



Keeping London's streets safe

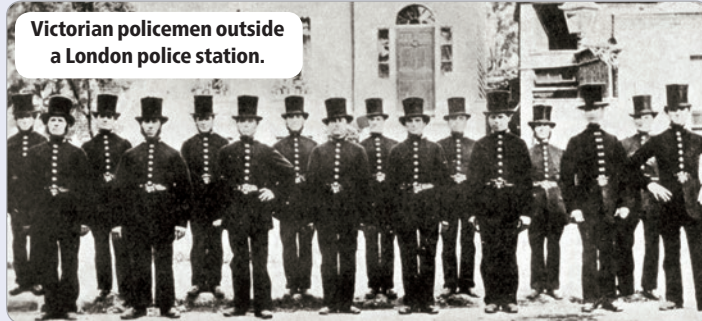
The UK's largest police force was founded on 19 June 1829. Discover the Met's fascinating history.

Metropolitan Police officers are a common sight in London. They've long been a symbol of the city, often featured on postcards alongside London buses and Buckingham Palace. Their job is to protect a population of more than eight million people who live in and around the city, and to keep visitors to the capital safe. The Met is the country's largest police force and it is 188 years old this month.

Law and order in London

Until Robert Peel set up the Metropolitan Police in 1829, London didn't have an organised police force. In the 1700s the city was safeguarded by groups and individuals, including local law-enforcement officers (known as constables), volunteer watchmen and "thief-takers", who captured criminals in exchange for reward money. By the early 19th century, there were 4,500 night-watchmen and 450 constables policing the city.

Victorian policemen outside a London police station.



The Bow Street Runners

In 1749, a group known as the Bow Street Runners was set up. Its organisers – two magistrates based in Bow Street, London – were responsible for maintaining law and order in their area. They hired thief-takers to find the lawbreakers, and later paid people to patrol the streets. The group is often said to have been London's first professional police force.

The Metropolitan Police Act

When Robert Peel became Home Secretary in 1822, he was determined to create a better system of policing for London. On 19 June 1829, his Metropolitan Police Act was passed by Parliament. This new law meant that London's loose network of law enforcers would be replaced by a single, paid police force. Peel's police force started patrolling the streets on 29 September 1829. They wore blue tailcoats and top hats and carried wooden batons.

Making a modern police force

To begin with, many people were suspicious of the uniformed officers – and some were openly hostile. They did not think that it was the government's job to set up a police force, and feared that they might be used against the public. Not all the officers were up to the job – some were even sacked for being drunk on duty.

The instructions for Peel's police force are known as Peel's Principles. Importantly, Peel wanted the public to support his officers; he wanted the police to serve the citizens, not the state (government). This is known as policing by consent and it is at the heart of most modern police forces.

Over time, Londoners got used to having a professional police force. Now, 188 years later, Peel's Metropolitan Police has played a huge part in making London one of the safest cities in the world.

Cressida Dick inspects her officers.



DID YOU KNOW?

The City of London has its own police force. This 1.12 square-mile slice of the capital is actually a separate city within a city.



New Scotland Yard



The Met moved into its current headquarters in November 2016. The building overlooks the River Thames in London and is named New Scotland Yard after the Met's original home, which had an entrance on a street called Great Scotland Yard. The street got its name because it was on the site

of a medieval palace that was used by Scottish rulers when they visited London. An eternal flame burns near the entrance to New Scotland Yard, in memory of officers who have died on duty.

HARD WORK

The first Victorian police officers only had five days off a year, and they weren't allowed to vote in elections.

Women in the Met

Earlier this year, Cressida Dick made history when she became the first woman to take the Met's top job. As Commissioner, she is in charge of more than 43,000 officers and staff. The history of women in the Metropolitan Police force dates back

almost 100 years to 1919, when the first Metropolitan Police Woman Patrols took to the

streets. However, female police officers were not allowed to make arrests until 1923. Sofia Stanley was the Metropolitan Police's first female police officer and designed the uniform worn by women at that time.



Cressida Dick



Sofia Stanley

Who was Robert Peel?

Robert Peel was a politician who first became a member of parliament (MP) aged 21. Over the course of his career he was Prime Minister twice and formed the first ever Conservative government. Peel not only created London's first organised police force, he was also responsible for passing other important laws, including some that improved working conditions for children. He is considered to have been a very good politician but is said to have been a proud and awkward individual. Peel died in London, aged 62, from injuries caused by falling from his horse.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Nicknames for police officers include bobby and peeler, after Robert Peel (Bobby is short for Robert).