbotskerswell, the Isles of Scilly and Torbay becoming a Sergeant. He retired in 2009.

“I was overjoyed when I was accepted into the police. The sergeant shook my hand and said, ‘You’ve got a job for life, welcome to the family.’ It felt like joining a club for life, and for 30 years they were going to look after you. That feeling was almost embracing, and I very much felt a part of something.”

Being welcomed into the service

“During the Miners’ Strike, we were known as ‘The Daffodils.’ We had these yellow jackets, and every other force was wearing black. They were reversible. Our Chief Inspector, a man called Joyner, said, ‘When we arrive you will turn your jackets inside-out.’ We questioned this, and he said, ‘It’s so I can see you, because it’s a sea of black out there and I need to see where you are.’ So, for the entire deployment in 1984, we were in yellow.

We were the one force that was encouraged to talk with the picketers, as long as we didn’t talk about Margaret Thatcher, Scargill or how much we earned. So that’s what we did, just talked like human beings do. Every other force, Cheshire and the Met in particular, were briefed not to speak to the miners. We felt sorry for the Cheshire lot as they just had to stand there and passively not speak.”

Policing the pickets, Devon and Cornwall style, in 1984
“PACE was an absolute pain when it began. For a while the Federation kept saying ‘Oh, it’s the Criminal’s Charter, we’re all doomed, it’s going to take lots of resources.’ But actually, us police are a funny lot because although we have a moan about it, we’re very pragmatic and just got on with it. In the end, it became routine and once you learned how to use a tape recorder and booked your prisoner into custody, that was it. I thought PACE was quite straightforward in the end, because it gave you easier justification for what you were doing.”

Getting to grips with PACE

“ONE OF THE THINGS I’M MOST PROUD OF WAS BUILDING TEAMS, ESPECIALLY IN DEPARTMENTS WITH PREVIOUS BAD MANAGEMENT. ENABLING PEOPLE TO DO THEIR JOBS PROPERLY UNTIL THEY WERE THE BEST THEY COULD BE. DOING THAT WAS ONE OF THE PROUDEST I FELT IN TERMS OF MY POLICE CAREER, WHERE I THOUGHT I’D MADE A DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE’S LIVES.”

Pride in teambuilding
Kevin Harris

Service History

Kevin joined Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in 1982 and served in Exeter, Okehampton, Bideford and Barnstaple on response, traffic and CID. He spent two-thirds of his tenure in CID and retired in the rank of Chief Superintendent in 2012.

“I knew from the age of 12 I wanted to be a cop. A police officer married my cousin and we always seemed to get on. From the time that I first met him I thought ‘That’s what I want to do.’”

“My most enjoyable experience was as Authorising Officer for the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, or ‘RIPA.’ The Act basically drove a coach and horses through the 1998 Human Rights Act and, if it was in the interests of national security and the prevention of crime, a criminal’s human rights could be undone and overridden by the State. It’s stopped a lot of terrorist atrocities and I think it’s a price worth paying, as long as the collateral intrusions are dealt with properly.”

From Judges Rules to PACE

“PACE was a nightmare. It came in in 1984 and had to be implemented by 1 January 1986 and having joined in ‘82 I’d just finished three years of intense training in Judges Rules. All of a sudden, we got called up to Middlemoor for 2 ½ days of PACE training. I made the fatal mistake on 1 January 1986 of doing the first stop-check in Devon and Cornwall and it took me six months to file the paperwork correctly!”

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers
Being the Best

“We were always the best in Devon and Cornwall. When we had the miner’s strike it was us that were noticed because we turned up, marched in formation in our bright yellow jackets and treated people right. The Mets turned up in their swish buses, never got out, stole all our yellow jackets and left a sticker saying, ‘You’ve met the Met.’

Our Chief Constables were social leaders, they would speak out and challenge the Government of the day. They were charismatic characters; John Alderson, David East and Sir John Evans. Alderson set up community policing, which every other force wanted to see, and Evans was President of ACPO and was highly influential.

