

EDITORIAL

As I write this editorial I have just arrived back from the Annual Conference at Bristol. To my mind it was one of the better gatherings. It never ceases to amaze me how many people are interested in this subject that we all follow. During the weekend many people approached me with the greeting "I must send you that article I am writing". Two of them have actually done that and they are included in this edition. Thanks to the efforts of people like these and many others I never seem to run out of items to fill the magazine. This current publication

contains a good spread of varying and interesting subject matter. Constabulary histories are represented as are characters like Sir Arthur Young the great police innovator. Simon Smith covers the Sovereign Base Police in Cyprus, a force that I know well from my visits to that island. With the diverse subjects in this magazine I think that this too is one of the better editions and all down to our membership. Thank you and keep it coming please.

Chris Forester

THE FINGERPRINT MAN

Stephen Wade

Cherrill of the Yard and 'French Marie'

On the photographs he looks like a large, lumbering man, bear-like almost. But he is also a man who would take time and work methodically. His sagging flesh around the neck and the sallow tone to his skin indicate a life spent in a sedentary occupation and maybe too much indulgence in good food and pints of English bitter. But this man is Fred Cherrill, revered as the fingerprint boffin of Scotland Yard in the 30s and 40s.

Fred was the son of a Devon man, a country lad who liked fishing and hunting. But he also loved the Sexton Blake detective stories from being very young, and when Fred wrote his memoirs he looked back on the tendency his life had to be a subject of Destiny, as if some force was shaping him for a career in criminal investigation.

One day when he was at home with his father, the local miller's wife came to see them; she was in rather a sweat of panic. Her husband was ill and not able to work the mill. Could Mr Cherrill help out? Indeed he could, and young Fred went with him. That stormy day something happened that would plant an image vividly in the boy's mind. They struggled to get the mill-wheel turning, and Fred's father, shouting through the noise of the wind and rain, told his son to fetch an eel-spear. There would be eels trapped in the stream and they would make a nice supper.

Fred stood by as his father speared and then threw the eels across the room. The boy had to grab them and ram them into a sack. Now eels are very slippery, and after wrestling with a few of them, young Fred had a gluey slime on his hands. He wiped some of this off on some wood, and as there had been a cloud of flour and chaff blown around the mill, the fingerprints of eel-slime showed well, glinting in the light. It was a memory that stayed with him. He was destined to manage the Fingerprint Bureau in 1938, following the retirement of Harry Battley.

Fred Cherrill had several high profile cases, but the one which shows perhaps some of the extraordinary

features of the British criminal justice system in the 30s was the story of 'French Marie.' This was a sad tale of a murdered prostitute and it led to some impressive forensic work on site. In August, 1937, in her little pokey flat off Euston Road, a street-worker whose real name was Torchon took a client home. They had been drinking heavily and bought two bottles to take home with them. They sang and listened to the radio, making so much noise that a neighbour, Mrs Eva Shladover, heard them, as did others. It has always been a dangerous game for ladies of the night, taking men back to an enclosed, private space. This time it was fatally so. Her guest strangled her as she lay on the bed.

The noise of the radio had stifled the sounds of Torchon's cries. When Shladover called, she found the corpse and called for help. A constable arrived, saw the red marks on the woman's neck, and brought in the murder squad. This was D Division at the time, and D S Yandell was prominent in that outfit. He did some good work, but they needed a print man. Enter Fred Cherrill, careful and observant as always.

Fred saw that Elsie Torchon's guest had left prints on bottles, cups and on a salmon tin. Elsie Torchon had a record stretching back to 1920, so Cherrill had brought a copy of her prints with him from the records. He soon made the match and confirmed her identity. Other objects were appealing to his eye for detail, such as a tin-opener that had been used on the salmon, but his way into some constructive work on the scene was on the juice which had spilled over the tin's rim. He took prints from that, but they were two prints, smudged into one. Nevertheless, he took what he could.

On one beer bottle there were prints which were not those of Torchon, so he took those. It would be easy to assume that those were going to be the only artefacts with prints, but Cherrill was not finished; he had his best break when he opened the victim's handbag and found that, though there was nothing in the few contents, there

was the print of the stranger on the metal rim of the bag. The detective had quite a considerable amount of material to work with.

But it was a case with an apparent dead-end. No suspect was named or even hinted at and observed. Time went on. Two years passed. Then, hundreds of miles north in Newcastle, a woman was found strangled in Leazes Park. A couple walking in the snow had actually heard the woman's screams, but were too late on the scene to help. But a man was arrested, and it was noted that the victim was a prostitute. A link was made with London. Sure enough, the man's fingerprints matched the Torchon killer's.

In court, at the Old Bailey, the accused faced a murder charge. He pleaded not guilty and his real name was not used, nor was any reference to the earlier case. He claimed to have merely pushed Torchon backwards, and not to have strangled her. The great Bernard Spilsbury was involved, giving details of the width of the red mark on the neck, and noting that it was too thin to have been caused by a scarf, and was rather more obviously the mark left by a tape or string, maybe a bootlace.

This kind of thinking led to a discussion of the attack being motivated by momentary anger, not something

premeditated. The accused was found guilty of manslaughter, therefore, and received sixteen years penal servitude.

Cherrill's work had made the north-south connection possible, as he had managed to extract a workable print to have in the records when the second crime came along. Did this remarkable policeman have a credo? Only as much as common sense would allow; but he did say, memorably, that he felt the 'machinery set in motion to prevent crime should be just as formidable' as the detection process.

Cherrill impressed in an age when fingerprint work was mainly reliant on a lens, sheets of prints well reproduced, and a reliable magnifying glass. He made a wonderfully successful career from the basic tools and a good nose for detail. He won the MBE and worked on solidly, spending probably rather too much time marking shadows on an image on an overhead projector than in spending time at home. But he had other interests, such as listening to and reading poetry, and drawing cartoons of legal professionals who crossed his path. He may have been a 'back room boy' but when he moved into action at the scene of crime, the crowd parted and he was observed with awe.

IRISH REVENUE POLICE

Jim McDonald



The illicit distillation of spirit in Ireland has had a long history and even today as far as Northern Ireland is concerned those areas where this trade was practiced still remain the areas of activity.

During the 18th and 19th centuries the sale of this unlawful spirit provided a "cash crop" by which some farmers raised money to pay the farm rent. The landlords were part of this trade because they benefited not only by

receiving the due rent but also enjoyed the quality spirit produced. There is also evidence that courts did not actively pursue cases against the distillers. All sections of Irish Society had an interest in this trade whether it was in the supply of the raw materials, the production of the spirit or in its consumption.

The background to the whole trade was that until the mid 1700s each household in Ireland could lawfully distil without licence sufficient whiskey for its own use, provided the still did not exceed 12 gallons in capacity. However the Government suddenly saw the opportunity to raise taxation and so overnight it became illegal to use the home distillery.

Of course the traditional trade could not be disposed of and indeed in 1806 one Excise Officer estimated that in Inishowen in Donegal one in every two houses retained its home still. Yet another Excise man estimated there to be approximately 800 stills in Donegal.

Within the community there was no indication that they considered distillation to be a crime and therefore there was no desire to suppress the private stills. The Board of Excise were not disposed to support the small stills and therefore in supporting the local distillers the local community were seen to be supporting their own neighbours.

There was a major change to the licensing laws in 1812 when only in exceptional circumstances would small stills be licensed. The major distilleries, i.e. those with a capacity of at least 500 gallons, were all situated