

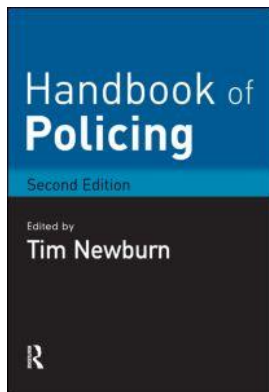
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Handbook of Policing

Tim Newburn

Introduction: understanding policing

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Tim Newburn

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Chapter I

Introduction: understanding policing

Tim Newburn

Image and reality

Social scientific literature is now dominated by discussions of globalisation, risk, new forms of modernity and cognate terms. Though varied in focus, what this literature shares is a concern with understanding what is perceived to be the very significant and rapid changes affecting our society and those around us. These changes – however described – permeate all aspects of public life, including policing. What is in little doubt is that we live in complex times. That the police play a central role in the maintenance of order is rarely questioned. Most opinion polls asking questions about security return the finding that the public appetite for ‘more bobbies on the beat’ remains undimmed. Yet, it is also the case that people are now much more sceptical about the abilities of the police than once would have been the case and are likely to be much more critical about their interactions with police officers. Writing in the inter-war years Charles Reith, in his ‘orthodox’ history of the police, suggested that, ‘What is astonishing . . . is the patience and blindness displayed both by citizens and authority in England over a period of nearly a hundred years, during which they persistently rejected the proposed and *obvious police remedy* for their increasing fears and sufferings’ (1938: v, emphasis added). It is rarer now for policing to be viewed as an obvious remedy for the problems that confront us for, as Reiner (2000: 217) notes, ‘police and policing cannot deliver on the great expectations now placed on them in terms of crime control’. Nevertheless, there remains considerable residual faith in this particular state institution.

It is worth reminding ourselves that public constabularies, in the sense we now know them, are less than two centuries old. Though there has only been concentrated scholarly attention on policing for a small part of that period, the police and policing are now a staple of sociological, criminological and popular discourse. There was considerable resistance to the introduction of the new police in the nineteenth century and, indeed, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that anything like a broad degree of social legitimacy



was achieved in the UK. By any standards, the public police service is now a formidable social institution. Its size and its cost, for example, have grown dramatically.

The political situation in which policing operates has also changed markedly. Up until the late 1970s there existed broad agreement between the main political parties on questions of 'law and order'. The end of this bipartisan consensus led to an intense battle over criminal justice generally, and arguably policing most particularly. The Thatcher administration signalled its desire to be perceived to be supportive of the police service by implementing the Edmund Davies pay agreement soon after reaching office in 1979. This led to a very substantial increase in police expenditure – doubling from £1.6 billion in 1979 to £3.4 billion in 1984, though with only a six per cent increase in staff levels. Although the pattern has been far from smooth since, expenditure has continued to rise, reaching £7.7 billion by 2000 and anticipated to rise to almost £13 billion during 2007–8 (*Hansard*, written answers 14 January 2008). This represents very nearly one half of total government expenditure on the criminal justice system. A significant element of recent increases in expenditure have been devoted to attempts to increase police numbers. Whilst this has by no means always been the focus of increased expenditure historically – as the Edmund Davies increases illustrate – nevertheless, police numbers have themselves increased substantially in recent decades. There were in the region of 50,000 police officers in 1955. This had increased to approximately 80,000 by 1975 and 118,000 by 1995. Total police officer strength stood at almost 142,000 by March 2007.

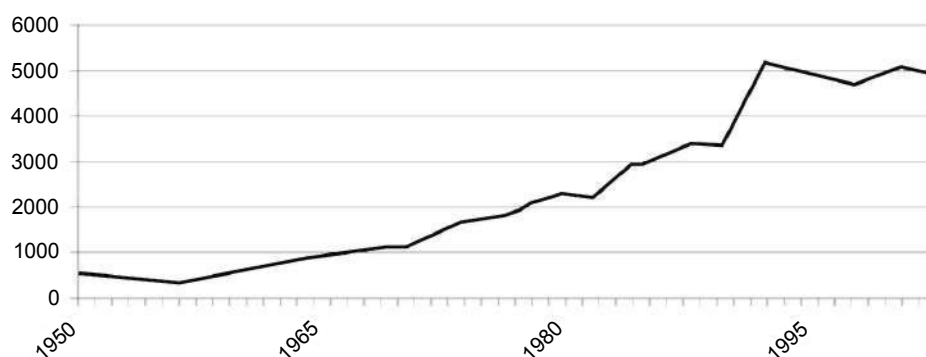
Such increased expenditure in part reflects the growing workload facing the police service. Whatever their other shortcomings, one thing that officially recorded crime rates are able to indicate fairly accurately is the number of calls on police time. Quite clearly this has expanded vastly in the post-war period. Notifiable offences recorded by the police, for example, grew from slightly over half a million in the early 1950s to substantially in excess of five million per annum at the beginning of the new century. The most dramatic increase occurred between 1980 and 1992, during which period recorded crime more than doubled.

