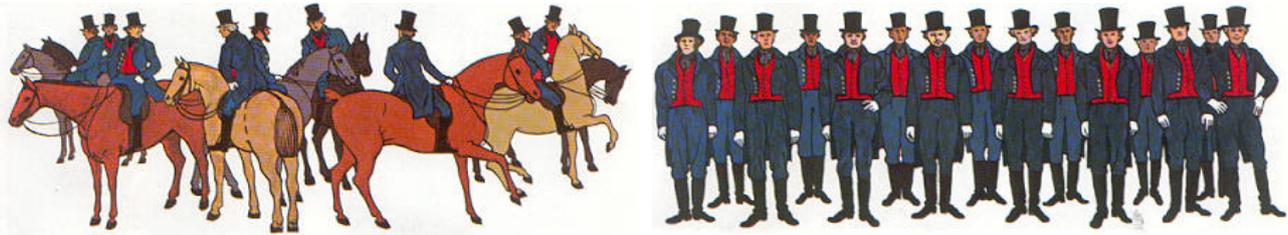


WALTHAMSTOW POLICE STATIONS 1840-2000



The best remembered event of 1805 is the British naval victory at Trafalgar and the death of Lord Nelson, but there was also an event in police history during the same year that was of some importance. The Bow Street Horse Patrol was inaugurated to combat the many highway robberies taking place on the roads around London. Set up by Sir Richard Ford, Chief Magistrate of the Patrol Office in Bow Street, and Mr. Day the newly appointed Clerk to the Horse Patrol and later an inspector. From 1813 the Secretary of State took over the appointment of patrol constables from the Chief Magistrate. This patrol was not the first peacekeeping force formed in response to the attacks by highwaymen and footpads, but an earlier arrangement was halted because of high costs.

The Bow Street Horse patrol was reserved for married ex-cavalrymen aged between 30 and 65. Tasked with the patrol of main roads to London up to a distance of 20 miles from Charing Cross, the average daily distance covered by each of the patrols varied between 14 and 23 miles according to district. The duties performed by the men were onerous. Each working day was often of 12 hours duration and there were no regular days off duty.



The Horse Patrol constables were each paid four shillings daily, a rate one shilling above the equivalent foot patrolman. Uniform was blue trousers with blue double-breasted greatcoats with yellow metal buttons over scarlet waistcoats, Wellington boots with steel spurs and tall black leather hats. To complete the uniform leather stocks were available - this item being a leather collar designed to be worn around the neck as a guard against garrotting. Not all of the uniform was provided free, the spurs; greatcoat and hats had to be paid for out of the patrolmen's wages. The horse harness and loaded pistol completed the equipment.

The dismounted horse patrols also consisted of ex-cavalrymen, posted to the principal towns and villages and tasked with the foot patrol of main roads within 12 miles of London.

After some of their earlier accommodation was found unsuitable, patrolmen were provided with cottages with stabling attached; a tablet, signifying the Horse Patrol and number was attached to the wall of each cottage. The annual rental for the property used in Walthamstow in 1836 was £14. Mr Barber owned Station number 63 at Lea Bridge, this being manned by Constable Richard Glendenning of the 4th Division Horse Patrol in the same period. As each of the patrols was regularly moved around from station to station and division to division to ensure that each did not become over familiar with people of the locality it is impossible to know how long he remained there.

Horses suitable for patrol work cost an average of £26 each. Forage for a London merchant delivered the patrol monthly. For convenience local farriers shod the mounts.

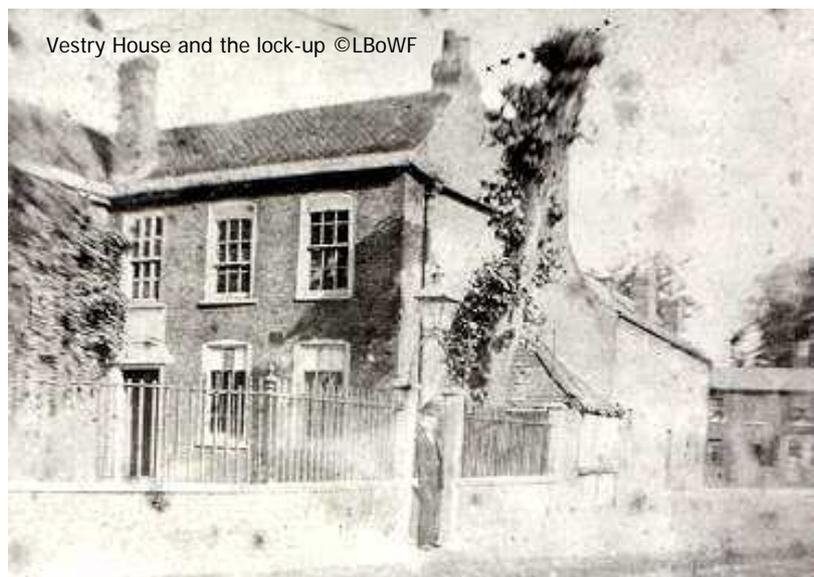
The Police of London expanded from boundaries originally set in 1829 as a direct result of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839. Preparations for great changes were contained in the Metropolitan Police Act 1839, and advertised on local notice boards from Saturday January 4th. The Horse Patrols had been incorporated within the force in 1837 so the changes brought about did not initially affect them a great deal.

