

POLICE STATIONS

Part 2, Chapter 11

Law and order was an issue which concerned Newtown residents in the mid 1870s. Lack of police protection was one of the objections raised against the granting of the Newtown Hotel's licence in June 1876. Only weeks later *The Evening Post* reported on the 31 July that Newton residents intended to hold a meeting to form a vigilance committee. The building boom, which was currently taking place, had attracted timber thieves whose activities had become so audacious that the residents threatened lynch law. Any offenders who were caught would receive "a cobbing... the vigorous application of a score or so strokes from a flat piece of wood to a certain portion of the human anatomy which presents a suitable amount of flesh or surface for the purpose". It is not known if the committee was formed or whether the mere threat of action was sufficient to deter the thieves.

For whatever reason the community remained without a policeman until 1 August 1880 when Constable I. G. Mackey established a station in a house in Adelaide Road between Hugh Street and the old Hospital Road. Constable George Stewart took over duties on 8 June 1881 and his station diary gives an insight into the daily routine at police work and the life of the community during the period 1881-1882.

The hours of duty were long as on a typical day he did street duty from 9.30am to 1pm, 3pm to 5pm and 7pm to 12 midnight. These hours were extended for special occasions. On Monday, 20 June 1881 after spending three hours in the afternoon delivering Jury notices Constable Stewart was on duty at the opening ball of the new Wellington Hospital from 7.30pm to 3am Tuesday morning. Seven hours later he was on duty at the Resident Magistrates Court for four hours and this was followed by two spells of street duty finishing at 11.30pm when no doubt he thankfully fell into bed.

Elections also involved long hours. Constable Stewart spent ten hours at the Adelaide Hall polling booth on 9 December 1881 followed by three hours street duty, while during the Cook Ward Licensing Committee elections the following February he was on duty at the station for nine hours followed by four and a half hours on the beat.

The area patrolled was largely Adelaide Road and Newtown where the three hotels were located but visits were also made to Kilbirnie and Island Bay, usually to investigate particular incidents. There is no mention of a horse being stabled at the station so presumably these distant visits were made on foot. Visits to the city for court appearances could have been made by tram, and presumably when prisoners were taken to the Lambton Quay station because there was no lock-up at Newtown.

The semi-rural nature at the district is evident from references to finding the owner of stray cows and making enquiries about an injured beast while impounding wandering horses. Such instances seem to have been regular events. Petty crime ranged from arresting an offender who stole a half-crown from the Caledonian Hotel's till, to investigating a burglary which involved the loss of clothes and a watch with a total value of £13, and finding the thief who stole a four shilling bag of mixed vegetables from a Chinese market gardener.

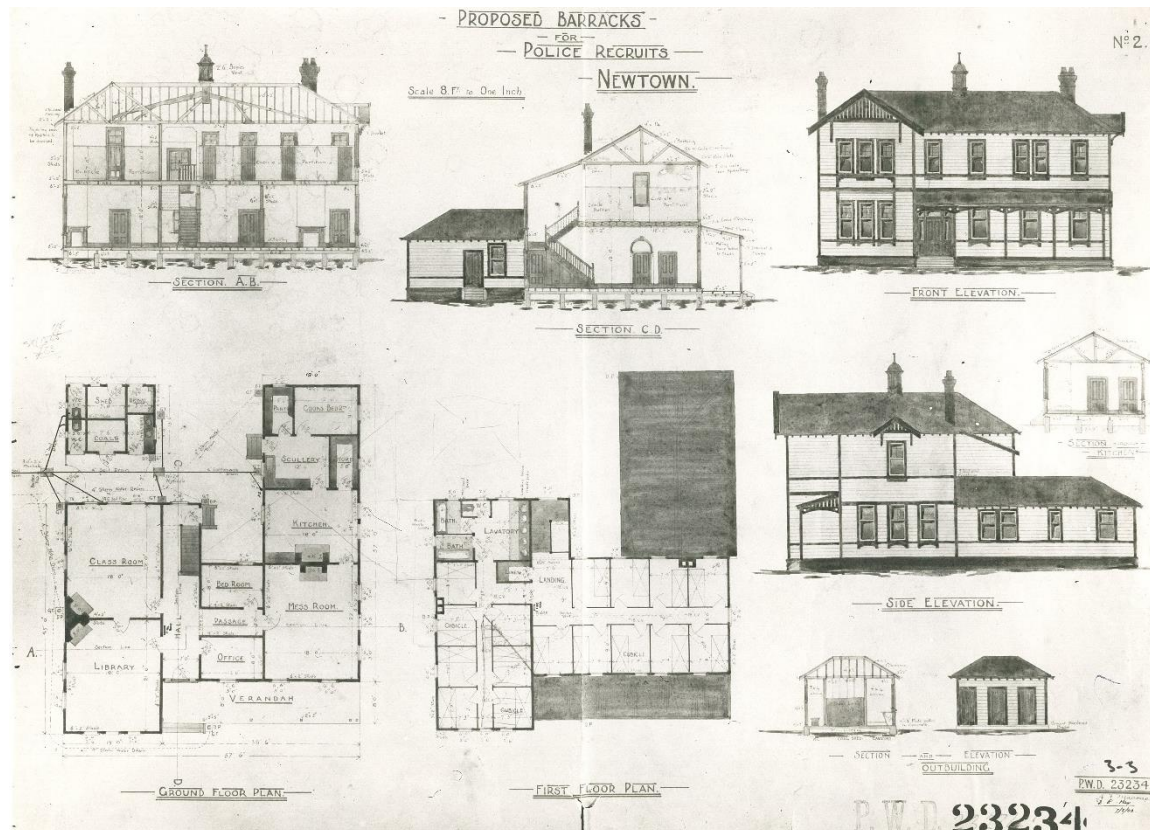
One of Constable Stewart's other duties was to attend local inquests. The Caledonian and Tramway Hotels were the venue for inquests into two rural tram accidents while the Newtown Hotel was the meeting place for an enquiry into a Riddiford Street fire which destroyed a number of buildings. The presence of two large public institutions in this district added to Constable Stewart's responsibilities as he had to attend many inquests into the deaths of patients at both Mount View Asylum and Wellington Hospital. The main part of his duties however was the regular day-to-day solving of