There have been times when politicians assumed that increased expenditure on the police would lead, almost mechanically, to greater effectiveness in crime control (see, for example, Baker 1993). Whilst this is no longer the case, and indeed there is considerable scepticism in some quarters about police efficiency and effectiveness, there remains considerable competition between the political parties to be seen to be supportive of the police. Recent years have seen the police service become a much more effective lobbying body. ACPO, in particular, has become a key player in the politics of crime control and, in the main, Home Secretaries have been reluctant to take on the police service. One of the clearest ways in which political support can be delivered is through a commitment to provide increased resources and this has been a political stance that, for understandable reasons, the police service has been keen to encourage – and has generally managed to do successfully.

More problematic, however, has been the relationship between the police and the public. During the past 20 years there has been a substantial decline

in public satisfaction with the police, with the proportion of people saying that the police do a 'very good' job declining from 43 per cent in 1982 to 24 per cent in 1992 and then again to 20 per cent in 2000 (see Figure 1.1), though overall levels of approval remain relatively high.

Figure 1.1 Recorded crime, England and Wales, 1950–2000



Source: Criminal Statistics England and Wales

In part, the continuing faith in the police relates to the important role that they have played, at least up until relatively recent times, as a focus for a particular conception of English identity and social order (Reiner 1991; Loader and Mulcahy 2003). More particularly, for the bulk of the post-war period the police have been able to call upon a large degree of support from significant sections of the population not because – or not *entirely* because – of what they do, but because of what they represent. The immediate post-war period, and the fictional figure of PC George Dixon, has come to take on a particular resonance in relation to British policing (see Reiner, this volume). Why this supposed 'golden age' has become such a powerful symbol is difficult precisely to fathom but, as Loader (1997: 16) suggests, it is likely not only to be 'about the allure of a seemingly safer and more harmonious era; it is also a means of recalling just how great this medium-sized, multi-cultural, economically-declining, European nation once was'. Rising crime levels, together with a decline in faith in the efficacy of criminal justice generally, and the police in particular, together with a raft of socio-political changes to our way of life, have created significant challenges to this symbolic image of policing. Nevertheless, it remains the case that there is an almost endless public fascination with the police as an organisation and with policing as a set of activities.

Nowhere can this fascination be seen more clearly than in the changing media representations of policing in post-war Britain. As Reiner (this volume) and others note, important elements of the shifting nature of policing have been captured in the changing characters and representations in television drama, from the romantic and politically uncontroversial society policed by George Dixon, through the gradual emergence of an increasingly complex world of the 1960s and 1970s (*Z-Cars* and subsequently the regional crime

squad in *Softly, Softly*), to the acknowledgement, and implicit acceptance, of police rule-breaking in the Flying Squad in *The Sweeney*. In some respects, the multiple representations now available on television – from hard-edged soap opera (*The Bill*)¹ through attempts to recover a ‘golden age’ (*Heartbeat*) to farce (*Thin Blue Line*) and fly on the wall (*Rail Cops*, etc.) all the way to historical comparison (*Life on Mars*) – reflect the somewhat fractured and plural nature of contemporary policing, but also the somewhat more problematic relationship between policing and English/British national identity.

In part, such dramatic representations have much to tell us about the realities of policing, though they are also a potent source, reproduction and reinforcement of the myth and mystique that surrounds policing. As I have already implied, in recent times the police have become much more adept at managing and manipulating images and messages about what they are and what they do. Attempting to understand the changing nature of police representation, and how this relates to the realities of policing ‘on the ground’, is a central aim of this book. So plentiful, and sometimes so seductive, are the images of policing now available, that it is relatively easy to persuade ourselves that we understand and somehow ‘know’ policing. The *Handbook* focuses on the realities of contemporary policing, exploring the nature and organisation of policing activities, how policing is conducted, the problems and controversies that exist, and the key issues and debates that are likely to shape its possible futures.