Early in January 1840 a section of the best men of the original force displaced the previous Parish Constables and "Watch". In 1841 they moved into a portion of the Vestry House, Church End, Walthamstow under a lease arrangement originally scheduled to last for 42 years.

The displaced force had been set up as a shared police arrangement between the Parishes of Leyton and Walthamstow in 1831. Although this was disbanded in 1833 it was re-constituted in 1835, operating in conjunction with the Bow Street Horse Patrol on the main routes to London. The 'N' Division Metropolitan Police provided an initial strength of four sergeants, seventeen foot patrol and one horse patrol constables under a supervising inspector stationed at Enfield Highway, it was responsible for the mainly rural areas of Walthamstow and Chingford Hatch. Although charges were taken at the Vestry House premises, initially all cases were tried some distance away, at the Ilford Petty Sessions held on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month.

The Vestry House, the first known police station, provided a single internal cell for police to house their prisoners, but there was additional prisoner accommodation afforded by the external old lock up attached to the east face of the main building. This substantial structure dated back to the mid-18th century and remained well beyond police use of Vestry House, not finally being demolished until the early part of the 20th century.

Although little space was actually required to undertake police business in those days, usually only a single charging room plus whatever cells were available, a section of the building was set aside for single men's accommodation. In 1851 a sergeant and nine constables and in 1861 ten constables were listed in the annual census return as being resident.



The new men policing the area were dressed in a uniform consisting of a blue tailed jacket and trousers. The coat was high necked and swallow tailed the trousers white in summer months and blue in winter. The collar of the jacket could be reinforced by the addition of a four inch high leather stock designed to prevent garrotting, a not uncommon means of attack. Also reinforced was the 'stovepipe' design top hat headwear chosen because of its civil connotation. For defence the officers were also equipped with truncheon, rattle and cutlass. The first was at that time made from male bamboo, but a variety of woods were tried out. In addition to the lethal qualities of the cutlass, night duty officers had a limited call on firearms well into the 20th century. The truncheon and rattle were kept in pockets provided in the tail of the jacket.

The men employed were literate, some only just so, but basically coarse and often over fond of their drink. They were not drawn from the lowest orders of society, but it certainly was not the occupation expected of a gentleman. The pay was low, but adequate. A starting rate of £1 1s 0d (£1 05p) had been introduced in 1829 and remained unchanged until 1869.

For this small amount the men were required to work every day of the week, on either a twelve-hour full shift or only eight hours split over sixteen. Initially the uniform was worn at all times - both on and off duty - a situation which led to the introduction of an emblem signifying the mans duty state. Worn on the left sleeve until finally abolished in 1968, the duty armband was to be worn only during duty hours. With such hard conditions and long hours large numbers of men were dismissed from the service before their pension was payable as "worn out".

Many of the previous members of the old Horse Patrol left the Mounted Branch after incorporation within the Metropolitan Police, this being mainly due to them becoming "worn out". The last noted member of the Horse Patrol serving in Walthamstow was PC Brunt who finally resigned in March 1855. The former horse patrol station, a brick building with a slate roof situated in the area now known as the High Street, remained in police use for much of his service. In 1845 Mr Leberny of the Castle Inn rented the building to the police.

In April 1892, whilst a new 2 cell police station building was being erected, the Local Board of Walthamstow approached the police with a request that the new station frontage might be set back a little way to allow for future road widening. This request was allowed, but the Local Board was charged £15 for the land lost.

