



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED POLICE OFFICERS (NARPO)

## Towards a Century of Service

by

**Angela Buckley**

**O**n Friday 25 July 1919, 500 retired police officers gathered at Essex Hall on the Strand in London. This was the first official meeting of the Association of Retired Police Officers and delegates attended from all over England and Wales, including representation from Middlesbrough, Blackpool, Nottingham and Hastings.

Thus 2019 will be the centenary of NARPO, and I have been commissioned to research their history, in preparation for the celebrations in 2019.

NARPO began in a period of war and unrest. During the First World War, the pay and conditions of police officers had deteriorated considerably. Their wages, which were generally lower than those of industrial workers, did not meet the escalating costs of daily life. After the war, both public and private sector workers took industrial action in protest against pay freezes imposed by the government. There was internal unrest in the police force, as their pay had been frozen and their working conditions were extremely challenging, with a badly organised 'split-shift system'. A shortage of serving officers, in the aftermath of war, had led to additional duties for those who remained on active service.

These difficulties led to the creation of a police union by the Metropolitan Police (National Union of Police and Prison Officers - NUPPO) to campaign against their unfair treatment. Branches were established in other cities, but their action was met with opposition by senior police officers and Home Office officials. However, in 1919, after a police strike called by NUPPO, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, was forced to form the Desborough Committee to inquire into police conditions of service, pay, pensions and allowances. The committee recommended an immediate pay increase and standardisation of pay rates throughout the country. There was no re-assessment of pre-war pensions. The committee also recommended the establishment of an internal representative body for the police, which led to the establishment of the Police Federation. The unofficial trade union was disbanded.

### **A united stand**

Retired police officers had been meeting in London from the autumn of 1918. At the first official meeting in July 1919, the National Executive Committee of the National Association of Retired Police Officers was established. William Turner was formally elected as the first national secretary and George Hodder was appointed as the first president. Both were former police officers of the Metropolitan Police. Richard Harris, editor of *The Police Review*, was the first honorary treasurer.

The Association's objectives were : to seek revision of pensions, which were still based on pre-war pay scales; *and* to seek an amendment to the Police Bill, in order to include all police pensioner widows (widows from before Sunday 1 September 1918 were to be excluded from any changes to rates of pay).

### **The push for pensions**

In keeping with its primary objectives, NARPO engaged in a long battle to bring equality of rights to police pensioners. This struggle would continue for decades.

During the First World War, police pensions were fixed and, as the value of currency depreciated, many suffered considerable poverty. Although police pensions were increased, following the Desborough Committee report, the recommended starting point was Tuesday 1 April 1919. There was no special provision for pre-war pensioners. By the 1920s, some pensioners and police widows were experiencing extreme hardship. The government refused to respond, fearing that any special allowances would set a precedent for other public sector workers. Two decades later, the Association was still campaigning for equality.

The Police Pensions Act 1948 granted pre-war police widows a weekly pension of twenty-six shillings, which was the same as the state pension, but there was no compensation for 'their long years of undeserved poverty'. The following year, NARPO representatives gave evidence to the Oaksey Committee, which was given the task, once again, with inquiring into police pensions and conditions of service. From then on, police widows received their pension under the National Insurance Scheme, with the addition of a small police pension.

In the 1950s, the value of police pensions fell again and NARPO stepped up its support for members. The Pensions Increase Act 1956 awarded further pension increases. However, NARPO still had to ensure that all pensioners received their rightful payment and that the promised changes were implemented. In 1954, they led the initiative to form the Public Service Pensioners' Council, in order to create a more united front.

As the century drew to a close, NARPO was invited to participate in more national events and its status increased. In 1995, the police service held a VE/VJ Commemorative Service at Coventry Cathedral in gratitude to the role played by police officers in the Second World War. The Queen sent a message of thanks and best wishes to the many NARPO members who attended the memorial.

### **Organisational change**

In 1964, NARPO engaged the organisation's first paid secretary, Philip James Smith, a former Inspector in the Somerset Constabulary and chair of the Police Federation. He was awarded the MBE for his work with NARPO in the 1985 New Year's Honours List (*London Gazette* 31 December 1984, p15).

Throughout the decades, NARPO headquarters had moved several times, from London in the 1940s, to Sheffield, Liverpool and Cannock. On Thursday 4 February 1999, the organisation finally moved into its own premises at 38 Bond Street, Wakefield, where it remains today.

The new millennium began well for NARPO with the granting of a coat of arms, adorned in blue and gold to represent the links with the police service. The motto, 'Of Service to Those Who Served', is inscribed in Latin on the scroll.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my research into NARPO's fascinating history and as the Association approaches its centenary, it is still working tirelessly to protect the interests and welfare of retired police officers throughout the country.

There must however, be retired officers who have some fascinating tales to tell, and I ask that if anyone would like them passed to me, would they please contact their local NARPO branch, who will pass them on through Headquarters.

Author :

Angela Buckley is the author of *The Real Sherlock Holmes : The Hidden Story of Jerome Caminada*, and *Amelia Dyer and the Baby Farm Murders*, the first book in a new historical true crime series.

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## 'KEEP TO THE WEST, PLEASE'

said the Traffic Warden in 1722

by

**Paul Dew**

**T**he ancient London Bridge with numerous arches and a double run of houses along almost the entire length is quite a well know image. Slightly less well known, is the law about driving carts and wagons on the left of the bridge, which is said to be the origin of the national 'Keep Left' rule. Almost completely forgotten is the detail of that law and how it was enforced. For that, we need to turn to a ruling made in 1722 by the City of London Common Council who were led by Lord Mayor Sir Gerard Conyers. The wording requires *carts, coaches and other carriages entering the City to keep to the west side, and those leaving to keep to the east side of the bridge*. In practice, this meant *keep to the left*, but the original wording is clearly by compass point, presumably because the very concept of keeping to the left was unprecedented.

Furthermore, to enforce the rule, *three sufficient and able persons* were appointed. These men could be the earliest traffic wardens and were to be present at each end of the bridge every day to prevent *the said inconveniences* (obstruction), and deter anyone from allowing carts to stand across the roadway to load or unload. Carters due to pay a toll had to have the coins ready for the official collector, or faced the prospect of being charged with obstruction. The highest toll then was fourpence (say two 'new' pence) for a wagon with shod wheels, as these were thought to cause the most damage to the road surface.

In 1811, 800 wagons, 2,000 carts and 1,300 coaches crossed the bridge every day, so the toll income was considerable. Added to the rent from the shops and houses along the bridge, an enormous amount of money has built up, and the City's Bridge House Estates Fund is now able to donate about £10 million to charity each year. Not bad from fourpence a wagon with shod wheels!