



KEEPING THE PEACE IN WW1:

The crucial role of the Manx police during the Great War.

Jennifer Hawley Draskau

Community policing in the Isle of Man in the years leading up to the Great War followed a predictable pattern; the crime profile in the Island's towns was one shared by many holiday resorts: petty theft, pick-pocketing, illegal serving of drink by publicans (after hours, to juveniles, etc.), shebeens, public drunkenness or use of foul or abusive language, the occasional affray, rowdy behaviour - holiday-makers blowing bagpipes, raucous auctioneers, touting cab-drivers. Usually, a reprimand from the Police sufficed. Over-familiarity between the sexes in public places was discouraged: the romantically-inclined often resented police intervention: the Island's Chief Constable recorded in his diary:

29 August 1913: A certain amount of trouble on the front last night but not too bad.

One man was very annoyed on being stopped cuddling too much.

In this relaxed atmosphere, officers sometimes indulged the holiday-makers' high spirits, and had to be reminded to sharpen up their act. Madoc notes:

26 August. Inspector Duke reports 2 constables on the last tram from Derby Castle where a hideous noise was going on and they apparently never attempted to stop or check it. Saw them and warned them to be more severe in their manner.

14 July. The manager of the Empire Theatre brought along one 'Tacoma Kid' who had been bound over for galloping [horses] on the shore and firing shots yesterday afternoon. Told him I took a very serious view of it and would not allow this place to be turned into a bear-garden, and he would have to answer for it.

This last holiday season, full of sun and laughter, was the lull before the storm. The situation was to change dramatically with the outbreak of war on August 14th 1914; the impact on the lives and working conditions, including those of the Manx Police, was to be unprecedented. Within weeks, the first batch of (eventually) 25,000 enemy alien internees would arrive in the Island - pop. 52,000, with most able-bodied men - 82.5% - away at the front. The Aliens Act of 5 August 1914 provided a framework of powers under which non-British men could be confined, detained or deported. On 7 August, the War Office sent instructions to all military commands to arrest as Prisoners of War all German and Austrian males between the ages of 17 and 42 - these instructions were cancelled by a second telegram, stating that responsibility for arresting them would fall initially to the Police, who would then hand the men over to the military authorities for custody.

When the need for accommodation for thousands of 'enemy aliens' became acute, Sir William Byrne, permanent Principal Secretary at the Home Office, recalled noting, on a visit to Douglas prior to the War, the 1,500 8-man bell tents which provided summer-time accommodation at Cunningham's holiday



camp. This institution, established in 1904 by Joseph and Elizabeth Cunningham, advertised itself as offering 'good clean fun for young men' at a cost of a guinea a week. The camp was hastily cordoned off with barbed wire, and already in late September 1914 the first detachment of 200 internees arrived. As detainees flooded in, the Douglas camp was supplemented by Knockaloe, on the West coast of the Island. Knockaloe became the largest internment camp in the British Isles. Much of the responsibility for both camps devolved upon B. E. Sargeant, Government Secretary and Treasurer of the Isle of Man throughout the War. In 1920, Sargeant wrote: 'There are not many parts of the British Isles in which the reality of War was more vividly reflected than in the Isle of Man.'

Internment on this unprecedented scale moved the Isle of Man from the fringe to centre stage and placed an additional burden on the resources of the Isle of Man Constabulary: besides interminable searches for escaped prisoners, the monitoring of food rationing, following up leads on the whereabouts of draft-dodgers, escorting enemy aliens to and fro on the steamer, checking weights and measures as well as quality in foodstuffs – 'light bread', watered milk, etc., the Manx police had to deal with internees accused of crimes ranging from attempted suicide, larceny, forgery, false pretences, and breaking and entering, to 'attempted buggery', and the killing and eating of an officer's dog.

It was a time of labour unrest, too, with meetings which required a police presence.

On 21 September 1914, the Island's Chief Constable, Lt-Colonel Henry Madoc (1870-1937), formerly of the South African constabulary, was appointed Commandant of Douglas 'Enemy Alien' Internment Camp. Madoc had risen from the ranks, having enlisted in the Cape Mounted Riflemen as a trooper, and enjoyed a reputation as a good and sympathetic officer. He held the post of Camp Commandant of Douglas for the whole period of the War.

In 1914, the Manx Police Force comprised the Chief Constable, Superintendent John T. Quilliam (later appointed Acting Chief Constable), four inspectors, and 8 Sergeants. Douglas, the Island's capital, had 32 constables and one police cadet; eight outlying districts were the responsibility of a lone police constable. Conventional British police history, especially where it concerns preventive policing, portrays the policeman as a representative of his own community, who, by virtue of a legal authority accorded to him by that community, polices his fellow citizens as a kind of citizen-in-uniform. This notion has been dismissed by more cynical historians as a convenient myth promoted by manipulative authorities. But, while such a conception of the policeman and his social role harmonises perfectly with the aims of authority (and all authorities are by their nature manipulative, or become so over time), it does not necessarily follow that the concept itself is mythological. Police historians often quote a *Times* leader from 1911:

...the policeman [in London], is not merely a guardian of the peace, he is an integral part of social life. In many a back street and slum, he stands not merely for law and order, he is a true handyman of a mass of people who have no other counsellor or friend'.