Police Orders of December 24th 1892 announced:

'The new station at Walthamstow is to be taken into occupation by police and business commenced therein 27th inst. The lodging assessment will be: -

1 married inspector at 5s 6d per week.

2 married constables at 3s 0d per week.

Sub-inspectors Patrick and Scrase are removed from Tottenham and St Ann's Road stations respectively, to Walthamstow New Police Station.'

Most new police stations at this period provided accommodation, but it was relatively unusual for Butler to include it in the main structure, he usually preferred to build a separate block. From a 1904 survey of married quarters we know that the set of quarters allotted to the married inspector was situated on the first floor and consisted of four rooms and a scullery, in 1904 the rental had risen to 6/-. The two sets of constables quarters, now also costing a little more, were situated on the second floor (a flat with three rooms and a scullery) and over the stables to the rear.



Three views of the original police station taken in about 1907. They show the side from Greenleaf Road and rear views of the stable and accommodation and a reverse view from the balcony looking towards Forest Road. ©MP

At the turn of the century, the Lea Bridge Road site was earmarked for future use as accommodation. At the end of April 1908 a new section house was taken into use, the total cost being £3,017.10.9d. Two years later a further £1,512 13 7d was spent on the site.

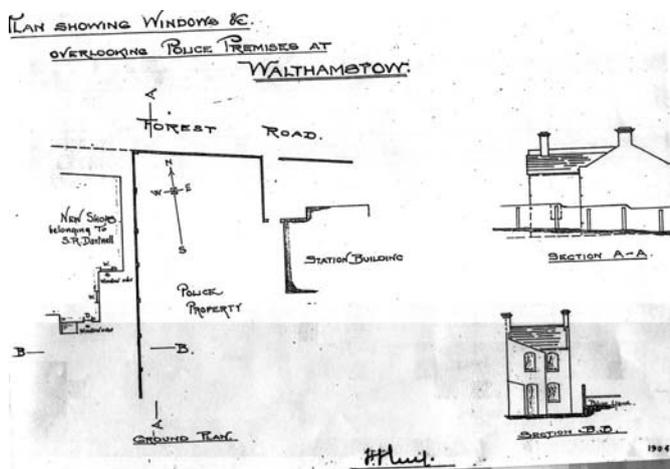
An immediate, but relatively minor, difficulty arose over the issue of the Telegraphic Code for the new Walthamstow station. After the introduction of the ABC Telegraph equipment, each station had been issued with a two-letter code that tended to reflect the name of the station. As Lea Bridge Road had acquired the natural local Walthamstow code of "WA", a coding it retained until closure in 1933, the new station was issued "WW", which remained in use until it was re-styled

after a divisional coding system as "JW" in 1938. To the casual researcher these codes are only important in identifying the source of artefacts. All manner of objects were marked with them.

It was not unusual for police stations to be closely linked with local fire brigade arrangements, in the early years this extended to not only calling out the largely volunteer firemen, but also catching the horses that pulled the engine and manning up the engine where volunteers were short. In line with this the local authority sought a variety of direct links with the police station from March 9 1895. A system of bells connected to the Walthamstow Fire Station, just along the road from the new site, was later, in 1924, replaced by a telephone. The Local authority were obliged to pay a line rental of 5/- (25p) each year for the equipment, but no charge was made for the services rendered on it. The direct link appears to have ceased prior to 1938.



Lea Bridge Road police station after it had been converted into quarters. ©LBoWF



The new police station had been built upon a "green field" site and was not overlooked when finished. It was 1900 before buildings were erected alongside the station. The first houses were a set of eight villas built by a Mr Alfred Fairhead to the south side in Greenleaf Road, the nearest being three feet from the nine foot high section of station yard wall adjoining the police stables. Shops erected by S R Dartnell to the west side in Forest Road in 1904 followed these houses.

From December 1898 until December 1906 various communications were received from "The overseers of the poor of the Parish of Walthamstow", the "Walthamstow Urban District Council", and certain notable individuals, making complaint about the shortage of police in the Walthamstow area. In 1891, prior to the opening of the new station, there were 70 officers of all ranks performing duty within the Parish, a number which rose to 90 by 1899. The number of new houses built to accommodate the rising population was 1895: 638, 1896: 612, 1897: 480, 1898: 1,650, 1899: 2,038. Many of these newcomers were attracted to the area by the good train service to London. Fares were cheap and the Great Eastern Railway issued special Workmen's Return Tickets to London at 4am for only 2d. From that hour until 8am the cost was 4d for the 15-20 minute journey.

