

LEYTON & LEYTON POLICE

When the ten year old Metropolitan Police was expanded from its Central London boundary in January 1840, Leytonstone was a station area on the Inner District of the K division. Like the adjoining station at Stratford, the single sergeant and six constables at Leytonstone had to take their prisoners for charging to Bow, the consequent cases being heard in the East End at the Lambeth Street Police Court, off the Commercial Road.

An ancient lock up situated at Harrow Green was not part of the police scheme, but it was undoubtedly used from time to time as a convenient building to house prisoners awaiting transfer to Bow, a journey invariably undertaken on foot through what was a very rural area at that time.

At this period there was no separate Leyton police station, although the replacement for Vestry House, the first police station in the adjoining area of Walthamstow, was sited in Lea Bridge Road, Leyton, from November 1868.



Police Orders on November 20, 1872 announced that the new police station situated at Leytonstone Road was to be taken into police possession. It is likely, but not verified, that this was the station called and sited - like the earlier lock up - in Harrow Green. Six years later, in 1878, a note on the Metropolitan Police station site file mentions that "Maria Cottage", Harrow Green, Leytonstone, was taken on a variable seven, fourteen or twenty-one year lease. This two storey building is the earliest for which identifiable illustrations appear. Although not originally provided with cells, two were said to have been added to the site prior to 1887.



In 1886 the search for a new site for a police station in Leytonstone was in full swing. In March of that year the police were offered a site right alongside the Leytonstone railway station, on the corner of Fairlop and Fillebrook Road's. Although the location, at 400 feet by 200 feet overall, was of a suitable size, the £2,500 price of the building plot was far more expensive than the police budget allowed.

In August 1886 Leytonstone became a part of the new 'J' division set up from a number

of former 'N' and 'K' division stations in the east of the Metropolis. An early result of this was the long overdue inclusion of Leytonstone in the network of police telegraph wires that was to reduce the need for mounted officers to act as message carriers. The telegraphic identification code of the station was 'LE' a code which it retained until the whole system was changed in 1938 - when Leytonstone received the more modern 'JS' coding.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Leyton, two plots of land on the new Great House Estate were considered, one of these plots which lay in Morley Road at the junction with Francis Road was purchased in 1887 at the cost of £420. This particular choice was well reasoned but far from popular with the populace. In spite of the area around Francis road receiving houses built upon it at a rate' of 600 per year - a rate that transformed the wide open spaces to the familiar crowded housing very quickly - some time before the deal was struck, on November 27, 1886, the local "Express & Independent" newspaper had seen fit to tell its readers:-

'We do not know if the police authorities are still determined to persevere in their utterly mad project of doing away with the Harrow-green Police-station, and placing one in the wilderness. We should fancy the condemnation of the whole intelligent public.... blundering.... preposterous notion.... silly and gigantic muddle at Harrow Green'

Whilst quite understandable, the paper had failed to take into consideration the extent of police boundaries. Leytonstone (Harrow Green) was on the edge of the 'J' Division, close to 'K' and also close to the station being built at Forest Gate in the same period. The Francis Road building was in the centre of its area of responsibility, in spite of its, then, very rural location.

According to the Land & Buildings file for Leytonstone the new police station in Leyton was erected in 1890 and given a location based telegraphic code of LS which lasted until 1938 when JL, based on the division and name was first introduced.

On January 6, 1891 Police Orders announced:

"J. The new police station at Leytonstone is to be taken into occupation by police and business commenced therein at once. The lodging assessment will be as follows: 15 single men at 11/- each per week."

