



## A History of the Special Constabulary in the Manchester Area

The place of the Special Constable is a long and honourable one in the annals of police history. From time immemorial, ordinary citizens have been called upon to assist the regular forces of law and order.

Traditionally, the constable of a town or village in the days before Robert Peel introduced professional policing, swore in fellow citizens should a situation arise that he alone could not handle, such as on market days or in times of public unrest.

At the 1819 Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, the then deputy constable of the town, Joseph Nadin, had enrolled under him a force of about three hundred Specials, to try and police the meeting of some 60,00 people that had gathered in Peters Field in the town. Indeed, one of the eleven people killed in the events that followed was a Special Constable named John Ashworth, sabred and trampled by the cavalry.

The earliest legislation relating to Specials was the Special Constables Act of 1831. This officially gave the Chief Police Officer of a district the power to appoint Special Constables on a temporary basis as a result of specific occurrences. Thus in the 1840s during the time of the protest marches and demonstrations of the political reformers known as the Chartists, many thousands of Specials were enrolled.

In the aftermath of the murder of Sergeant Brett of the Manchester police in 1867, Specials joined the regular officers and troops who lined the streets of Salford during the execution of the three Irishmen convicted of his murder.

During the First World War, the national emergency and the recall of many regular police officers to their regiments led Chief Constables to enrol many Specials. The Special Constables Act 1914 was passed allowing the Chief Constable to appoint Specials even though "a tumult, riot or felony has not taken place". The outcome of this Act was to establish Specials as a permanent feature throughout the war as opposed to being the temporary force of earlier years. In Manchester companies of Specials, each around fifty strong and commanded by a Leader, were assigned to the twenty districts of the city. An inspector of the regular police was in charge of each district. The superintendent of each of the regular police divisions was in overall command of the Specials on the division and there was a Special Constables Administration Office at the town hall, run by Inspector Webb of the City Police.

In addition to foot patrols, the Manchester Specials also carried out a number of mounted patrols, with the officers acting as traffic police. Where possible a full uniform with peaked cap was provided and for off-duty wear an enamelled lapel badge for civilian clothing was authorised. Many men also wore a badge inscribed "On War Duty". Normally issued to



persons with reserved occupations, the badge could prevent the presentation of a white feather for cowardice by those misguided members of the public swept away in the patriotic fervour of the early war years.

After the war decorated truncheons were presented to all Specials, bearing the name of the individual and the coat of arms of the city or borough that he had served. In the 1920s, the Specials were largely disbanded although the value of their service was not forgotten and the provisions of the 1914 Act were reinforced by the 1923 Special Constables Act. This confirmed the permanent nature of the Specials and allowed for the employment of them in naval, military and air force yards and stations. It also removed some restrictions on the appointment of Specials in Scotland. Also laid down at this time were regulations regarding the reimbursement of out of pocket expenses. However, Specials were enrolled again a few years later during the General Strike of 1926. While civilian volunteers manned buses and the army provided escorts for food lorries and other supplies, many thousands of Specials were required to help maintain vital services. Many volunteers received no uniform, merely an armband, and after the event decorated truncheons were presented by some towns and cities to those who had served.

The next great test came during the Second World War when again the call for volunteers was answered, often by men too old for the armed services, but willing to help out on the home front. They topped up police forces depleted by the return of men to the Services and stretched by extra duties such as civil defence, air raid precautions and the supervision of foreign nationals - friendly or otherwise.

After the war, the Specials remained as a permanent complement to police forces and have remained so until today. At present, after joining Greater Manchester Police, Specials attend a basic recruit training course at the training school in Prestwich. The thorough training includes criminal law, first aid and traffic regulations. Mock court hearings and staged accidents help to liven-up training and boost the Special's confidence. After training they are posted to Divisions. Tours of duty are normally four hours and while unpaid, allowances are available and out of pocket expenses are reimbursed. Their uniforms and equipment are the same as those used by the regulars. In 2002 the shoulder title "Special Constabulary" was dispensed with and the only visible difference that remains now between regulars and Specials is that Specials wear three numerals on their shoulder insignia, as opposed to the four worn by the regular officers.