Reacting to the earlier complaints, Superintendent J McFadden, the 'N' Divisional Commander reported in September 1899 that 1,050 new houses had been erected and that the population of Walthamstow had increased by 6,000 persons since the start of the year. By the turn of the century he expected that the local population to have reached 88,000 persons. The Superintendent recommended that the manpower at Walthamstow be increased by 2 sergeants and 21 constables. The strength in 1896 was given as 90 officers, of whom 12 were sergeants and 72 constables. Police Orders of March 31st 1900 announced that his request had only been partially successful, only five constables were added to the station, all being for fixed point duty within the Parish of Walthamstow.

By 1906 the manpower allotted to the Walthamstow section had grown to 177 officers, although 9 of the 151 constables in the reckoning were actually Chingford officers posted to duty in the Highams Park area. In 1906 the number of officers above the rank of sergeant were few. In addition to five station sergeant's (four stripes) there were only three inspector's, with Sub-divisional Inspector (SDI) W Gray in overall charge.

Telephones were not introduced into widespread police use until the early part of the 20th century. Walthamstow was placed on the public network in 1907. The officers dealing with the calls generated by this provision, and the telegraph, were usually men of the Divisional Reserve kept at the station. As a result of this the early communications rooms became known as the "Reserve Room", a term that only died out with computers in the late 1980s.

Minor changes to the accommodations at Lea Bridge Road took place in 1908. Police Orders dated April 21st that year announced: -

'Building and fixtures 'N'. The new section house at Lea Bridge Road is to be taken into occupation 27th inst. The lodging assessment will be 26 unmarried men at 1s each per week.'

As previously mentioned, the use of the station for accommodation was not new. The various buildings in use had contained a variety of combinations of quarters for married and unmarried police and their dependants since the early days. The use of the upper parts of the building wholly for single men was in effect a precursor for the future use of the site.

Later in 1908 Police Orders announced the loss of the Lea Bridge Road station's own identity:

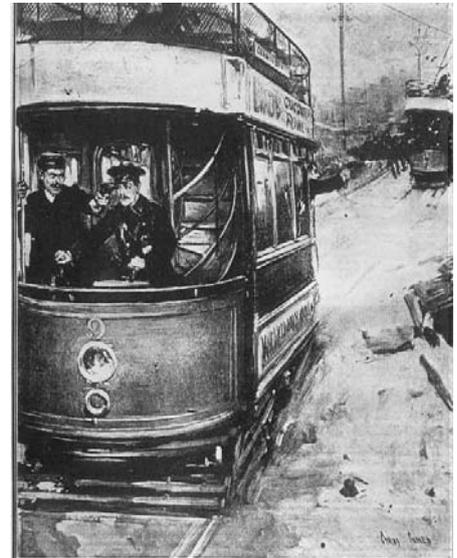
'Sub-divisions 'N'. The sub-division hitherto known as 'Lea Bridge Road' will in future be known as 'Walthamstow'.'

In January 1909 the infamous anarchist wages robbery, and resultant murders of a Tottenham constable and young lad, took place. Subsequently to be known as the "Tottenham Outrage", the major proportion of the subsequent action took place in and around Walthamstow. The snatch of the money and the deaths in the shadow of Tottenham police station resulted in a 'hue and cry' such as had not been seen since the Middle Ages. The two robbers were chased on foot onto the marshes of the River Lea in a running gun battle that was to lead to further injuries as hundreds of rounds of ammunition were expended by villain and police alike.

The chase crossed over into Walthamstow in the vicinity of Blackhorse Lane and then via footpaths and lanes onto the Chingford Road near to the present Greyhound Stadium. A tram was hi-jacked by the pair, the driver hiding upstairs and leading to the conductor being forced into the cab at gunpoint. The police also obtained the services of a further tram and chased the first vehicle towards "The Bell".

The temporary driver of the first tram managed to rid himself of his hijackers by convincing them that the police station was around the next corner as he approached the tram station, now known as Walthamstow Garage. The pair left the tram and ran off down Farnham Avenue to hi-jack a milk float that they used for the length of that road until changing to another cart when near Forest Road. This latter cart took them to Fulbourne Road and into Winchester Road, Highams Park where the pair again took to their feet.