The Devon and Cornwall Crime Investigation Model was plagiarised nationally into the National Intelligence Model. We were considered and always felt we were the best, even at rugby!”

“The trouble with new technology is it generally comes at a high price and the Police Service are always behind, mainly due to price and high diligence processes because you had to make sure it was going to work. You must remember though that the Police is an emergency service. If a plane crashed now, we’d be brilliant. If we were told a plane was going to crash in 9 months’ time, we’d be late, over budget, disorganised, have too many commitments and it wouldn’t work, and I think that’s how police technology has developed over the years.”

The Police and Technology
Martin (Anon)

Service History

Martin joined Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in 1986 and served in Devonport, Newquay, Camborne and Truro. A significant part of Martin’s role was as a Satellite Officer for London’s SO13 counter-terrorism unit whilst concurrently managing Scenes of Crime in Cornwall and Plymouth from 2001 to his retirement in 2016.

“Being a policeman is all I ever saw myself. When I joined, all I ever wanted to do was be a village Bobby that walked the beat and talked to people, but of course by then (1986) they no longer existed!”

Dreams of being a Bobby on the Beat

Fond Reflections

“My fondest memory of being in the Force was the camaraderie. We had fun, even during post-mortems!

I enjoyed my service and I loved the job, even though the long hours took a toll on my health. It damaged my heart in the end; there’s an expression – ‘job pissed.’ I think I can certainly say I was job pissed.

I had some real run-ins with the bosses, but who doesn’t? Good reputations are hard to maintain, a poor one is not worth having.”

“I didn’t realise I was colour-blind until I joined the police. I was a glasses-wearer and the police doctor said I was right on the limit of being excluded.

I failed some of the visual tests and after the examination I had a chat with the Training Sergeant, called Sergeant John Thorne. He asked me ‘Everything alright boy?’

I said, ‘No, my vision’s not good. Can you have a word with the doctor?’

Sergeant Thorne went in to see the doctor and came out and said, ‘Come with me, you’ve passed.’

To that man I owe everything, because he could have easily said, ‘no.’ Whatever he said to the doctor, 30 years later I’ve done my time!”

Memories of acceptance into the Force
“In 2006, I was selected by the Met to undertake the Forensic Bomb Scene Examiners’ Course with SO13 at RAF Uxbridge. It was a 3-week course dealing with counter-terrorism forensics, exhibit handling and managing seized items. Going back to Devon and Cornwall, I then became Regional Co-Ordinator for the 7 south-west police forces. Devon and Cornwall held the budget for SO13 Satellite Officers and they gave me this beautiful unmarked Volvo VXC70 Estate, loaded with kit, and realistically I could receive a phone call from SO13 asking ‘Can you come to London?’

It’s a 287-mile drive to London, blue light authorised! My first job was the plot to blow up passenger planes with liquid bombs in London. They’d arrested two offenders for it, and me and a colleague blue lighted up to London for the briefing. We got lost driving from the Met nick to Walthamstow; 11.30 at night in London is like rush hour in Truro, and I picked up three speeding tickets and three red-light cameras on the journey.”

Extraordinary duties as SO13 Satellite Officer for the south-west region

THE PRICE OF DEDICATION

“It’s been a really varied career, but it’s taken its toll. You work 18/20 hours a day on 3 hours’ sleep and do a 300-mile round trip for 4 or 5 days at a murder scene. For the Perch Garage Murders, I did 20 hours a day for five days straight. I was absolutely exhausted. That just does damage to your body, and it did.”
Brendan Brookshaw

Service History

Brendan joined the force in 1988, much to the chagrin of his parents, who wanted him to make good on his academic achievements. He served in Ilfracombe, Paignton, Plymouth, Tavistock and Okehampton and upon reaching the rank of Chief Superintendent became deeply involved in promoting equality and diversity in the force and bringing about organisational change. He retired in 2018 after spending four years in the force’s Professional Standards Department.

