

The Metropolitan Police: a basic introduction to the records of service

In the second part of his article on the Metropolitan Police, Chris Heather, Advice and Records Knowledge, discusses the staff records held by TNA

Although the staff records have not survived in their entirety, with a particularly bad period between 1856 and 1868 where very little survives, from 1889 to 1909 there are several sets of records available. The staff records are always arranged by one of three criteria: name, warrant number or date of joining or leaving. The warrant number was issued on joining, and remained the same throughout an officer's service; unlike the army where several service numbers could be issued. There are six main collections of staff records, each providing four pieces of information: the name, the warrant number, the division and the dates of appointment or removal from the force.

The *Numerical Registers* are held under the reference MEPO 4 / 31-32.² Two of these volumes exist and the entries are arranged by warrant number order. They were completed as men signed up and they record the warrant number, the name, the date of appointment, the division to which they were attached, and their height.¹ The record also notes how each officer was removed from the force. This was usually because they had died, resigned or were dismissed. Incidentally, it is noticeable from this register that nearly all of them were dismissed for being drunk.

The very first warrant number, number one, was issued to William Atkinson, who was dismissed for being drunk on the 29 September 1829, the very first day of the new police force, having only been in the job for four hours. Of the first 2800 new policemen only 600 managed to keep their jobs. Such a rapid turnover caused Mr Charles Hebbert, the first clothing contractor, to complain to the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police about the extra cost involved in altering and re-issuing so many uniforms.³

The second document available is a single Alphabetical Register, filed under reference HO 65/26. Arranged in alphabetical order of surname it provides the date of appointment, warrant number, name, rank, date of promotion or reduction, and former warrant number if the officer was reappointed. It also specifies the reason for leaving the force.

Thirdly, there are the *Alphabetical Registers of Joiners*, held under reference MEPO 4/333-338. They are quite easy to use, being arranged in alphabetical order of surname. They cover the period from 1830 to 1857, after which there is a gap until 1878 and then continue up to 1933. These registers provide the name,

rank, warrant number, division and dates of appointment and removal for each officer. The earliest volumes also include the names and addresses of referees; a helpful resource for those working on a family tree that might include the father or brother listed as a referee.

The fourth series of records are the *Attestation Ledgers*, held under reference MEPO 4/352-360. These records are arranged in warrant number order and include the actual signing up to join the Metropolitan Police. These include, inside the front cover of these documents, the oath that they would have sworn at the time of their signing. These ledgers also include the division that they joined, by whom they were sworn, and a signature of a witness, which again could be another member of their family.

The fifth series of records are the *Certificates of Service*, held under reference MEPO 4/361-477. These include quite a lot of information on each person but they only survive for 21 years from 1889 to 1909. They provide a physical description, date of birth, the trade that they were employed in before they joined the police, their marital status, residence, number of children, last employer, surgeon's certificate, posting to divisions, promotions, demotions and cause of removal from the force. They are arranged by warrant number and record the answers to the questions that the recruiting officer would have put to the new recruit, and consequently most of the information relates to their life before joining the police. The very last question asks: 'Do you belong to an illegal secret society?'

The sixth and final series of records are the *Registers of Leavers*, held under reference MEPO 4/339-351, of which there are 13 volumes. These are arranged in date order, completed as and when people left the force, but with name indexes at the front. These volumes specify the division, the warrant number, the rank, the class, number of certificate granted - if not dismissed. Leavers would receive certificates according to their character: number one would be excellent, number two would be very good, and so on, and you will find abbreviations such as 'R.P' - Resignation Permitted, or 'R.R' - Required to Resign.

To assist visitors to The National Archives in locating records of a particular officer there is an *Alphabetical Index of Metropolitan Police Officers*, in seven