One of the anarchists called Hafeld fearing that the game was up shot himself in the head near the railway cutting, but the other, Lepidus managed to get as far as the junction of Oak Hill and Hale End Road where he entered "Oak Cottage". When he also realised that he had failed to lose the pursuing police he



also shot himself. The money was never found at the time. Many years later it was claimed that a package containing a large amount of money had fallen from the chimney flue of "Oak Cottage" some time after the event, this being duly spent by the family in an atmosphere of some secrecy. Sufficient for the propagation of a local fable.

In common with most London police stations, during the Great War period police manpower was greatly increased by the addition of part time men from the newly formed Special Constabulary Reserve. Made up of elderly shopkeepers and businessmen in the main, there were younger elements employed, primarily those awaiting the inevitability of call up into the armed forces. It was as a result of the availability of this reserve manpower that police were able to operate an embryo air raid warning system throughout the war years.

Bombing was far less of a problem to the Walthamstow populace in the Great War than it was to prove in the Second World War, nonetheless incidents did occur. In spite of the negligible effect that the rudimentary bombs dropped from German Zeppelin and SL airship's had upon the stout building's in England, on such raid succeeded in totally wrecking the "Rose & Grown" public house in Hoe Street, Walthamstow.



Bomb damage in Walthamstow during the Great War. © LBoWF

Towards the end of the war police pay was inexorably failing behind that of factory workers, leading to a number of short term special allowances being introduced. Even these measures proved insufficient to support police and their families. In 1918 the police went on strike, a matter which led to the Government of the day increasing wages and making promises which were to be met after the war was over. Unfortunately these promises were not honoured when the war was over, leading to another police strike. Many of these strikers were sacked.

Many of the Metropolitan Police Divisions north of the River Thames underwent an extensive re-organisation as a result of Police Orders issued on July 27th 1933. Operative from 6am on August 1 that year, Walthamstow was transferred from the "N" (Stoke Newington) Division to the "J" (Hackney) Division. It remained a sub-divisional station, effectively in charge of not only Chingford, as before, but also Waltham Abbey which had transferred from the Enfield Highway sub-division. Lea Bridge Road closed for police business but, with one short period excepted, it remained wholly in use as a full time police section house and, later, married quarters into the late 1950s. Even after the Victorian building was removed the site was used as police accommodation, a modern, multi-storey single officer's accommodation block being built there in the 1960s.

Albert Newlin, the SDI who had seen Walthamstow through the 1933 changes retired in mid- October 1935. He joined the Metropolitan Police in 1906, had been one of the few officers personally commanded by a Home Secretary as a result of his actions in the 1926 General Strike. On taking over Walthamstow he was unwittingly to become the last SDI in the Metropolis to make the change from the patrolling his section on horseback to the use of a motor car for the same purpose.

Street corner police telephone boxes were introduced as a means of improving communication

with the street duty officer and with the public requiring the assistance of each of the emergency services, there being relatively few public telephone call boxes at this period. Although neighbouring Chingford had a form of box in Winchester Road, Highams Park as early as 1902, the widespread availability of these did not come about until the mid- 1930s. The major part of the system on 'J' Division came into operation in 1936. There were fourteen on street police telephone boxes connected to the switchboard at Walthamstow, but of these not all served the station directly.

Those boxes serving the police and populace of Walthamstow were: -

- 14 *Junction of Wood Street and Ilea Bridge Road.*
- 15 *Selbourne Road, near Hoe Street.*
- 16 *St. James Street, near Railway Station.*
- 17 *Ferry Lane, at Ferry Boat Inn.*
- 18 *Junction of Forest Road and Shernall Street.*
- 19 *Junction of Forest Road and Woodford New Road.*
- 20 *Junction of North Circular Road and Chingford Road.*
- 21 *Junction of Billet Road and Higham Hill Road.*



In addition to these boxes used by the officers patrolling Walthamstow and some surrounding stations, there were a number of other boxes on the areas of the sectional stations at Chingford and Waltham Abbey that were connected directly to Walthamstow by the private wire system. Some boxes were connected through other surrounding stations such as Woodford for technical convenience.

To support the calls from these boxes motor vehicles were obtained. Initially brought in during 1929, some time before the arrival of the boxes themselves, motor transport did not really blossom prior to 1935. The use of a divisional, and then a sub-divisional, box van was soon backed up with an area wireless car and, from the outbreak of war in 1939, a 650cc motor cycle. The areas these vehicles were expected to cover prior to the war were very large. As all the outer station police boxes were connected by private wire to the Walthamstow switchboard it enabled the vehicles stationed there to deal with calls from them. This arrangement required, for instance, that a call from the furthest police box on Waltham Abbey section, box 27 at Fishers Green some 10 miles away, was to be dealt with by the Walthamstow vehicles. This vehicle would pass both Chingford and Waltham Abbey stations, both without motor transport of their own, to get there.

