



'J' DIVISION POLICE STATIONS

BETHNAL GREEN.

The police station sites in Bethnal Green are, perhaps, the most confused of all the one time 'J' division stations. There is a reference in some old papers held in the Public Record Office that a plot of land was purchased in December 1860 for the purpose of erecting a police station at 243 Bethnal Green Road in London's East End. Although a station was built in the area it is not known whether it was upon this particular plot.

Police Orders of January 11, 1864 showing the distribution of the Metropolitan Police Force at that time placed the station at Bethnal Green on the 'K' (Stepney) division. One inspector, nine sergeants and sixty six constables were posted to the station.

According to later correspondence on the police in Bethnal Green, in 1868 the police station for the area was, as later, at 458 Bethnal Green Road, Shoreditch. The building had been erected at a cost of £9,000 on an uncertain date, the freehold of the site being bought by the police in 1869. Any hope that this reference would clear up the location of the Bethnal Green police station were dashed by Police Orders issued on January 6, 1871. Announcing the, not unusual, taking into occupation of a new police station, this document stated:-

"The police of 'H' division are to take charge of and occupy the new police station at Church Street, Bethnal Green, on the 9th."

A later note added, on August 23, 1935, the explanation for this state of affairs:-

"Apparently in 1874 the Receiver owned two Bethnal Green Police Stations".

this matter was not further pursued in the papers, but it was presumably referring to the premises in Church Street which was operating in some lesser role much as old police stations become used as traffic warden centres today. It would seem that the writer was not referring to the permanent, much mentioned, post at the Bethnal Green Museum in the Cambridge Heath Road which remained manned well into the 1930's, having even acquired a direct police telephone line to the head station as early as July 1902.

The telephone, which became widespread in police stations by the turn of the century, was preceded by the wire telegraph, a simple morse code transmitter. Bethnal Green received the equipment along with some of the other stations on 'K' division in January 1872. To ease the workload of the operators each station was given a two letter code, in this case "BG".

With the formation of the 'J', or Bethnal Green Division in August 1886 (Police Orders July 22, 1886) the station became the Divisional Headquarters of the nine station re-grouping and a change in telegraphic code to JD, denoting then as now, the divisional station. The other

stations were Barkingside, Chigwell, Dalston, Hackney, Leytonstone, Loughton, Wanstead and Woodford.

In Police Orders dated February 7, 1894 it was stated:-

"J. The new Section House at Bethnal Green Police Station is to be taken into occupation on 19th. The lodging assessment will be, 24 single men at 1s. each per week and revised lodging assessment at Bethnal Green Police Station for 1 married inspector at 5s.6d. per week."

In 1904 the position of Bethnal Green as the head station of J division was ceded to the newly built Hackney police station and it reverted to its former telegraphic code of BG. It was only to be a short time after this that a new station was built on the 458 Bethnal Green Road site.

Two further issues of Police Orders in 1917 referred to the new station at Bethnal Green. On April 28

"J. The administration portion of Bethnal Green new police station is to be taken into occupation and business commenced therein 30 April"

and on June 30

"J. The new married quarters at Bethnal Green police station are to be taken in occupation. Lodging assessment 2 sets at 10s.6d per week each"

In August 1933 another major re-organisation of the divisions north of the Thames took place. Bethnal Green was removed from the 'J' division it had once been Divisional Station for. Transferred to the 'H' (or Whitechapel) division, as a sectional station under Bow, it retained its telegraphic code until 1938 when all the Metropolitan codes were changed, it then acquired the modern code of "HB".

During the 1939-45 war an emergency exit from an air raid shelter belonging to the British United Shoe Machinery Company emerged into the police station yard, remaining there until being blocked in 1948.

In the April 1, 1965 re-organisation of police boundaries to align with the new local authority boundaries created by the London Government Act 1963, Bethnal Green became a sectional station to Commercial Street in part of the new London Borough of Tower Hamlets. When Lemn Street police station was closed for re-building in early December 1967 the area was policed from Commercial Street and Bethnal Green, the latter assuming sub-divisional status.

