

10. GUARDING AND POLICING THE YARD

From early days the Commissioner of the Yard was a Justice of the Peace by virtue of his office - the Superintendent still is but his powers are more limited. The Commissioner could invoke the law and put it into action in guarding the Yard. He could call the Service or Civil powers to his help in times of emergency. The first watchmen were untrained labourers and are stated to have been neither satisfactory nor suitable men.

At first the Gate was in the charge of a Porter and this office existed until 26th October, 1801, when Naval Lieutenants were introduced as Wardens. On 3rd April, 1833 the name was changed to Director of Police, the Naval Lieutenants still holding the office until on 1st October, 1860 the Metropolitan Police took over the policing of the Yard,

The Porters seem to have given a certain amount of trouble as we have seen in regard to the Taphouse and Chips. One could read into the correspondence that they were not wholly controlled by the Commissioner. The Navy Board wrote to them direct and seemed on occasions hesitant to punish them. This, however, is more an inference than an established fact.

In the last few years of the 17th century we find the Navy Board worried about theft and sabotage. As a precaution, in 1694, they directed Yard Officers to

"Examine and search workmen as they leave, sometimes at noon and sometimes in the evening, when they least expect it, as also their chests and bundles. Any found to have stores, etc. are to be reported and prosecuted."

This same order directs the Master Builder or other officers to choose

"Suitable workmen to act as Watchmen at night. They are to go round the Yard in Pairs and stop and examine anyone they meet. As they pass the officers' doors they are to give an account of the hour of the night and state of the watch. They are to take particular care to strike the bells as the clock strikes and at the half hours and make sure all watch towers answer."

In 1719 the Admiralty directed that these Watchmen were to be armed and that the Gate was to be closed at 10 p.m. The Watchmen received a fee of one shilling per night.

In 1748 the Commissioner found that the chosen Watchmen were letting out their duties to any wretch so introduced into the Yard for ninepence a night and so making a profit of threepence per night. The Watchmen were also found asleep in their towers and omitted to strike the bell so that people in the Yard did not know the time at night.

An order of 24th October 1764 did away with the Watchmen who had been selected from labourers in the Yard and introduced a Guard of Marines instead. Owing to other requirements for the Marines the old system was reverted to on 13th March, 1771, but on 2nd, June, 1783 the Marine Guard was reintroduced at first as a Captain's Guard of one Captain, two Lieutenants, 129 N.C.O.s and privates. A few years later it was

reduced to a Subalterns' Guard of 36 privates to serve as patrols only along the Dockyard boundary wall. If you examine the wall of the lane which passes behind the houses in Short Row you will find cut into the bricks a large number of numbers, dates, one or two bugle crests (R.M.L. I.), names, etc. and these are stated to have been cut by these patrolling Marines in the days when this lane was part of the Dockyard boundary. Some say the Archway joining two stores opposite the houses of Short Row is the remnant of the Old Dockyard Gate but I can find no confirmation of this.

In addition to these patrolling Marines, "rounders" and watchmen were reintroduced, the watchmen from labourers employed in the Yard, the "rounders" from the mechanics. In 1803 the Marine Guard was replaced by a Military Guard supplied by the Garrison, One of the markings on the wall referred to above appears to read "*Royal Limerick M*". The presence of the Marines had been somewhat spasmodic, depending on the requirements for them elsewhere. The military guard seems to have consisted of three Commissioned Officers, nine N.C.O's, two Drummers and 63 Privates in 1824. A report of 1822 states that "*the Civil Guard was in charge of a Warrant Officer from one of the ships in dock*" and adds that

"they did their duty, there was no thieving and they had become very obnoxious to people in general. The rounders (night) were men of the very best character being Shipwrights".

In 1833 the Civilian Guard was reorganised on a more permanent basis and placed under a Naval Lieutenant as Director of Police. This continued until 1860, when the Metropolitan Police took over the policing of the Yard. Many of us have kindly recollections of that efficient body of men. Their position was regularised by a special Act of Parliament (Metropolitan Police Act 1860) for their employment in Her Majesty's Yards and Military Stations. "*Yards*" covered Dockyards, Victualling Yards, and Steam factory Yards. "*Stations*" included Naval Barracks, Hospitals, etc. This act gave them power in the Yards and within fifteen miles of such Yards. Outside the Yards they exercised power in respect of the property of the Crown or of persons subject to Naval, Marine or Military discipline. They continued in full control until 1922 when, as a matter of economy and to give employment to the large number of Long Service Marine pensioners, the Royal Marine Police was born, and took over a Naval Armament Depot at Bandeath. The R.M.P. continued to expand and oust the Metropolitan Police until they took over the policing of Chatham Yard in 1932, Portsmouth in 1933 and Devonport in 1934.

The force was at first composed of Marine Pensioners of N.C.O. and warrant officer rank acting as constables. The Officers were also ex-Marines. At Portsmouth the Area Officer was a Captain, R.M. Retired, as was also the Chief Inspector who acted as Police Officer in Charge of the Dockyard. Within the area were the Armament and Victualling Depots, Portland Naval Base, Holton Heath, Mining Depots, etc. The Metropolitan Police had employed retired Police Officers as Detective Officers in the Yard and these were taken over by the R.M.P. in an advisory character. The R.M.P. were attested and serving under the Army Act, the C.I.D. under the Police Act.

By 1935 the force was in great demand and the ranks were opened to certain grades of Naval Personnel and its Chief Constable also started the Royal Marine Police Special Reserve under

a Civil Code of Discipline to be enlisted from civilian sources. This was fully mobilised when war broke out in 1939.

Another force operating at this time was the Admiralty Civil Police in the Naval Hospitals, under their own Civil Code of Discipline.

During the war the Chief Constable at the Admiralty had control of these three Police Forces - R.M.P., R.M.P.S.R., and A.C.P. The Portsmouth Area comprised fifty-one Stations with complements varying from five or six men to over three hundred in the Dockyard. On 1st October 1949 these three separate forces, acting under quite different codes of discipline, were merged into one Police Force under a Chief Constable as the Admiralty Constabulary and this is how they now exist. They recruit their members from all directions and the members are Civil Servants (Non Industrial) with the normal establishment, pensions, etc. They are all sworn in as Special Constables, with full powers of arrest, although prosecutions are handed over to the Local Civil Police.

The C.I.D. Section continues as a number of retired Police Officers under a Superintendent (Crime) working within and alongside the Admiralty Constabulary and answerable to the Area Police Officer. The Area Police Officer, an Assistant Chief Constable, has under his jurisdiction the Police Superintendent in Charge of the Dockyard, the Chief Fire Officer and the Police Officers in Charge at other Establishments.

The Fire Brigade is manned by special Admiralty Constabulary Officers with headquarters at the Fire Station, not-one of our architectural beauty spots (I believe it was originally built as a water storage tank for fire purposes and then used as a Timber Store). Up to the recent war the Fire Brigade was made up from the members of the Police Force acting under the Police Officer in charge. During the war a professional Fire Officer (an R.N.V.R. officer on the staff of the C. in C.) was introduced in an advisory capacity. Subsequently he was enrolled in the R.M.P. as Chief Inspector (F.F.) The Area Police Officer was made Assistant Chief Constable and the Police Officer in charge of Yard a Superintendent in 1947. The C.I. (F.F.) was made a Superintendent in 1951.