small robberies, dealing with emergencies and easing the difficulties which arose in any small settlement.

Constable Stewart was in charge of the station for close on 11 years during which the volume of work increased considerably. The station moved to a more central site in 1883 when a house on the southern side of Normanby Street, close to Riddiford Street, was rented for the annual sum of £36-8-0. In March 1892, the station's name was changed to the Wellington South Police Station. By 1898 the station had moved around the corner to a building in Riddiford Street near Newtown Avenue and two years later it was located at what was then 66 Riddiford Street (between St Thomas's Church and Gordon Street). It was not surprising that police accommodation was one of the local Issues brought to

the Premier's attention when he opened the new post office in 1901. Perhaps the comments had some affect as the station remained at that address until permanent accommodation was built eight years later.

Police training in the later part of the last century had been given largely on the beat in the company of an experienced constable, although it was not unknown for a new recruit to be put straight on to street duty on his own. A Royal Commission on the police force in New Zealand, appointed in 1898, urged the establishment of a training depot and in December of that year one was set up at the Mount Cook Police Station in Buckle Street. After passing physical and educational examinations the probationers spent two months in training before sitting a final test following which the successful candidates



Reference to be added

were then sworn in as constables. Additional courses were added to the depot's programme in the first years of the new century, all of which placed a strain on the accommodation at Mount Cook Station. The need for new premises was obvious and Newtown was a likely area. Early in the 1900s the Crown had acquired an interest in land in lower Rintoul Street, part of Town Acre 944, and this area was purchased in 1906 as a site for a police station and training depot.



Building started about the end of 1908 and both institutions opened the following year. Situated at 12 and 12A Rintoul Street, behind the shops at the present traffic lights, the area was approached by the existing lane which runs between Orientique dress shop and the second hand appliance premises. The traditional blue lamp was suspended from an iron arch at the street frontage and, at the end of the lane, stood the two-roomed station with a small lock-up behind. Beyond that, facing west, was a six-roomed policeman's house. With the opening of a permanent station the constable's position was upgraded and William Mathieson was appointed Sergeant-in-Charge in March 1909. Across the paved grounds, near the southern boundary, was the Wellington South Training Depot, the national residential

police school. The two-storeyed wooden building had 16 single bedrooms for the recruits and on the ground floor were a classroom, library, mess room, attic, kitchen and a couple of staff bedrooms. A parade ground was situated to the west of the barracks where the recruits were drilled by Sergeant J. W. H. Dart who was in charge of the depot.

After the outbreak of World War I recruiting practically ceased and the depot was closed in December 1916. The temporary constables who were employed to maintain staff numbers did not meet the standard for the regular force so they were trained on the beat during their three months probation. Planning for the type of postwar training needed to upgrade the force was under consideration however and it was proposed that the course should be lengthened and specialised technical training be introduced.

Wellington South Training Depot reopened on 17 May 1921 with 25 recruits who attended an extended course of three months. Because the depot was too small to train all the new recruits a second intake of 50 probationers was trained at the Alexandra Barracks on Mount Cook (now the site of the National Art Gallery and Museum). Training continued at the depot until 1930 when the Depression forced its closure until August 1935 when 21 recruits started the course. A drive for more recruits resulted in large intakes and in 1937 two groups were trained at Trentham Military Camp.