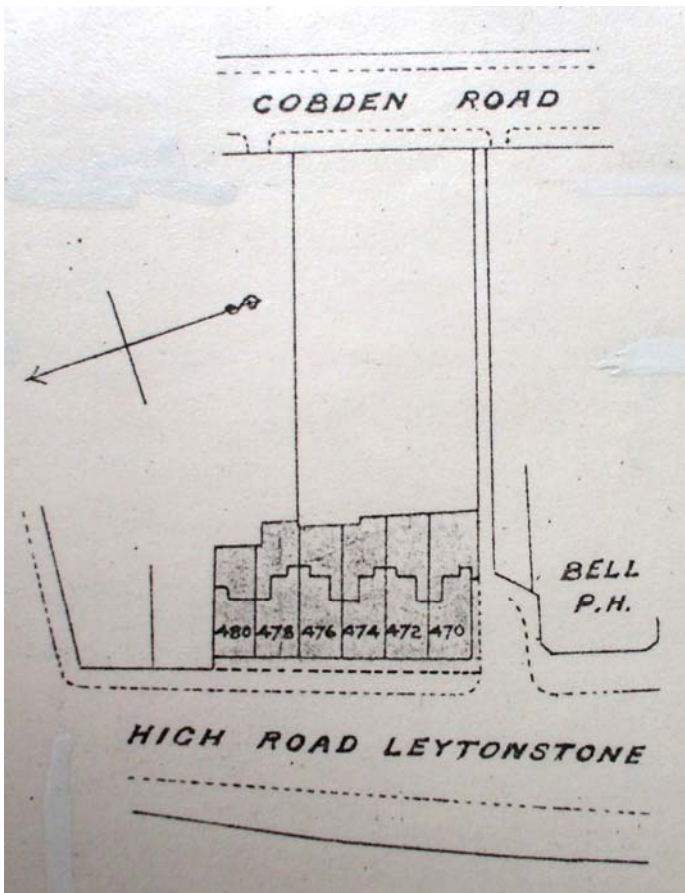


This appears to have been the first police building in the area to have included accommodation for which the police residents were charged a rental.

The reason for the new site being called the same as the station at "Maria Cottage" related to the intention to use it as a replacing station, this being the reason for the furore in the populace. "Maria Cottage" Leytonstone closed down as a police station in 1890, being instead occupied as married quarters at a rental of 21/- weekly. After fourteen years, in 1892, the lease on this building was surrendered in favour of an annual tenancy, although any intention to discard the site was thwarted by intense local pressure to re-open the building as a police station. In the same year the wishes of the locals were met.

The Leyton station was in a relatively rural situation until quite a few years into its existence. Adjoining houses were still being built as late as 1896 - a development that caused considerable correspondence to be raised to arrange for the perimeter walls to be heightened to maintain (police) privacy.

As the area developed, drawing in ever more inhabitants plans were made to put up a new police station for Leytonstone. The negotiations being somewhat long and drawn out as the owners and tenants of the plots of land extracted the best price they could get.



A plot of land occupied by houses, numbers 470, 472 and 474 High Road, Leytonstone, lay in front of a parcel of land to the rear of, and between the "The Bell" public house and a timber yard off Cobden Road. It was intended to build the new Leytonstone Police Station on this 142 by 138 foot site obtained from a Mr. W. Keable of 458 High Road for £535. Other financial arrangements were negotiated with Mr. W. Jennings of 494 High Road who had an interest in 474 and 476, and a brewery who owned all of the houses adjoining "The Bell". As the original intention was to erect the station set back, only two of the plots were originally sought, but in 1908 six houses between 470 to 480 were bought from Charrington & Co., Anchor Brewery, Mile End, for £900.

The land sale was covered by special covenants, some of which related to the trade of the next door neighbours, "The Bell":-

No building is to be erected within 10 feet of Cobden Road.

No house of less value than £150 is to be erected.

The trade of Innkeeper or Retailer of Wine, Spirits or Beer is not to be carried on.

No noxious trade, business or manufacture is to be carried on.

The site before the police station was built ©MP



After the purchase of a larger plot fronting the High Road than originally intended, the new building was erected close to the High Road in 1913 and took the number 470. The lodging assessment for the two married quarters were set at 8/6d and 8/- per week.