A FORCE FOR GOOD

“Why did I want to join the police? Because I wanted to be a force of good for society. I wanted to have influence over people in a positive way. I think the police are a really good force for the good of society. The concept of the police is brilliant and police officers in the main are brave, resilient people who run towards problems not away from them. I’m very proud of being a police officer and I’m very proud of the police service.”

“I had a 2-1 BSc Honours in Bioanalytical Science, two A-Levels and twelve O-Levels. Joining the police with a degree was unusual and you just got the piss taken out of you all the time! It set you apart a little bit, because you were a little bit different.”

Joining the Force with a degree in the 1980s
“I was the only police officer on the National Working Party for the development of the equality framework for the police service. I wrote the plans and we adopted that in Devon and Cornwall. I made sure that every officer in the force was trained to the national standards for diversity, the only force to do so, and over the course of two years we saw confidence by BME people in the police rise by 25%”

What makes Brendan proud
Darren Green

Service History

Darren’s service with Devon and Cornwall Police over three decades has taken in Penzance, St. Ives, Barnstaple, Ivybridge and Plymouth. At the time of Darren’s interview, he was still serving in the force in the rank of Sergeant.

“I watched ‘Z Cars’ and ‘The Professionals’ and that was probably the limit of what I knew the police did. Car chases and catching villains. I just knew that if the police caught you doing anything, run. Don’t get caught, you’ll get told off by your parents afterwards. The police were there as an authority and if you needed help, that’s where you went.”

Early impressions of the police force

Worlds apart

“Working in Cornwall was a different world. If they felt the need, the Cornwall Constabulary hat went on, not Devon and Cornwall, because most had joined when it was just Cornwall. We all played tricks on each other. The most popular was if you fell asleep on night duty, they’d drive you into the middle of a field, put the two-tones on, jump out of the car and leave you there. It was a different time!”

“The force under Sir John Evans

“John Evans, love him or loathe him, was very proud of Devon and Cornwall. He was an autocrat and a good orator and wanted what was right. He gave us loads of stuff and equipment and wanted us to be the best and have the best of everything. We had that pride in being ‘Devon and Cornwall.’”
Richard joined Plymouth City Police in 1954 and served for 15 years, seeing the Plymouth force become a division of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in 1967.

“Plymouth City Police was an intimate force. It was about 600-strong, and everybody knew everybody. Your higher ranks knew the lower ranks because the higher ranks had come up through the lower ranks. It was very much a family. When we merged into Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, it became very fragmented. There were some members of the Plymouth City Police force who gave up their right to stay in the city, because you had a choice; you either accepted moving away to another part of the force or you didn’t. The Plymouth City lot knew what the city was about.”

**The Plymouth City Police family**

**The advent of radio**

“It sounds archaic now, but radio was the most important technology we had. We had three mobile cars with a wireless, that was a great thing. When you went out on the beat to do your eight hours, there was no radio with you. You had police boxes dotted around the beat, but that’s all the contact you had with HQ.”

The balance of respect
Service History

Stephen joined Devon Cornwall Constabulary in 1983 and retired in 2013. He received a number of commendations during his career, including the ‘Hamilton Bobby’ trophy (pictured below left) awarded to the smartest recruit while at Chantmarle Training School in Dorset.

“My father was a military policeman and had served in Palestine during the troubles. My family was very law abiding and as a kid I remember being scared to death of the police! I remember being told off by a policeman for cycling on the pavement and crying all the way home.”

