

How insular was Britain's New Police?

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This paper re-opens a debate which occurred in the pages of the *British Journal of Criminology* over twenty years ago, between Mike Brogden and John Styles, on the issue of the relationship between what Brogden called the 'Anglo-American' model of policing and the wider world. First I will summarise its details, then note some historical factors which might have a bearing on it, before offering my own conclusion. Brogden talked about the nature of police in Britain, the nature of police in the empire, and the interconnectedness of the two. My analysis today will chiefly focus on that interconnectedness.

Brogden complained of a 'near-total' 'failure to consider the wider contours of the emergence of the professional police'.¹ This stemmed from a 'tunnel vision' and an insular historiography, and he promised to explore 'the imperial circumstances of professional policing in Britain', through an 'appreciation of the imperial context'. He asserts that 'The formation of the New Police occurred within the purlieu of wider imperial ambitions to legitimise alien rule, to ensure consent to imperial hegemony.'²

He castigated the assumption that 'salaried policework was . . . a British invention'. After recapitulating the orthodox Whig explanations for the emergence of the new police in the early nineteenth century, and their later radical critiques, he noted that they all shared two problems. The first was a 'confusion between what the police actually did and the causes that brought them about'.³ The second, though was their ethnocentricity, in which 'the London Metropolitan model . . . was the only possible prototype.'

He listed a number of other models, which are interestingly European as well as imperial. The first was that of 'preventive policing' in the *haut police* style, the example of which he cites is French political policing. The second was another European tradition: that police power was but a subset of administrative power and everyday social regulation more generally. The third concerned policing as a profit-making activity carried out in the private sector. The fourth was of democratic citizen-

¹ Brogden, M., 'The emergence of the police – the colonial dimension' in *British Journal of Criminology*, 27.1 (1987), 4-14, p. 4.

² Brogden, M., 'An act to colonise the internal lands of the island: empire and the origins of the professional police' in *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 15 (1987), 179-208, p. 180.

³ Brogden, 'Emergence', p. 7.

derived police forces, such as emerged during the revolutions of 1848. The fifth, and most significant was colonial policing, which he saw as 'pre-eminently missionary work to legitimise external governance'.⁴ Rather than the sharp polarity between British and colonial models of police, with the latter being derived from the Royal Irish Constabulary, he asserted that the RIC itself was largely congruent with the London Metropolitan pattern, perhaps combining the two in a 'Westminster model'.

Partly by analogy with the history of medical practice in the British Empire, Brogden hypothesised that 'British institutions, from medicine to law enforcement, were transplanted to the Empire: to delegitimise indigenous customs; to impose centralized social control; and to incorporate local society as a branch of imperial society.'⁵ It is worth noting that this is an argument which refers to traffic from metropole to imperial periphery, but not in the other direction. In the case of law, the imposition of colonial codes was a key element in delegitimizing local authority.

Brogden identified several key similarities between colonial practice and the London model:

- Alien rank and file, recruited from outside the area to be policed.
- Recruitment of officers largely from ex-military high ranks – also noting how styles of domestic policing were often exported to imperial contexts by Met or RIC officers who moved there.
- 'task forces for outside excursions' in Britain, to maintain order; in Ireland and the empire, to crush insurrection.
- Style of policing, in terms of attitude to the residuum.
- Preventative function.
- Stated rationale for formation, often fear of the dangerous classes or of riot: but above all in the empire, where imperial police and company police often merged: 'The primary justifications for the new police were the exigencies of trade and company profit'.⁶

Thus, although there were some distinctions between the policing of Britain and the colonies, the types of policing 'are not separate categories but ranged on a continuum'.⁷ In his schema colonial police remained different in some key respects: they were usually at the service of the government rather than (formally at least) of the law – although this distinction tended to break down from both sides. They were often housed in barracks, and received military training. Brogden finally turned his attention back to Britain where, he argued, a process of internal colonisation took place, in which the government used a process analogous to the imperial strategy of indirect rule when it imposed its idea for a police force on the existing structures of traditional constables. This argument was expanded in another contemporaneous article whose title – 'An Act to colonise the internal lands of the island: empire and

⁴ Brogden, 'Emergence', p. 9.

⁵ Brogden, 'Emergence', p. 10.

⁶ Brogden, 'Emergence', p. 12.

⁷ Brogden, 'Emergence', p. 13.

the origins of the professional police', sums this up.⁸ Brogden, therefore made two arguments: a relatively weak one about the influence of empire on metropolis, and a stronger one about the nature of the influence of metropolis on empire.

