

Investigating the police

John Scott

This inquiry started with John Scott who was born in Harrietfield in 1862. His grandfather, William Proudfoot, had taken on the original 99-year building lease of a double plot when the village was laid out in the 1820s. It lay on the back road of the village, between what became the pub and the United Free Church, and was later called Kirkside. William and others in the family at that time were handloom weavers, but in the 1840s the industry went into decline due to the growth of factory production, and he took up work in Craiglea slate quarry. His daughter, Christian, married a John Scott, who had been a ploughman, but he also went to work at the quarry when he moved into the family's cottage in Harrietfield.

John and Christian had three sons, the oldest was called John after his father, and like his father he started work in the slate quarry. But when he was twenty-one, he joined the police force in Perth, and there he did well. As the website, the history of policing in Britain (<https://british-police-history.uk/f/perth-city-officers>) describes, he went from the foot to the top of the ladder. He progressed from his entry to the service to Sergeant in five years.

By the time he was 55 he had been appointed Chief Constable for the Burgh of Perth. This was at the start of the First World War which brought new problems to the service. There was unrest and a strike over pay and conditions in 1918 but the next year brought considerable improvements. His 20 years as Chief Constable saw much change, including the depression of the 1930s and the growth of road traffic. He awarded two medals; one for Long Service, and the other for the rescue of two children from a fire.

In the mid 1930s he retired on a pension of £366.13.4. He died in 1947, aged 84, at his long-established home at 20 Muirhall Terrace, off the Scone Road, on the east bank of the Tay.

John Scott inherited the family plot in Harrietfield in 1922. As the original 99-year building lease ended it was converted into a feu charter, and the two houses on the land were let out. On his death the property was sold after 125 years in the same family.

The Tayside Police Archives in Dundee have a photo of him as a young man with his two younger brothers taken in the late 1880s when he was in his mid 20s. They also have another photo of the three brothers taken about 1912 when all three had joined the police, one of them in Glasgow.

John Scott's career seemed to me a significant achievement and I wondered about the appeal of the police force as a career, and then about the local bobbies based in Logiealmond.

The Scott brothers about 1888: John seated, James (right) and Walter (left)



The Scott brothers about 1912: left to right James, John and Walter



Rural policing

The Perth Burgh Police had been established in 1811. Earlier policing was a function of the Commissioners of Supply who were the major landowners and most concerned about vagrants. Big construction projects from the 1840s for railways, the drainage of the Pow and later the hydro dams needed special policing in areas outside the burghs.

Captain Gove was appointed in 1842 to set up the Perthshire Constabulary as a separate force from the burgh of Perth. The Police Scotland Act of 1857 required every county to have a rural force and set out their structure and functions, which borrowed much from the army. Constables had to be at least five foot seven inches tall, less than 40 years old, of sound intelligence, able to read and write, and pass a medical.

By 1850 Captain Gove had a force of 35 men, consisting of one Sergeant Major paid 17 shillings a week, one Clerk and five Sergeants paid 16 shillings, six First Class Constables paid 14 shillings, fifteen 2nd Class Constables paid 13 shillings and seven 3rd Class Constables paid 12 shillings a week. One shilling a week was deducted from pay for the rent of a house, which was usually near the centre of activity in the area. Labourer's wages were commonly 10 to 12 shillings a week, so not much less.

Conditions of service were not easy but perhaps not very different from those of many other workers at the time. There were no set hours of duty and they were on call at any time. It was not until after the end of the First World War that constables achieved a six-day week. A constable was reimbursed for expenses incurred, such as feeding someone who had been detained, but not necessarily for travel as he was on duty anyway. Travel was slow and often difficult in the rural areas in winter, but became easier for some with the railways. Men received an annual allowance of £1 for a bicycle from 1890s but they were not supplied. Some police houses were of a poor standard, not ideal for bringing up a family. Many did not include a lock-up, which made it difficult to investigate a crime while holding a suspect.

Some of the records of the Perthshire Constabulary are held in the archives of the A K Bell Library, Perth (catalogued as POL1), and some are in the archives of the Tayside Police in Dundee. The census records and valuation rolls provide further information. Although it would be possible to find out about the men born in Logiealmond who chose a career in the police, and there were several in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this article focuses on the constables posted to Logiealmond.

The Logiealmond Constables

John Grant was the first policeman based in Logiealmond. He arrived in 1859 aged 40. He came from Sutherland and his wife was from Dornoch. They had two rooms in a rented, multi-occupancy house at the foot of the west loan in the village, and the pub was at the top.

He moved on in 1862 and was followed by **Robert Wilson** who stayed almost 30 years. When he joined the new service in 1858 aged 34 he already had 12 years' experience with the police though it is not known where. He came from Cruden Aberdeenshire and his wife from Inverurie. The Perthshire Constabulary records of service in the A K Bell Archives note that he was 6 foot tall and had grey eyes. The Wilsons lived even closer to the village inn than his predecessor. They had two rented rooms in a multi-occupancy house abutting the pub and owned by the publican, John Miller.

