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

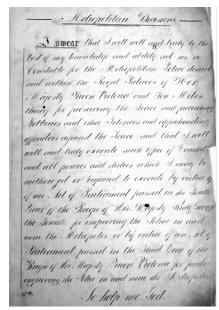
volumes in the Research and Enquiries Room located next to the MEPO series lists. It was compiled by combing through the correspondence and papers for the Metropolitan Police held in MEPO 2, and extracting details of individual men and their warrant numbers. This information has been cross referenced to other sets of relevant records in MEPO 4, MEPO 7 and the HO 64 ledger, and should confirm basic details about an officer, provide his warrant number, and may sometimes include the document reference where the entry was found.

There is also a separate name index to Police Officers mentioned in the Police Orders from 1880 to 1889,

Index to Officers Who Joined 1880-1889, held in series MEPO 7. It includes all men that joined during this period. Police Orders were like office notices - announcements of people leaving or joining or being promoted - and they can provide specific information on individual policemen. They comprise general and confidential notices, and instructions on personnel matters including recruitment, promotions, transfers, awards, retirements, and dismissals. They also contain other instructions or notices to be brought to the attention of all ranks. These records are not otherwise easy to use because there is no index apart from this binder. If an officer joined in the 1880s, this binder should at least provide the warrant number, which is the important key to unlock other records.

Until 1890, pensions were discretionary and officers had no legal right to claim a pension. The Police Pensions Act 1890 entitled officers to claim a pension provided they had served 25- years, and could claim a modified pension or gratuity if discharged medically unfit. There are two main sources for records of pension entitlement. The first is MEPO 5, *General Correspondence and Papers of the Metropolitan Police's Office of the Receiver* relating to financial matters, between pieces number 1 and 90, which cover the dates 1829 to 1907. These records are not arranged by name; it is perhaps not the best source to start any research.

On the other hand, MEPO 21, *Records of Police Pensioners*, have been catalogued by name, at least from 1852 to 1890, and are searchable using The National Archives' Catalogue. The pension records continue in this series until 1993, still within MEPO 21, but individual names have not yet been added to the catalogue. For records after 1890, the original document that covers the date of retirement must be



An example from the Attestation Ledgers (MEPO 4/352)

ordered. The Register of Leavers will specify the date an officer left the force and that can then be found in MEPO 21. The entries in the volumes are arranged in order of pension number, which generally corresponds to the date of resignation although in some instances this chronological order has not been strictly followed.

The pension records provide the officer's date and place of birth, marital status, parents, next of kin, service details, and then from 1923 they include details of a spouse. There are also documents concerning widows' pensions amongst MEPO 21; they are quite clearly marked as widows' pensions papers in the Catalogue, and may provide further

details for family historians. These papers are bound up in volumes, in order of pension number, with one page for each person. It gives the name, rank, reason for discharge and rate of pension. On the back of the page, there is more information about the individual including a description and particulars of his service.

Information about officers killed while on duty can be found in the *Returns of Death While Serving*. This consists of one volume, MEPO 4/2, and is arranged by date order from the introduction of the force 1829 to 1889. There is an alphabetical index in MEPO 4/488, and this includes the cause of death. PC Joseph Grantham became the first officer to be killed on duty, at Somers Town, Euston, in 1830 when he was kicked in the head attempting to arrest a drunken man at a disturbance.

The King's Police Medal, introduced by King Edward VII on the 7 July 1909, was for those 'who performed acts of exceptional courage and skill or who have exhibited conspicuous devotion to duty'. The files on these awards from their introduction in 1909 can be found in HO 45 under the heading 'Honours' and a list of awards, 1909-1912, is provided in MEPO 2/1300. A register of officers under consideration for the award of the King's Police Medal 1909 to 1951 is held under reference MEPO 22/2, and notifications of awards are published in *Police Orders* (MEPO 7) and the *London Gazette*.⁴

Notes

- 1. Women were not recruited until 1919 and their records are not included amongst those held at The National Archives. Some early records for women are held by the Metropolitan Police Historical Museum, c/o Room 1317 New Scotland Yard, Broadway, London, SW1H 0BG.
- 2. MEPO is the acronym for Metropolitan Police records.
- 3. http://www.met.police.uk/history/175yearsago.htm
- 4. Available online and in series ZJ 1