If the 'citizen-in-uniform' concept of a police officer enjoyed genuine validity anywhere, it was perhaps in the Isle of Man. The Island's community was small, close-knit, relatively homogeneous, relatively egalitarian. Although the Manx police were officially encouraged to work in districts in which they did not reside, the geographical size of the Island and its demographics, as well as the interrelationships within the local community, historical, economic and social, meant that the Island-born members of the Force (and most officers were Island-born, or of Manx descent in those days, as their surnames reveal) could hardly be described as 'strangers policing strangers'.

The dominant ideology and the perception of central government which affected, and to some extent directed, the operations of the Manx Police Force at the time of the First World War were based off-Island. The Senior Management of the local Force were in daily communication with officials who, though Island-based, were the representatives of central British Government. From them the Police received their instructions, but the interaction was more complex: in daily contact with these senior powers and their officials, the senior police officer freely exchanged views, and gave and sought advice and support on issues ranging from the trivial to the nationally important.

With a diminished force, Acting Chief Constable Quilliam successfully carried out a delicate balancing act between the Manx Government and British ('Imperial') Governments, the local administration and representatives of various Government departments and local military bodies, and at the same time ensured the fulfilment of the peacetime expectation of the Police, in the effective maintenance of public law and order, and the prevention and detection of crime. The task was one of unprecedented complexity: the increased wartime paperwork alone represented an additional workload for Police Officers of all ranks; searching for escapees from the camps was arduous for the police, expensive in time and man hours, and the assistance of the public was much appreciated. Relays of search parties often scoured the land for four hours at a time for sightings. Eventually patience wore thin:

'These escapes are most troublesome and annoying,' Quilliam complained, '... the neglectful guards should be punished by the loss of leave and by being made to search until the prisoner is found'.

One of the more striking escapes was the fifth attempt by consummate escape artist Georg von Strang, 'who claims to be a German nobleman and author, but whose appearance suggests that he is a tramp' Quilliam notes tersely. Von Strang had on one occasion attempted to climb the barbed wire while naked, been imprisoned for using insulting language, and for escaping and swimming out to a steamer. Handcuffed, he escaped, entered a smithy and attempted to sever his cuffs. Approached by police, he put up no resistance, accepting the situation with 'philosophical resignation'. A neighbouring farmer brought along his dog-cart so that the prisoner might be conveyed to Port St Mary police station, where 'Sergeant and Mrs Faragher provided a substantial breakfast for the dejected man – the first meal he had had for three days.' The prisoner warmly thanked them for their hospitality.

Inevitably, among so many internees, there were men with mental problems. These were sent to 'Ballamona Lunatic Asylum', where surveillance appeared lax:



One alien inmate strolled unremarked out of the asylum and called in at the local gaol, where he naively enlisted the help of officers to assist him in getting off the Island. Another asylum escapee got as far as the town, where he encountered a resourceful discharged soldier, who shut him

up in a shed while he fetched the constable. The ACC noted that asylum staff were unaware of these defections. He had also learned that staff habitually sent patients to fetch liquor from the local inn - sometimes two or three times a day - and themselves frequented the pub every evening, often while police were out searching for escaped alien inmates. Exasperated with their lackadaisical attitude, he reported their deficiencies to the Government Secretary.



Manx Police including JT Quilliam

At the end of the war, Madoc returned from his secondment to resume his duties as Chief Constable, a post he would continue to hold until 1936. He was awarded the CBE for his wartime service. In 1920, Quilliam, who had ably deputised throughout the war years, retired from the force after 33 years' service. In 1918, the Governor wrote a letter congratulating the Police on their work and on the fact that ten officers had won colours. Madoc wrote to Quilliam, congratulating him on an excellent job performed in a



difficult time. These sentiments, despite their predictability and formality, reflected no more than the truth. Before the War, the Isle of Man Constabulary had been a small local force, well accustomed to dealing with the seasonal problems of a popular tourist resort, including the influx, for periods of short duration, of hordes of strangers who required additional vigilance. Troublesome visitors could be put back on the boat; delinquent local youngsters and other minor malefactors, too, could be exported. Consequently, the Island was a low-crime area. Police enjoyed, for the most part, the respect and confidence of the close-knit community they patrolled, and were often able to use their knowledge of that community in order to form their own judgements. Senior Police officers were in daily contact with the Governor and Government Office; there were regular discussions and a certain degree of consensus management.

With reduced manpower, the Manx Police confronted a massive influx of military personnel and enemy aliens whose presence in the Island was of indeterminate duration (the last prisoners marched out of Knockaloe for repatriation in October 1919). They also confronted ever-changing, often conflicting, decrees, rules and regulations issued by the War Office and other bodies of the Imperial Government, which had to be negotiated in addition to instructions from Island authorities.

The Police had indeed acquitted themselves well of their complex task; the impact of the Great War on all societies involved, and on the Police, who continued to operate within a society in a state of turmoil, was irreversible: there could never be a return, in many respects, to the *status quo ante*.

The Author:

Dr Jennifer Kewley Draskau

Centre for Manx Studies, Isle of Man

Senior Research Fellow, University of Liverpool and granddaughter of a career Police Inspector with the Isle of Man Constabulary.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN
THE POLICE HISTORY SOCIETY
PLEASE CONTACT THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY
MR LEN WOODLEY,
FOXTROT OSCAR,
37 SOUTH LAWNE,
BLETCHLEY,
MILTON KEYNES,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE,
MK3 6BU**