A policy change and World War II meant that regular training courses at the depot were suspended between 1938 and 1945 although groups were trained for particular purposes. A special intake was recruited in 1940 to provide extra police during the centennial celebrations and in 1941 a pilot course for women police was held. The first group of 10 women started their training on 3 June and the scheme proved so successful that several other groups were trained in the following years. Early in the century a number of women's

Reference to be added

organisations had advocated the training of policewomen but it was not until 1938 that provision was made for their appointment. Their admission to the force in 1941 was probably hastened by the manpower shortage caused by the war.

The Wellington South Training Depot reopened on 21 May 1946 with an intake of 25 constables, some of some were ex-servicemen and most had had several months' police experience before starting their eight weeks training. The depot was non-residential at that time and the trainees lived in barracks at Mount Cook Taranaki Street and Central Stations, travelling to and fro by tram.

Training at the depot continued for another seven years and during that period it reverted to being a residential school, the course was extended to three months then reduced to ten weeks and the subject range was broadened to meet the new demands made on police. The year before it finally closed several cases of exhibits dating from the 1880s were moved to the depot from the Central Police Station and displayed in the sitting room. This nucleus of the police "Black Museum" is now part of the collection at the Police College at Porirua.

The last intake to train at Wellington South Training Dept. started on 3 July 1953 and the depot closed on 3 September after completion of the course. A recruiting drive to increase police numbers meant larger intakes than could be handled at Newtown and it would have been too costly to upgrade and enlarge the old building. Training was conducted at Lyttelton for the next few years until the school was transferred to Trentham in 1956.

In close on 45 years as the national home of police training nearly 4,000 officers had been trained at the Wellington South Depot, many of whom later held senior positions in the force.

Throughout these years the Wellington South Police Station, on the opposite side of the property,

continued to serve the community. In the early 1950s two extra rooms were added to the building to provide better working conditions. The station remained on the site until the mid 1960s when it was transferred to the corner of Adelaide Road and King Street where a clothing store had been built a decade earlier. On 30 June 1976 the Wellington South Police Station finally closed after being closely involved with the community for nearly 96 years.

The Rintoul Street property was converted to the Police Driving School and a new workshop and buildings were erected in 1968. To provide better vehicular approach to the school part of Town Acre 946 was acquired in 1966 giving access to Colombo Street. About 1974 the driving school was joined by the Wellington Dog Section which had been based at the Adelaide Road clothing store since the late 1960s. The dog handlers and a few mechanics are now the sole occupants of the site and it is likely that they too will be relocated in the near future.

The area was without a local police officer until 1983 when Constable A. Leadbitter was appointed community constable. He was based at the Kilbirnie Police Station for about 18 months until the present premises in the Lychgate Centre, Riddiford St, were opened by the Minister of Police, the Hon. Anne Hercus on 22 August 1984.

The appointment was welcomed by the community but it was a difficult task for one officer to cover the large area encompassing Newtown, Berhampore, Island Bay, Brooklyn and Kingston when insufficient funding restricted motorcar use. Plans were announced in 1989 to improve community policing by setting up suburban police bases, one of which was to be in Newtown, but these were put on hold when the government announced reductions in police staffing. A car has now been allocated to the district and the present constable is better equipped to cover the area of responsibility.

One other police officer has been working in Newtown for some years but, because he is based at Wellington Hospital his presence is not generally known. The position of hospital enquiry constable was established about 1969 after the Wellington South Police Station in Rintoul Street closed down. For a time he had an office at the Adelaide Road building but when it closed in the mid 1970s an office was opened on the first floor of the hospital's administration building.

His duties cover the range of problems similar to those of a small town but, as part of the hospital, he is

more closely involved with the outcome of accidents, emergencies and death. In some respects his responsibilities closely resemble those of Constable George Stewart who, 110 years ago, maintained law and order in Newtown and the surrounding districts.

Over the years police work in Newtown has had its own particular problems. Four hotels within close proximity caused pressure around the turn of the century until the closure of the Park and Newtown Hotels in June 1909. The Zoo and Winter Show Buildings drew large crowds at times while functions and big sports events at

Reference to be added



Newtown and Athletic Parks meant that the local police had to be augmented by extra staff from the Central Police Station. The presence of Wellington Hospital added further responsibilities attendances at inquests and the morgue while occasional prowlers in the grounds made it necessary to create a special beat around the hospital. These extra responsibilities made the work more varied but it was the regular work of the station which kept the police in touch with the community. Residents with difficulties turned to them for help and advice, or assistance was given on domestic matters, legal affairs and family emergencies.

This much needed support was lost when the local station was closed, but since then other agencies such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Community Law Centre, Newtown Community Centre have helped fill some of the gaps. For the future it is hoped that the role of the community constable will be strengthened by further supporting services to help families and people under stress.