Early perceptions of the police

“I was totally overjoyed and shocked when I was accepted into Devon and Cornwall Police, because I’d heard that they were only recruiting local people into the roles. The Force at that stage was still being heralded as the one that was community based. Being from the Black Country, I didn’t think they were going to accept me.”
Accepting a commendation from Chief Constable Evans (© S.R. Evans)

“I got two commendations during my career, one for an incident in Polperro and another from the National Co-ordinator of Ports Policing in the Met for the delivery of a piece of technology. For the first, I was called down to a pub where a well-known criminal was robbing the till. He grabbed my radio and threw it across the room and the three witnesses ran straight out of the pub rather than helping me! I kept him pinned down for about 20 minutes until my colleagues arrived. Not long after, the offender’s brother arrived and began fighting with them and I still think what could have happened had they not arrived first.”

A narrow escape
Service History

Steven joined Devon and Exeter Police as a cadet in 1966 and became a fully-fledged constable shortly after the amalgamation of 1967. He served for 35 years and retired in 2004 in the rank of Assistant Chief Constable.

Early years on the Brixham beat

My first station was Brixham, which was an Inspector’s station. Being a fishing port, it was a hard town and policing there was all about public order. We had to deal with the drunk fisherman on nights in the pubs and clubs around the harbour, followed by the domestics when their wives would show up at the pubs demanding to know where they’ve been. It was quite a hard place, and the nearest back up was 25 minutes away.”

“I became interested in the police by seeing the policemen who lodged at the newsagents who I delivered papers for. I read their Police Review magazines and watched the TV cop shows. I was fascinated by Dixon of Dock Green, not so much the Dixon character, rather the detective Andy Crawford. I was fascinated by how the detectives went about their business and cracked the cases.”

Influences on a career in the police

“The highlight of my career was becoming a detective constable. I was a detective in every rank from constable to superintendent and enjoyed the challenge of having a section of folks of all shapes and sizes, strengths and weaknesses, and building a team out of them. There’s something about the people, whether it be a team of four on the drugs squad or three-hundred in the city. It was all about the team identity.”

The joys of teamwork
Getting involved with local schools

“Chief Constable John C. Alderson was seen as fairly liberal and forward-thinking and introduced a scheme in Devon and Cornwall of school liaison sergeants. They were sent into schools to do other things than the traditional road safety talks. The sergeants would liaise with headteachers and try to involve themselves more in the curriculum of school to show the face of policing in the community. I was selected for one of these posts in Plympton; it wasn’t easy, but it taught me a lot about policing within communities.”

DISTRACTED BY A DRUNK

“When I was a young PC in Brixham, breath testing had just come in and I breathalysed a fisherman and he was way over. He was compliant to begin with but became very verbal on the drive back to Paignton, so much that I turned my head back to tell him to shut up and I drove through a red light. I knew he’d seen me do it and knew he would try and use it to get let off in court. I was worried stiff about it and I certainly couldn’t deny it and my colleague saw it too. And of course, he started ranting about it in court and the Magistrate asked, did you? I said yeah, and explained I was distracted. Luckily, he was convicted and nothing happened to me regarding the red light!”

PACE

“PACE changed life for a generation of coppers. Pre-PACE, you learned from your peers and followed their lead but in 1984 everything we did before was basically outlawed. Looking back, nothing we did was criminal, but we certainly conned people, often because we didn’t have the support of scientific evidence or witnesses. We went by our gut feeling and had a lot of bargaining chips to play as a detective – bail, cigarettes and promising to leave their wives and friends out of it. I never resorted to violence, because that was seen as you’d lost it if you couldn’t con a confession out of them.”
Simon joined Devon and Cornwall Constabulary in 1975 and served in various stations across the two counties, as well as a stint on the Isles of Scilly. Seventeen years of his service was spent at Tavistock, where in 1997 he was awarded the MBE for services to the community, as well as Mountain Rescue and for setting up the Search and Rescue dog teams on Dartmoor. He retired as a regular in 2007 and continued serving the community as a special constable, being promoted to Temporary Assistant Chief Officer of the Special Constabulary in 2014.