The site after the police station was built. This image dates from the 1970s ©MP



In 1927 Leyton became a sub-divisional station, remaining as such after the major re-organisation of the Metropolitan Police Force which came into effect in August 1933. Leytonstone was a sectional station under Leyton.

On the afternoon of Thursday May 17, 1934 the Commissioner of police officially opened

Officers pose in the yard at Leytonstone during the Great War. © MP



the newly acquired No.3 District Sports Club House and Ground opposite the end of Francis Road in High Road, Leyton. This former famous Essex County Cricket ground and grand pavillion was held by the police for only a short period, in 1937 arrangements were made to acquire a larger ground at Chigwell Hall.

In January 1936 seven police telephone boxes were brought into operation in Leyton and Leytonstone, each of which was connected by private telephone line to the switchboard at Leyton. Those boxes connected directly were.,-

Box 38 situated in Lea Bridge Road near Gloucester Road, Leyton E10. Later relocated, this box was finally taken out of service in mid- September 1970.

Box 39 in the High Road, Leyton, just north of Ruckholt Road was also taken out of service in September 1970.

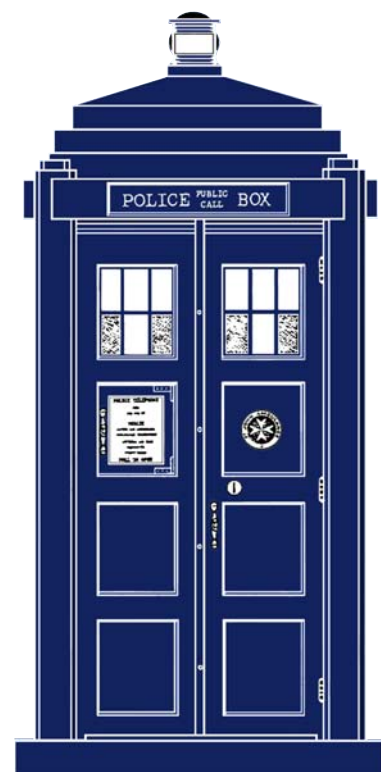
Box J10 was one of two fitted with an air raid warning siren on an adjacent post. In Centre Road, just south of Aldersbrook Road, Leytonstone E11, it was finally disconnected on September 15, 1970.

Box J11 was originally in Cambridge Park Road to the east of Leytonstone High Road, E11. Relocated, it was eventually taken out of service in September 1970.

Box J12 was in Essex Road, Leytonstone E11 until September 1970.

Box J13 lay on an island in the centre of the roadway in Lea Bridge Road by its junction with Hoe Street, Leyton E10. Like all the others it went in 1970.

Box J14 was also fitted with an air raid siren, and was originally in Lea Bridge Road by Wood Street, Walthamstow E17. Later moved, it was in use until September 1970.



Demolition underway at the Francis Road site in 1939 ©MP



Although these were the sole boxes actually connected directly to Leyton, just as these were available to men from other areas, there were boxes connected to other stations which Leyton officers were able to use.

Shortly before the Second World War, it was decided to wholly re-construct the fifty year old Francis Road police station, Police Orders duly announcing on March 16, 1939:

'It is notified for information that Leyton Police Station, 215 Francis Road, E10 will be closed at 6.00am on Sunday 25th March 1939 for re-construction, and all business transferred to the old station at Lea Bridge Road, E10.

The old Lea Bridge Road building had been in use as section house accommodation since finally closing, after some years acting as a duplicate Walthamstow police station, in July 1933.

The new building, designed by Julian Leathart, and built by Pitchers Ltd., of Highbury, replaced its two storey forebear with a, then very modern, structure of far greater size within the same plot. The three storey (plus basement) building was designed to at least appear of a similar size to its two storey forebear. As was usual at the time, the top floor was set aside as married quarters.