In 1937 it was decided to re-construct the Walthamstow police station on the same, Greenleaf Road, site brought into use in 1890. The works included the incorporation of the existing structure within a new extended building. This decision restricted both the works and the visual appearance of the finished building, to provide a station with first and second floor office accommodation, and a single set of married quarters on top intended for the use of the SDI. In addition, external buildings provided garage accommodation for seven cars, stores and a canteen.



At that period the building, on the 80 feet by 130 feet plot, continued to provide accommodation for police purposes only on the ground floor and some rear annexes in a structure by then named, "The Cottage". This may well have been a name given to the former stables, long since out of use for their original purpose. Space was very limited, with even the SDI making do with a converted cell for his office. In spite of the relatively meagre dimensions each of the upper floors provided a two bedroom married quarters, one of which was at that time vacant.

The married quarters in the existing building were done away with during the re-building period which allowed the various sections of police working to have some office space. The work was to

be undertaken in three stages, the first being the demolition and clearing of the buildings at the rear. This allowed the erection of garages which would act as a temporary police station while the rest of the building work was undertaken in the vacated front section.

The main contract for the major re-construction was let to Courtney & Fairburn Ltd, Building Contractors of Albany Road, Camberwell in May 1939 at a total of £20,695. Smaller contracts were arranged with Grierasons Ltd for electrical work at £630 10s 6d and Fretwell Heating Co Ltd for heating at £1,187. A contract for other engineering works was let later.



Unfortunately after all these arrangements had been made the war interfered. A whole variety of extra items connected with Air Raid Precautions measures were added to the contracts, such as an air raid siren and various hardened buildings and a gas contamination cleansing centre. As the latter item was to be incorporated within the garages previously assigned to temporary police station duties the whole system fell apart. Realising that disaster was close all, but the emergency war, works were suspended for seven weeks whilst the schedule was examined. The builder was reduced to the unhappy state of having to build the other sections of the police station whilst they were occupied, in a full war situation, and well after the whole programme was supposed to have finished.

The accommodation situation was exacerbated by the need to find space for extra police officers attached to the station because of the war. The extra men, in two separate bodies termed the War Reserve and the Special Constabulary, were similar in that both were paid, at a level much lower than regular officers. The Special Constabulary numbered 46 in April 1940, of these the inspector, two sergeants and twenty constables were full time police and one sergeant and fifteen constables part time. Those on full time employment tended to be over thirty years old.

The manpower levels of both groups fluctuated as men left to join the armed services, often replaced by others, young men, who were also merely biding their time awaiting a call. up. The initial Special Constabulary leader, Inspector Coe, left to join the Royal Navy in November 1943.

With the notable exceptions of pay, allowances and length of tenure, both groups of reserves were otherwise expected to perform all of the duties of the pre-war regular officers after being provided with similar equipment and training. As proclaimed in a popular song of the period, in the eyes of the public, these wartime officers were not held in the same esteem as their peacetime counterparts.

In another instance of poor timing in the face of war conditions part of the Lea Bridge Road section house was brought into temporary use as a police station to serve the Leyton area in 1939. This followed the scheduled closure and demolition of the police station in Francis Road prior to rebuilding. The police station and attached Section House were also used by the War Department for part of the war.

With the worsening situation becoming evident on the Continent - as the German army smashed its way through the Holland, Belgium and France - the authorities in the United Kingdom were forced into looking at whatever defence measures might be possible to deflect a Nazi war machine intent upon invasion. Discussions took place between the Home Office, police and military on May 13 and 14. It was decided that a general request for volunteers to form a civilian defence corps should be broadcast on the BBC at 9.10pm on May 14 - the day of the Dutch surrender. To cover this appeal by Mr Anthony Eden, 20,000 leaflets were quickly printed and 50 delivered to each police station, it was not enough for the numbers that rushed down to sign on for the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV)- later to be re-named the Home Guard.

Further appeals were broadcast requesting weapons for the LDV. On May 16 the request was for the loan of rifles these, together with spare military equipment, allowing the London area to share out 6,000 rifles to the volunteers. Before the month of May was out, the rifles were followed by successful appeals for shotguns and all types of ammunition. Locally these weapons were issued via the police at Walthamstow; of the 250 rifles passing through the station one hundred weapons each being initially allocated to Chingford and Waltham Abbey sections of the LDV and twenty five each to the Holyfield and Cophall Green sections.