“Technology was a bit of an encumbrance and many officers struggled to understand it, but there was no expectation that they should and were ‘carried.’ I was carried a bit but I did begin to master it, but many men who were approaching retirement took retirement early as a result. My first PNC check was in 1976; a green Mini Cooper I saw in a layby on the A30. There was one PNC terminal in the force at HQ and I asked for the check and it came back as stolen and there was great excitement because this computer thing had detected a stolen car!”

The challenges and advantages of new technology

AN ACT OF GALLANTRY
“'I was awarded the QCB after the fire in Callington in 2002. I was criticised for my actions, but I still believe I did the right thing. I was on a late shift getting ready to be relieved by the night duty officer and a member of the public came thumping on the door saying there was a fire raging in a building up the road. I went out and there was a woman very distressed saying her son was upstairs. I radioed comms’ and said there was a fire and that I was going into the building, but advised that I couldn’t hear them respond as I was about to go in. Apparently, the comms’ sergeant told me not to go in, as I later found out, but I went inside and brought the woman’s son and husband out alive. I was quite badly burned and now have asthma as a result of the smoke inhalation. Like I said, I was criticised for going in, but I know I did the right thing.’
“I’m most proud of treating people fairly and correctly. Even before PACE I did it, and when someone comes up to me in the street today and asks, ‘Do you remember when you dealt with my son?’ I’ll usually say no, because I dealt with so many, but I will always ask ‘Did I treat them fairly?’ And sometimes they’ll respond and say, ‘He was 12 at the time and approaching 40 now, but you are the police officer who put him straight.’ And I often think that’s something to be proud of, of being a good police officer.”

*Pride in doing the right thing*
On 12 April 2018, retired policewomen Ida Blackler, Pauline Bradley, Patricia Jackson, Daphne Jago, Anne Lockwood, Cindy Page and Margaret Vickery descended upon Devonport Guildhall and spoke to an audience about their experiences as female police officers in the Plymouth Policewomen’s Department. The witness seminar was organised by Plymouth University in association with the Institute for Contemporary British History, King's College, London, and provided an intimate and oft-amusing look at policing in what was then still very much a man’s world.

"I was very proud of my police uniform. It was quite strange because I worked as a typist in the Traffic Office before I joined the police and when I went home and told my parents, bearing in mind I was 23, that I was going to join the police, my mother was horrified. She said, ‘that’s the lowest of the low, joining the police’ and my dad said, ‘well it could be worse, she could join the forces and be away, if she’s in the police in Plymouth we know where she is and what she’s doing.’ So, that’s how that news was received.”
Our sergeant kept us in order with our uniform. Our hair was not allowed to touch the collar or eyebrows, but she used to tell us in a subtle way. She would look at you and say ‘oh, I must get my hair cut,’ knowing that we would take the hint. We never went out without our hat on. If we were in a police car, we had to take our hat off and when we got out of the car we had to put our hat on before we did anything else. We had three pairs of black nylons issued, which never lasted because they used to ladder so easily, so we were always having to buy them. We had to ‘spit and polish’ our shoes, which we had been taught to do at training school. Yes, we were proud of our uniform in those days.

Unfortunately, my life expectancy in the force wasn’t very long because I decided to get married. I married a policeman and, in those days, when you married a policeman, you automatically left. He was in the Cornish force at the time and they did their absolute best and utmost to separate us, right from the very start. They threatened to send him to the Scilly Isles when we got engaged and he said, ‘I’m not going, I’m going to join Plymouth.’ When we got married, we were like ships in the night. He was going out on night duty and I was coming in, so, it didn’t work for us. I think nowadays they’ve got much more freedom in that field.
“We also had to wear our white gloves if we went out on patrol. You always had to have your white gloves and if your white gloves were mucky, woe betide, because Miss Cooper, Mildred, she was an inspector by the time I joined, and she would check that you wouldn’t go out of that door without your gloves. We didn’t have any sort of bags in those days. Anything you had with you, had to go into your pocket and they weren’t allowed to be puffed out with anything, so, you couldn’t carry anything with you that was surplus to your uniform. All we had was a whistle. A pocket-book in your breast-pocket on your tunic, but all we had was a whistle, we never had anything else.”

