


View from the chair

As *Police* magazine celebrates 40 years, Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation, looks at the changes in the service over four decades

A portrait of Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation, wearing a dark pinstriped suit, a light blue and white striped shirt, and a purple tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an office or meeting room.

“The biggest changes, however, concern the role of the police, once described succinctly as the protection of life and property, and the prevention and detection of crime. These terms of reference have been diluted by a huge social agenda that seeks to put the service at the heart of a wholly inclusive and co-ordinated effort by the entire community to overcome crime, guarantee safety, and enhance the quality of life.”

As if to prove that there is nothing new about policing, the dominant theme when *Police* began in 1968 was “change”. The Police Federation and the government were busy digesting a remarkable report to the Police Advisory Board, dealing with manpower, equipment and efficiency. It was produced by a working party set up by the Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, to examine criticisms of the state of the service by the Federation. The report said that the acute problems of the service at this time were poor pay, long hours of duty, and mismanagement. The working party said that civilians should take over tasks that did not require police powers or experience. It called for more traffic wardens to relieve the police of parking supervision. On equipment, the report wanted personal radios for every beat officer, and it endorsed a new system called unit beat policing, which introduced the ubiquitous Panda cars to the streets of Britain.

“Our predecessors might be surprised to see how much progress towards a genuinely inclusive service, embracing all colours and genders, has been achieved, just as they would be surprised by claims that the old prejudices flourish beneath the surface.”

The cover of the first issue of *Police* featured a Panda car, which unfortunately, came to be disliked by the public, who wanted to see officers patrolling on foot. The project, in common with several other imaginative schemes to make better use of manpower, soon withered on the vine.

The report was scathing about the quality of management and supervision, and identified this as a major cause of the high level of premature resignations. The working party led to a further inquiry into the recruitment of more “well educated” people, which led to the first Graduate Entry Scheme, from which most of our current senior commanders have benefited.

About this time, T A Critchley had published his invaluable *A History of Police in England and Wales*. Mr Critchley had been the Head of the Police Department in the Home Office. At the end of his book, he gave a graphic description of the state of the service at the end of the 1960s. He said that the social environment was hostile, although the public accepted the cost of the service (then a minuscule £200 million a year), but resented restraints imposed by the law on civil liberties. Of the individual police officer, he then wrote:

“...the policeman stands at the storm centre round which many of the tensions of modern society are working themselves out. He tries to exercise a stabilising influence at a bewildering period of our national life, when almost

everything is in a state of change. He lives in the midst of an upheaval in ideas, morals, religious beliefs, and all the old-fashioned values.”

It is true that the 1960s saw huge changes in British society, but what would Mr Critchley make of the Britain of four decades later? Then, London was bracing itself for a huge demonstration against the Vietnam war, in a year when similar events had brought destruction and fatalities to cities all over the free world. The fact that, after all, the London event was largely peaceful was a triumph for the Metropolitan Police that enhanced the popularity of the force at a time when such a boost was sorely needed.



Race riots in Notting Hill 1976

It is hard now to look back to try to envisage our service in 1968. For a start, it was almost exclusively white. Our predecessors might be surprised to see how much progress towards a genuinely inclusive service, embracing all colours and genders, has been achieved, just as they would be surprised by claims that the old prejudices flourish beneath the surface.

Forty years ago, the idea that women officers would be totally integrated in the work of the service, and that some would command police forces, would be deemed highly unlikely. Today, the possibility of a woman becoming the next Metropolitan Commissioner, or perhaps the next but one, is regarded as a reasonable bet.

The biggest changes, however, concern the role of the police, once described succinctly as the protection of life and property, and the prevention and detection of crime. These terms of reference have been diluted by a huge social agenda that seeks to put the service at the heart of a wholly inclusive and co-ordinated effort by the entire community to overcome crime, guarantee safety, and enhance the quality of life. It is an admirable concept, but will it ever materialise? Perhaps the pages of *Police* in the coming year will supply the answer to that question.