John Styles' response to Brogden agreed in general terms that more attention needed to be paid to the international context of the development of policing. He took issue, though, with a number of aspects of Brogden's commentary. Brogden, he declared, was looking at sociological archetypes not historical developments, and had not appreciated the complex and local evolution of new police. He also considered that properly 'professional' police only really arrived in the UK after around 1870. Styles's view of Brogden's work can be summed up thus:

it is most unlikely that policing in Britain's extra-European colonies had a significant influence during the major part of the protracted period of police emergence in England. Most of the colonial forces were established in the second half of the nineteenth century, the period that saw the most dramatic expansion of formal empire. There may well have been important colonial influences on English policing during this later period, perhaps through the transfer of senior personnel, or perhaps through central government as it came to exercise an increasingly *dirigiste* influence over English forces and set professional priorities that may have reflected colonial imperatives. It is hard to see, however, given the chronology, that these would represent sufficiently important influences on the character of English policing to oblige us, in Brogden's words, "to recognise the centrality of colonial conquest and incorporation to the development of the British police."⁹

Styles's story, posited that there was much that was evolved from the bottom up about the British police of the early nineteenth century, existing alongside elements imposed from the centre. Overall, this is the one that has been borne out by subsequent research. Notably, the police practice of London appears to have been a product of local rather than central government, although in 1829 central government took the model of pioneered by some parish watch forces, and reproduced it across the capital, while bringing it under its control.¹⁰

Much of Brogden's point about the influence of the core on the periphery is illustrated by many historical examples. For instance, Sinclair has noted how in the 1840s alone, 'information and sometimes, small numbers of Metropolitan Police officers, were sent out to Jamaica, Ceylon, Canada, Australia and South Africa.'¹¹ This practice continued: some imperial police forces recruited their staff from the UK's population in general, but many of them continued to seek to use the talents of serving UK officers. In 1890 the Trinidad force recruited a number of volunteers from the RIC, who had answered an appeal.¹² Often they took their rank with them, as did John

⁸ Brogden, M., 'An act'.

⁹ Styles, J., 'The emergence of the police: explaining police reform in eighteenth and nineteenth century England' in *British Journal of Criminology*, 27.1 (1987), 15-22.

¹⁰ Reynolds, E., *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Harris, A.T., *Policing the City: Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1780-1840* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Sinclair, G., *At the end of the line: colonial policing and the imperial endgame 1945-80* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

¹² *Police Review* Aug 21, 1893, p. 408.

Bennett, an Inspector in the Metropolitan force when he transferred to the Gibraltar Police, of which he was appointed chief in 1895.¹³

The issue of potential influence by, as well as of, empire, remains. This is an interesting area for study, but nobody has systematically really addressed it, until Georgie Sinclair and myself looked at the period after 1918.¹⁴ We concluded that in this period, Brogden was definitely right about British and colonial traditions not being polar opposites: there was significant two-way traffic in many, though not all, areas; ideologies, personnel and techniques. But was he right to insinuate a link in the eighteenth century, and to predict the existence of one by the end of the nineteenth? It is worth noting that Styles also noted the possible effects of 'the transfer of senior personnel' and this issue is one that I will examine further below.

Two key research projects completed since 1987 both served to strengthen Brogden's argument. Notably, in her book *A Despotism of Laws*, Radika Singha has shown how the political authority of the British in India was indeed closely linked to their imposition of legal authority.¹⁵ Secondly, something that Brogden could have mentioned was the impact of imperial property and its owners on the demand for policing. Patrick Colquhoun was the prophet of the policed society, and following Mark Neocleous's work on his influence and originality as a thinker, we can place him as a key exponent of Malthusian political economy.¹⁶ He was able to move from being a propagandist to a reformer in 1798 when the West India Company backed his plan for a Thames River Police to protect the valuable cargoes in London's docks from theft and speculation. In 1800, the government decided to fund it through taxation.¹⁷ This is a clear example of Brogden's point that empire amplified the economic motivations for policing which was pioneered by property-owners and then replicated by the state: 'professional policing was directly linked to the commercial interests of an expanding capitalism'.¹⁸ It was imperial trade which created both a tempting concentration of value and an interest group with the influence to use the state to protect it.