PATRICIA JACKSON

“I was a special constable when I joined the ‘regulars’ and I’d been a special for nearly four years, but 18 months of that was taken up with all the process of joining the ‘regulars.’ I have Ida to thank for the encouragement when I was a special for the interest in the police force. I got engaged and put in a request to get married. My husband was in the Navy at the time and had to be vetted and go through all the security checks before I got the ok to get married and I was the first Plymouth City policewoman to apply for maternity leave, which was very much frowned upon and was not met very favourably.”
“I joined Halifax Borough Police in January 1962 and transferred to Plymouth in April 1966. It was a bit of a shock joining Plymouth because Milly, the woman inspector, was really, really strict and during my first encounter with her, she looked at me and said, ‘that’ll have to come off’ and she meant my hair and I said, ‘no way,’ but we were made to tuck every little bit of hair we had and keep it under control very tightly, under our hats. The other thing was, she didn’t like you to wear makeup. There were one or two girls who rather pasted it on and she would make them go and wash it off. The other thing she did was she kept nail varnish remover in her drawer, so, that was something else, but she was very, very strict with the uniform. When I came down I was taken to this place in Ebrington Street and fitted with my uniform. Because I was very tall, some of it had to be especially done. I still have my overcoat, which actually I do still wear. It’s my best funeral coat!”

“*We had police matrons and they had a uniform as well, but because the police force has a very cryptic sense of humour and probably still now, to what we had then, and if you didn’t have a sense of humour, you wouldn’t have got on at all. I know Winnie Frowde was the particular matron on duty and we heard that she had a lady in the cells and on side she had tattooed ‘mild’ and on the other side ‘bitter.’ On another occasion they gave Winnie a lady to strip off because obviously we stripped them off for their own sake as much as anything else, and this in fact was a man, but they fooled Winnie into thinking it was a lady. You just had to get used to their sense of humour.”
“When children went missing, we used to have to go and bring them back. Somebody from the office would arrange a carriage for you to go and collect these children from whichever constabulary had the child. I know on one occasion I had to go as far as Scotland to pick somebody up. The carriage was booked for you and the guard would lock the door. You’d pick up the child, bring the child back, but the parents would have to pick them up from the station and they would have to pay the cost of the rail fare of us having to go and pick them up.”

“I would say it was about 60-70% of the time was spent dealing with women and children issues, but one of the beauties of being a policewoman, that I enjoyed, was not knowing what I was going to be doing when I went on duty that morning. You didn’t know whether you were going to be in a car in plain clothes, whether you were going to be on patrol, whether you were going to be dealing with a shoplifter or even escorting a female prisoner to Pucklechurch women's prison. You just didn’t know and that was one of the beauties of the job.”

“Pauline (Bradley) and I went to Ryton-on-Dunsmore for training. My joining date was the 11th July 1966. I led a reasonably sheltered life and those 13 weeks were the funniest, most wonderful elements of my life. I’ve never laughed so much. The accommodation was adequate. It was clean. It was very vigorous. We were sent on cross-country runs and on the drill parade with the boys. We had Sergeant Gilbert, who was an ex-RSM and he’d come alongside you if you weren’t stepping out properly and say, ‘left, right, left, right, left, right or I’ll stick this drill stick up your rectum and march you around like a mobile lollipop.’ You either took it or you didn’t. What would they say now? But, I’ve never enjoyed it so much in all my life. I went back there on my finals and I’m still in touch with people that I trained with now. It was lovely.”
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For further details of the project, to request access for the full transcripts of the interviews or if you require this publication in an alternative format, please contact Kim.Stevenson@plymouth.ac.uk

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication. The University is committed to the promotion of equality and diversity.