Robert Wilson remained a constable second class until 1878 and perhaps did not gain promotion sooner because of an incident during the Methven Fair in 1857 when he was based there. The Defaulters' Book notes he was 'drinking in an Inn in Methven during the hours of duty' for which he was fined 2/6 and severely reprimanded. His colleague John Grant was also present and another constable but they were less severely punished, perhaps because they were not on their beat.

Robert Wilson also features in the records for meritorious conduct. His page in one of the police archives in Perth has a slip of paper inserted: '22nd December 1875. The Warden of Trinity College Glenalmond, Rev W P Robinson, handed PC R Wilson a gratuity of 30/- as a reward for his Exertions in Extinguishing the late fire there' [present day value perhaps £130]. A serious fire in the Warden's house destroyed most of the building and property in and adjacent to it. The College's fire engine was no use and it took three hours to get the Fire Brigade from Perth. Local people including PC Wilson helped the staff and boys limit the damage by breaching the roof, barricading doors with turfs cut from the hockey pitch, pumping water and protecting the property rescued. (The History of Glenalmond, 1956)

He was widowed in 1889 but stayed on in Harrietfield until his retirement in 1891, which is the first one listed in the Register of Pensions for the County. Previously police constables commonly worked beyond the intended retirement age of 60 for lack of alternative income. Robert Wilson's enhanced pension was £40.11.5 net after 47 years' service. He died in 1901.

Thomas Robertson was the first of the Logiealmond policeman to live outside the village, in half the house at Castle Malloch which was roughly equidistant from Harrietfield, the looser group of buildings at Chapel Hill and the mills by the Almond at Millhaugh. He was there for just three years as he died of phthisis or TB at only 28 years of age.

Alexander Mitchell was from Leuchars in Fife and had been a carter. He had been posted to Tyndrum and Rannoch before Logiealmond, went on to Blairgowrie, Dunblane and Crieff, and rose to the rank of Inspector.

Although here for only a few years we have a visitor's comment on policing in the area at the time. The American artist, photographer and travel writer, Clifton Johnson, was sent by the publishers of Ian McLaren's very popular kail yard novels to provide illustrations and he wrote his own impressions of the place in his book, *The Land of Heather*, 1903.

'The public house of the clachan was on the back row. At noon, in the evening, and on holidays, there were many loiterers in its neighborhood, and the sound of boisterous laughing or singing was heard from the taproom. Occasionally the merriment was increased and encouraged by the drone of a bagpipe. The inn stood near a narrow byway which connected the front row of the village with the back, and down this byway, drunken men frequently came staggering after too freely partaking of the wares of the publican. Sometimes a man would be so overcome when he reached the main road that he would throw himself down on the grass that bordered the wheel tracks and lie there for hours in tipsy stupor, while the rest of us that travelled that way passed by on the other side of the road like the priest and Levite of old. These inert figures were most often stretched on the turf near the outskirts of the clachan, with the "U.P." [United Presbyterian] kirk looking gloomily down from just over the hedge. The local "polis" had headquarters a mile down the road, and a lone policeman was often in the village, but he never interfered with a drunken man as long as he was moderately peaceable. If a man fell by the wayside, the polis let him lie there.'

Alexander McLennan was in Logiealmond only for a few months in 1897. Born in Caputh and formerly a labourer, he had been in the force for four years. His career was short as he resigned during his next posting to Blairgowrie.

In November 1896 the Defaulters' Book in Perth Archives records: 'At 9 pm PC McLennan while on duty in Blairgowrie was found by Inspector Cruickshank the worse for drink with a crowd about him. The Inspector ordered him to the office but instead of obeying the order, he drew his baton and attempted to strike the Inspector. Several constables were then called and they with great difficulty carried McLennan to the office and locked him up, when he smashed and destroyed the cell window. On getting sober the following day McLennan sent in his Resignation which was accepted and on paying the damage to the cells he was allowed away and rid of the Service.'

To skip forward fifty years to the conclusion of locally based policemen in this area; in 1952 the beat was merged with Methven and the policeman based there. The last police house was in Milton Cottage to the west of Harrietfield. Willie MacFarlane, who published 'The History of the Perthshire & Kinrossshire Constabularies' in 2011, says: 'I had the privilege of working with and later interviewing the very last Logiealmond policeman - **Jimmie MacGregor**

who was a real personality. Logiealmond Police Station was said to be the very last one in Perthshire which relied solely upon Tilley lamps and the like. Owned by the Earl of Mansfield the office part can still be seen attached to the right-hand side of the house whilst the cell, which Jimmie rarely if ever used according to his wife Beatrice, was attached to the left-hand side of the house completely isolated from the main building.'

Rosalind Pearson