Nevertheless, for the crucial period before 1856, with one exception, there is very little evidence of what Brogden insinuates. To take one important example, it is clear that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, police reform in India followed the precedent from the UK, rather than anticipating it. For example, in the chief cities of the Indian empire at the turn of the nineteenth century, the process of inquiry into the deficient state of public order, and the attempt to solve this problem by a patchwork of police with various jurisdictions and roles under the control of justices of the peace, closely resembled the state of the art in London at the time.¹⁹ During the 1830s, in the newly-conquered province of Sind (modern Karachi and its

¹³ *Police Review* Dec 20, 1895, p. 610.

¹⁴ Williams, C.A. and G. Sinclair 'Home and Away'; the Cross Fertilisation between 'Colonial' and 'British' Policing, 1921-1985' in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35.2 (2007), 221-238.

¹⁵ Singha, R., *A despotism of law: crime and justice in early colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 1998).

¹⁶ Neocleous, M., *The Fabrication of Social Order: a Critical Theory of Police Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Critchley, T.A., *A History of Police in England and Wales* (London: Constable, 1978), p. 42.

¹⁸ Brogden 'Act', p. 202.

¹⁹ Griffiths, P., *To guard my people: the history of the Indian police* (London: Ernest Benn, 1971), p. 62.

environs), General Charles Napier set up a police force which replicated the existing Metropolitan and Irish models, by being removed from the control of the judicial authorities, and heavily resourced.²⁰

The exception, noted by both Brogden and Styles, is of course Ireland. There is ample literature on the nature of the connections between Ireland and the rest of the empire.²¹ Despite the absence of any clear-cut 'Irish Model' it is clear that at least until the final third of the nineteenth century the Irish experience was closer to that of the empire than it was to Britain. The relationship with Britain is less clear cut. Stanley Palmer's, monumental book describing the mutual influence between police policy in Britain and Ireland was published in 1988.²² Palmer, though, concluded that the most salient feature of the relationship between England and Ireland was the difference between the forms of police which were adopted there. Each was a response by the Westminster class to the nature of the threat to authority in the respective country, and the English response was weaker and under looser government control because the threat it was intended to combat was proportionately weaker than that in Ireland.²³ Nevertheless, Peel's experience in Ireland did supply him with one template to test on England, and the existence of a nearby pool of policing expertise certainly affected the adoption of police in England: some large county forces such as Staffordshire modelling their uniform and ethos on the Irish Constabulary.²⁴

But as both Styles and Brogden noted in general terms, the most obvious element of repatriation was the number of police officers in the most senior posts who had learned their trade in the colonies. By the late nineteenth century, there were four ways that police chiefs could get to the top in Britain. The first was from humble beginnings in the ranks: a relatively rare occurrence, impossible in the Met, the RIC, nearly all the counties, and most of the large boroughs. The second was via accelerated promotion through having joined as a clerk: this appears to have provided a way to the top for several police officers of a slightly wealthier background. But this, too, was confined to the borough forces. The third was after experience in the armed forces without specific police experience - although this almost always involved colonial experience in any case.

The fourth was via the Irish or colonial police. Both had a distinct and substantial officer class which it was possible to join directly, providing middle-ranking experience invaluable for a career as a Chief Constable. For example, the Head constable for Liverpool for the last two decades of the nineteenth century, JW Nott-Bower, had begun his career with four years in the RIC, where he gained what he claimed was 'altogether the most complete and practical (if not indeed the only) system of preliminary training for the duties of an Officer of Police, available

²⁰ Griffiths, pp. 67-70.

²¹ This is summarised in Sinclair, G., *End of the line*, pp. 14-19, and *idem* 'The 'Irish' policeman and the Empire: influencing the policing of the British Empire-Commonwealth' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 142 (2008), 173-187.

²² Palmer, S.H., *Police and Protest in England and Ireland 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²³ Palmer, pp. 519-523.

²⁴ Palmer, p. 452.

anywhere within the United Kingdom'.²⁵ The imperial influence was most striking in the Metropolitan force. The first two Commissioners were both from Ireland. Between 1869 and 1886, Edward Henderson, who had begun his career as the controller of the convict settlement in Western Australia before directing Britain's prisons, was in the post.²⁶ James Monro, Commissioner between 1888 and 1890, had been Inspector-General of the Bengal Police before returning to the UK to head up the Met's detective division.²⁷ Sir Edward Bradford was an Indian Army officer of whom Vanity Fair wrote "Having suppressed Thuggee and Dacoitee, he less successfully tackled a tiger."²⁸ The tiger's claws, incidentally, are still on display in New Scotland Yard. Bradford served much of his career in the political department of the Government of India, and his final posting in that role was as head of the Political and Secret department of the India Office in London.²⁹ He was succeeded in 1903 by Edward Henry, another Bengal Police veteran who had played a key role in implementing a mass fingerprint register in India. For thirty years, therefore, the Met was led by veterans of the Indian police.

