
Special Feature: Historical Perspective

The Evolution of Community Policing from its Origins in the UK

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It was between the years 600 to 1400 in England that Anglo-Saxon laws were written down. Laws were considered "weapons" of the state and served as the legitimate remedy for wrongdoing for the victim and his/her kin. In this way, formal justice supplanted the previous system of private revenge or blood feud. Laws laid down the requirement that local communities must pursue criminals and offenders and deliver them to the royal courts: harboring criminals became a serious offence punishable by death. This is the first true example of "community policing." After the successful invasion of England in 1066, the King began to raise revenues from administering the criminal justice system by the imposition of fines and compensation. The mission of the crown became to promote the spiritual welfare of the people by leveraging force against wrong-doers (an early form of "serve and protect.")

In the twelfth century, greater emphasis was placed on the role of the community and its accountability to the king through the system of "frankpledge," the local "watch," the "hue and cry," and the judgment of outlawry. Frankpledge, an oath of loyalty to the King, was the obligation of all citizens to pursue offenders and ensure the good behaviour of other members of the community. Subsequently, Sheriffs were appointed in counties as the first law officers to coordinate criminal cases and arrest suspects; they could also call out the "posse comitatus," which consisted of all adult males. The powers of Sheriffs were then superseded by the appointment of other law officers such as Coroners and Serjeants (sic) of the Peace.

Laws of in the 13th century obliged every town, borough, and city to set up a watch each night during the summer to arrest strangers and pursue those who sought to flee. "Constables of Castle" were appointed by the Crown, but "Constables" in towns were elected annually by the community they served. Constables had a range of military, policing, and revenue functions: these were the first true police patrols. Other legal entities within towns and cities were the Bailiffs and Beadles who had duties to exact fines, execute warrants, and deal with orphaned or foundling children.

As a result of the social, health, and political problems of the 13th and 14th centuries, communal policing began to be replaced by a substantial body of appointed legal officers. In the mid 14th century, the Justice of the Peace (JP) role was created to deal with civil and criminal disputes and offences; from this time until 1600, the roles of Constable and JP evolved into the role they perform today. From 1600 onward, many criminal law statutes were passed by the legislature, but it was not until the 1750s that the police first had real investigatory and crime prevention functions.

At that time in London, Henry Fielding started the Bow Street runners, who gained a reputation as expert thief takers. In 1822, Robert Peel was appointed Home Secretary and the celebrated "general instructions" were written for the Metropolitan Police Service.

SIR ROBERT PEEL'S NINE PRINCIPLES

- The basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder.
- The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police actions.
- Police must secure the willing co-operation of the public in voluntary observance of the law to be able to secure and maintain the respect of the public.
- The degree of co-operation of the public that can be secured diminishes proportionately to the necessity of the use of physical force.
- Police seek and preserve public favor not by catering to public opinion but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to the law.
- Police use physical force to the extent necessary to secure observance of the law or to restore order only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient.
- Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.
- Police should always direct their action strictly towards their functions and never appear to usurp the powers of the judiciary.
- The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it.

Source: New Westminster Police (undated)

Borough and rural police forces formed in the 19th century. Policing from that time went on unchanged until the 1960's when changes in society required a fundamental re-think in operational policing. A Royal Commission issued a report in 1960 that resulted in the Police Act of 1964. Transportation, organization, command, and control of the police service was changed forever and the fond image of the "bobby on the beat" was erased from reality.

Policing became more scientific and managed, leading (via the temporarily popular "managing objectives") to the increased focus on outputs and outcomes that we experience today in policing and other public service organizations in the UK.

1980s Politicized Police?

Indeed, during the 1980s and onward to the present day, the police in the UK have become increasingly politicized. We can identify this through the approach taken to dealing with major incidents of public disorder (for example miners strikes through 1980s) and attempts to articulate police professional standards and ethical principles such as the Metropolitan Police Principles and the Association of Chief Police Officers' Statement of Common Purpose and Values of 1985 and 1990 respectively. This led to a new focus and need for examination of policing principles and ethics. Several books were published to open up debate on the subject, which went along the lines of questioning why ethics are important, and identifying the ideal ethical police service.

1990s Cause Celebres

In the UK during the 1990s, there were several high profile examples of police incompetence or mismanagement (see Neyroud & Beckley, 2001) and corruption .

As well, in Europe, several models of policing have emerged over the last two centuries. Most are described as democratic policing systems, but they move from the extreme of locally appointed, locally accountable systems such as those recently introduced in Belgium, through to the locally appointed but centrally accountable in the UK to the quasi-military, centralized system in France and other European States.

There is a correlation between the cohesion of society and the model of policing that is appropriate for that society. To achieve greater accessibility to the police and interaction with the community, it is necessary for citizens to participate in its policing.

The "best practice" model to establish a system of democratic policing in any country is thought to be the "tripartite" system whereby accountability is separated by having the three pillars of governance: legislature, executive and judiciary. This formula has been found to establish the necessary checks and balances in civil society to ensure that crime is punished but also the rights of individuals are respected.

Our short history of policing is brought up to the year 2003 by the introduction of rights-based law in the shape of the Human Rights Act of 1998 and other developments (see Beckley, 2000) such as the new Oath of Office for police officers that incorporated a statement on human rights.

Conclusion

As proposed by Levin & Myers, NDP appears to propel us "back to the future." In essence, it represents a sort of 21st century Frankpledge with citizens responsible for the safety of their community. It is a notion that bears consideration, as long as one recalls the evolution of the policing profession in the UK. To that end, a vigorous emphasis on civil rights and ethical behavior must underscore the activities of both community members and the police in the NDP model (or any other model, for that matter). If that happens, Peel's vision may finally be realized.

Endnotes

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