The police at Scotland Yard were a little worried that the whole matter of setting up the LDV appeared to be devolving upon them, and direct involvement in the setting up of an armed unit was not then seen as something the police ought to be involved in. It was soon explained that after the initial involvement, the LDV would look after its own affairs. Fears that the groups might set themselves up on police premises, like an armed branch of the Special Constabulary, were allayed.

Being rebuilt to an austere standard in wartime resulted in Walthamstow station not being involved in the surrender of police station railings to the war effort. The old station and section house in Lea Bridge Road was however involved in this giving up of metalwork. Eighty yards of three foot high railings of a heavy ornamental type set upon an 18 inch high brick base were involved at the old station. The surrender of these railings was first agreed in November 1941.

Additional police premises involved in this scrap arrangements included four sets of married quarters in Newbury Road and single sets in Brookdale Road and Melbourne Road.

A proportion of the regular police officers, mainly those already military reservists, were called into the armed forces early in the war; others were not released for volunteer war service until the middle of the war. A large proportion of this group chose to join the RAF. From immediately before the war regular police manpower was scheduled to be bolstered by the employment of War Reserves and the Special Constabulary Reserve although those air raid duties undertaken by the latter's forebears were undertaken by the new Air Raid Precaution's Dept.

Although there was a war on, crime did not cease. Additional work was thrust in the direction of the police by the new regulations brought about by the conflict. The intense darkness brought about by the black-out, which the station was required to adhere to as much as anyone, caused a massive increase in road accidents, cars and other vehicles constantly hitting each other in spite of measures being taken to prevent such eventualities.

The war brought with it the requirement for everyone to carry an identity card to guard against the possibility of espionage. Even this measure had its typically British aspect. Anyone unable to immediately show his identification to the police in the street was issued with a form that would allow the later production of it at a police station, just as if it were a driving licence before the war started !

Wartime loss of life amongst the regular policemen at the Walthamstow station was low,

Police Orders of March 21st 1941 announced:

'Roll of Honour. Death.

PC William David Bentley 620J/1 19283 died as a result of injuries received from a bomb explosion during an enemy air attack'

This 33 year old Walthamstow based officer on night duty, requested, and was granted, a period of time off duty in lieu of previously worked overtime, he was struck down by bomb splinters on the front doorstep of his home at 24 Tufton Road, Chingford on March 19th 1941. He died of wounds in hospital the following day. He is believed to have been the only officer posted to Walthamstow to have died by enemy action.

On July 7th 1941 the married quarters at the rebuilt Walthamstow station became available for oc-

cupation. The quarters comprised one living room, one sitting room, three bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom and toilet.

The state of disarray resulting from the war caused the prime contractor to suffer a massive loss by the time building had finished in 1941. This problem was later partially resolved, in 1944, by ex-gratia payments of which £998 17s 2d was paid to Courtney & Fairburn, but this only covered the actual loss they made on the contract.

The building escaped major damage in the war years. The nearest major incident took place when extensive bomb damage was caused to housing adjacent to a side turning across Forest Road, an attack on Greenleaf Road itself late in the war having no effect on the police station.

In the post-war years Walthamstow police station became best known for the spread of its social activities. The sub-division supplied a number of the officers singing with the "J Division Male Voice Choir" throughout the 1950s, their activities leading to an appearance on a BBC television variety show in 1958 and involvement in a wide range of community projects. This choir, one of a number of such set up on a divisional level in the days when such highly expensive commodities were acceptable, was eventually absorbed into a Force Choir.

The 'J' Choir were but a small part of the police input to a commercially sponsored old persons social club known as "The Welcome Inn Club". The all important commercial sponsorship for the arrangement came from Bourne's Biscuits, with Harry Bourne himself playing a leading role in the entertaining and feeding of the elderly of Walthamstow.

The third arm of the Walthamstow police of the late 1950s was their sporting prowess, in particular the football. In 1958 the germ of an idea awoke in the station. The 1959, and subsequent, International Football Tours were originally intended as a private police visit by the sub-divisional social club to play the Paris Police at football, the resultant scheme was taken over by the British Section of the International Police Association (IPA) and grew into a media event.