This repatriated talent was not confined to the Met: for the 1880s, the Manchester borough force, one of the largest and most important in the country, was led by C.M. Wood, who after a very short army career had risen rapidly in the ranks of the Sind police, before moving back to Britain aged 33.³⁰ Also from 1880, Chief Constable H.S. Daniell of Hertfordshire moved back to Britain from the Bombay police. Daniell was used by the Met in 1887 to organise the special constables in London who helped to police the unemployed demonstrations of 1887.³¹ It is probably significant that he was seen to have expertise in coping with such occasions: one talent that colonial police officers brought to the metropole which it was difficult to pick up while rising through the ranks was the ability to police act in a *haut police* style, paying equal or greater consideration to political factors as to legal ones. Daniell also helped to advance another returned colonial policeman, C.E.S. Innes, who began his career in the Bengal Police and ended it at Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire.³² As far as the careers of senior officers were concerned, then, Brogden's vision of interpenetration between empire and home appears to accurately describe the late nineteenth century.

We can also examine the mentality of the British police from below, to see the extent to which they saw themselves as existing in an imperial context. In the 1890s the weekly magazine *Police Review* proclaimed that it was 'posted to members of Forces and their friends in all parts of the world'. It was an autonomous police publication which campaigned for the rank and file, chiefly in the UK but also occasionally beyond, was happy for policing techniques to be repatriated to the metropole from the colonies, and expressed no uneasiness at the arrival from India of senior police with political experience. It pointed out the pros and cons of the opportunities for UK-

²⁵ *Police Review* Jan 23 1893, p. 43; Nott-Bower, Sir [John] William *Fifty-two years a policeman* (London: Edward Arnold, 1926), p. 27.

²⁶ Ascoli, D., *The Queen's peace: the origins and development of the Metropolitan police, 1829-1979* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979).p. 137.

²⁷ Ascoli, p. 163.

²⁸ *Police Review* Jan 2 1893, p. 7.

²⁹ Ascoli, p. 169.

³⁰ *Police Review* Jan 9 1893 p. 20.

³¹ *Police Review* Sept 4 1893, p. 427.

³² *Police Review*, Aug 7 1893, p. 379.

based police officers to get jobs in colonial forces.³³ They were, though, not seen as occupying the same register of policing techniques as in Britain: like Brogden a hundred years later, *Police Review* summed up the North West Mounted Police as 'soldiers in everything but name'.³⁴ It was very unhappy at the prospect that illiberal imperial systems of police accountability might be repatriated, bring with them a risk of 'coercive tyranny'. It saw colonial police forces as having a tendency for excessive violence and corruption which were seen as characteristic of police forces whose rank-and-file was non-European. There were clear limits to the extent of the practice of 'policing by aliens', and a Lincolnshire man in London was clearly far closer culturally to those he policed than was a Sikh man in Singapore.³⁵

Looking at the strength of the systems for local police accountability in the UK at the start of the twentieth century, we have to conclude that they were more than just a sham. Charles Reith claimed that the essence of the British system was consent, to the exclusion of force.³⁶ Brogden sometimes claims the exact reverse – that consent and democratic control are the exceptions to the norm of repression – but at other times is more accurate in describing the alternative forms of police response as best thought of as points on a spectrum.³⁷ Brogden's weak prediction of a two-way association between police in the empire (outside Ireland) and those at home in the late eighteenth century cannot be sustained. But when we look at the responses by Westminster to threats to political and public order in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is evident that, as well as the consistent and continuing export of police officers and techniques, there was a significant importation of the personnel and practice of colonial policing in Britain as a whole. By 1890, the long-standing and on-going import of police from Ireland was accompanied by a significant repatriation from India, which was to continue into the twentieth century.

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³³ *Police Review* Sept 18 1893, p. 459; Dec 18 1893, p. 627; Jan 3 1895 p. 6; Oct 4 1895, p. 475.

³⁴ *Police Review* May 24 1895, p. 24.

³⁵ *Police Review* June 10 1893, p. 295.

³⁶ Reith, C., *British police and the democratic ideal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 7.

³⁷ Brogden 'An act', p. 181.