Not everyone was happy with the change in structure in March 1939 the occupants of an adjoining house at 217 Francis Road requested some financial compensation for their loss of light caused by the larger structure. After due consideration the police coughed up a once only payment of £10 to cover the claimed damage, disturbance and inconvenience.

In spite of the difficulties provided by the war breaking out later in 1939, the building, along with a number of necessary but temporary wartime additions, re-opened for business at the height of the Battle of Britain on August 25, 1940.

Its temporary- closure caused at least one police family some disruption. A new inspector, Eddie R. Langdon, was posted to the station at the time of re-building, but like the other flat dwellers, Sub-Divisional Inspector Hanscombe and his family until 1942, he and his family were unable to move in to the married quarters before the September. Langdon remained at the old address at Victoria Park Road, Hackney and commuted to Lea Bridge Road daily.

Once moved into the police station the war naturally disturbed any normality that might have prevailed in the top floor quarters. When night bombing became regular, in late 1940 and early 1941, the family were obliged to spend at least part of almost every night in the less dangerous lower sections of the station, even if that meant voluntarily occupying one of the station's cells occasionally. The Langdon's moved out, on retirement, in 1951.

The Nazi German propaganda machinery knew of the opening of the new station, and even went so far as to threaten that the building would soon suffer from destruction from one of the many bombs that fell in the area shortly after it opened. In spite of numerous near misses it survived.

Only one police officer is known to have died on duty in Leyton during the war. Sergeant 67J Brownhill, who had joined the force in 1931, was killed by the explosion caused when a long range rocket struck his home as he was preparing to go on duty at Leyton on



Leyton Police Station, on the corner of Francis Road in its heyday. Image dated around 1980 ©MP

March 6, 1945. Fortunately this officers family remained evacuated. With his home no longer existing, he was buried with full honours from the station building.

Primarily due to the extingencies of war the new station building was not fully completed during the years of conflict. All through the war the low station forecourt walls were guarded against tripping over in the blackout by cheap chestnut fencing (which also provided an excellent support for growing tomatoes). This departure from the architects ideals was removed after the war when the design of the building was submitted for a architectural award. In 1949 the matter was considered and tenders accepted for a variety of solutions, finally, in, March 1950, work providing acceptable and permanent fencing was completed.

After the major changes brought about by the London Government Act of 1963, Leyton replaced Hackney as the Divisional Head station of 'J' Division (with a telegraphic code of JD) from April 1, 1965. Both Leyton and Leytonstone (still JS) its sectional station, were now stations within the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

In 1975 a new police station was opened in Brook Parade, Chigwell. This building became the Divisional Headquarters and Leyton reverted to its earlier identity code of JL. In 1986 'J' Division was abolished and the two stations, Leyton and Leytonstone, formed the new Leyton Division which lasted another decade or so before yet another restructuring brought them under a Waltham Forest Division under Chingford.



Leytonstone taken during the 1980s.

Into the 21st Century both buildings were declared surplus to the needs of modern policing and disposed to the private sector for accommodation or, in the case of Leyton demolished. Much had changed in modern policing as policing became more remote and reactive and even the Walthamstow building in Forest Road was gone and replaced by an office.

Leyton Police Station at 215 Francis Road, London E10 6NL was declared as under-occupied, and in poor condition, therefore costly to run and maintain. The locals may have considered it to be being built in too remote an area of countryside back in the 19th Century but the servicing of 21st Century needs was not to be looking after the houses that sprang up around Francis Road in subsequent years.

As of the 10th December 2012 front counter facilities transferred to The Custody Centre located a short distance away at Boreham Close, E11 1FE. The opening hours for the front counter remained the same as previously offered at Leyton in its final days - 7am through to 3am.

Leytonstone Police Station, had transferred to a small office overlooking the Leytonstone LT station at Waltham House, Kirkdale Road, Leytonstone, E11 1HP. Open 0700 - 1900 daily.