As visits to foreign police forces were, and indeed remain, unusual events the large group of police, players and cheer leaders, involved in the Paris trip took along with them their best uniforms, then the old fashioned "Number 1s". On board the ferry ship across the Channel their intentions came to light and they were feted, and given special privileges, such as a cabin and separate dining space. As they approached the French port they donned their uniforms, finding that there was a great deal of media coverage of their arrival and subsequent comings and goings.

Although the Walthamstow police football team was not in any way brilliant, they usually managed to lose their matches effortlessly, they were subsequently to undertake further IPA tours to Holland and Germany (Cologne) in 1960 and 1961 before the arrangement ceased. Although irregular, IPA contact was maintained beyond this period by way of social events.

The mobility of police was boosted in the late 1950s. Since 1929 police had taken on an increasing number of motor vehicles. Medium size box vans had serviced the emergency calls emanating from the first police boxes in the mid- 1930's. These vehicles had been bolstered by early Area Patrol





More images taken by Roy Price a Walthamstow PC who ran the area police newsletter ©RP

Cars. These being mainly of Wolseley manufacture and the introduction of a single station motor-cycle in the war. The majority of police strength remained firmly with the foot patrols of the Victorian era until the arrival of a number of the Velocette Light Weight Motor Cycle, or "Noddy" motor bikes, in 1959.

The subsequent replacement of these grey motor-cycle patrols by small Unit Beat patrol cars, the "Panda" car, a decade later was, and remains, far from popular. The police were becoming increasingly hard pressed, although now expected by the public to attend emergency calls within minutes, the same public wished to see the return a larger number of foot patrols, a style of police duty that could never meet the response expectations.

With all the extractions of manpower caused by specialist police groups, at a local level police manpower was in fact failing.

By 1971 all the available space, including the one time accommodation, at Walthamstow had been used for offices and yet more was required, it was therefore decided to re-build Chingford as the sub-divisional station in place of Walthamstow. After more than one hundred years as a sub-divisional station Walthamstow was ousted from this role in Police Orders dated January 7 1977 when it was announced:

'Buildings 'J'. On 10th January anew Sub-Divisional police station will be opened at Chingford (JC). At the same time Walthamstow will be reduced to sectional status'.

In spite of this turn of events, Walthamstow retained full facilities for the custody and charging of prisoners.

Shortly after midnight in the early hours of Friday November 29, 1991 Chingford based Sergeant Alan King, patrolling singly in a police corresponded to a call from a member of the public in Higham Hill, Walthamstow. The 41 year old married sergeant pulled his Vauxhall Astra car across the road to block the exit of two men loading a Ford Cortina. At that stage the incident was only another, often repeated, call. It was not until one of the two men suddenly started stabbing the policeman repeatedly and then cut his radio aerial that the situation became out of the ordinary. As the two assailants made off, the mortally wounded sergeant staggered down the road and managed to stop a passing motorist who took him to the Forest Road police station. In spite of the best efforts of the surgeons, Sergeant King died in Whipps Cross Hospital some time later.



Five hours after the Walthamstow incident two more policemen were attacked and wounded in Thornton Heath, South London. Later two men were arrested in connection with both incidents and charges preferred.

Subsequently, a number of memorials were erected to the dead officer. In addition to a simple

plaque, unveiled by the dead officers widow, in Walthamstow police station itself, a memorial lamp and plaque from his colleagues on 'C' relief at Chingford was placed outside the Chigwell Police Sports Club. Finally a street side memorial, erected by the Police Memorial Trust, was sited close to where the attack took place, in Higham Hill.

Although nothing could bring back the dead officer, the law finally caught up with Nicholas Vernage at the Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey, a year after the fatal attack. Found guilty of the murder of Alan King, the attempted murder of two other police officers, Simon Castrey and John Jenkinson stationed at South Norwood, and other offences, Vernage was sentenced to five life terms with a recommendation that he serve at least 25 years.



The other man involved in the Walthamstow attack, Peter Grenfell, was acquitted of the murder of Alan King on the directions of the Judge, but he was dealt with for the attack on the two other officers.



The police station closed as a result of growing funding cuts in the early 21st Century. A by now elderly building deteriorated and became under-used and costly to run and maintain. Leaving its task to a small office in the High Street - not too far from where the Horse Patrol had once held sway. Walthamstow Town Centre Office was at 191-193 High Street, E17 7BX but only open Tuesday to Saturday during the daytime. The only local 24-hour police station was that at King's Head Hill, Chingford, E4 7EA.