Studying policing

In recent decades social scientists and historians have become increasingly preoccupied with policing. The socio-political changes of the 1960s permissive era set in train a number of changes in policing, as well as stimulating considerable academic thought on how policing should be theorised and understood. Since that period there has been a very significant expansion in both the sociology of the police and sociology for the police (Banton 1964). In recent times, in part reflecting the apparently increasingly complex policing division of labour, the sociology of policing has also grown substantially (Jones and Newburn 1998). At the same time ‘law and order’ in general, and policing in particular, have also become much more politicised and contested.

Much early work on policing focused on the nature of the police role and of police ‘culture’. In particular, work by Banton in the 1960s, Cain in the 1970s and Smith and Gray in the 1980s set the parameters for much that has followed. Banton’s observation that the police officer is primarily a ‘peace officer’ rather than a ‘law officer’ spending relatively little time enforcing the law compared with ‘keeping the peace’ had a profound influence on subsequent criminological work in this area. Subsequent work also focused on what were primarily functional definitions of police work with Cain (1979), for example, arguing that the police ought to be defined in terms of their key practice – the maintenance of order. Despite criticism, much academic writing continued in this tradition of analysing what policing *is* in terms of what constabularies *do*, and much such work focused on the idea that a considerable



portion of police work should be understood in terms other than crime control, or even order maintenance (Punch 1979). In contrast to studies focusing on the 'police function', work by Bittner and others focused on the legal capacity brought by the police to their activities. Starting from the position that neither the public generally, nor the police in particular, succeed particularly well in describing and justifying what it is that the police do, Bittner argued that it is the police's position as the sole agency with access to the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of force which makes them distinctive and accounts for the breadth of their role. As he put it:

the police are empowered and required to impose or, as the case may be, coerce a provisional solution upon emergent problems without having to brook or defer to opposition of any kind, and that further, their competence to intervene extends to every kind of emergency, without any exceptions whatever. This and this alone is what the existence of the police uniquely provides, and it is on this basis that they may be required to do the work of thief-catchers and of nurses, depending on the occasion (1974: 17).

Bittner's crucial contribution was to identify what was distinctive about the role and contribution of public constabularies.

As I suggested above, much of the early sociology of policing tended not to allow its gaze to stray much beyond the public police. Recent years have seen much greater attention paid to the private security sector and to the range of policing providers that lie somewhere between the 'public' and 'private' spheres (see Shearing and Stenning 1987; South 1988; Johnston 1992; Jones and Newburn 1998; Johnston and Shearing 2003), though the bulk of criminological attention continues to be paid to public constabularies – and this is the case for this volume too. The title of this volume – *The Handbook of Policing* – is deliberately chosen. Though much space is devoted to the nature and work of the police, wherever relevant authors have focused attention on other policing bodies. As such, it is very much a child of its time, taking the increasingly complex, fragmented and plural nature of policing as a major focus.

Two other major additions transformed the study of policing during this period. The first was the emergence of a set of critical historians who, in Reiner's (2000) terms, challenged the 'cop-sided view of history' with a revisionist 'lop-sided' account (e.g. Storch 1975). The result is a much richer history of policing arrangements, and one that is able to grasp the extraordinary story of increasing police legitimacy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries whilst allowing for the fact that the power of the police is always contested (see, in particular, Reiner 2000, ch. 1). The second development was the emergence of a form of policy-oriented (administrative) criminology focusing in the main on police activity, operations and performance. Much of this was funded by government and was influenced by the dominant research paradigm emerging in the Home Office in particular in the late 1970s and 1980s (see e.g., Heal *et al.* 1985).

Work on the police has continued to expand since that time. Indeed, from a period 30 years ago in which the police service was, perhaps understandably,





somewhat nervous about, and on occasion actively resistant to, criminological research, we now find ourselves in a position where most forces have some form of internal research capability, and all forces actively encourage research. The sub-discipline of police studies is now well established within British criminology and beyond. Both professionals within the police service itself and students studying criminology and related subjects are increasingly involved in the study of policing in its broad sense. Courses are proliferating and this shows no sign of diminishing. A number of specialist journals cater for, and facilitate, this market in ideas, and the range of books on policing – including book series – is increasing all the time. It is for this territory that the *Handbook of Policing* is designed.

The volume

This volume aims to provide a broad introduction to policing – attractive to students at all levels and to practitioners – without sacrificing its commitment to high quality scholarship. The intention in this volume has been to cover all the major aspects of policing – in its broad sense – inviting experts in their particular fields to address key themes in the history, theory and practice of policing. This is a range that is difficult to capture within a single book and, certainly, existing textbooks in this area have only attempted to cover part of this terrain. Thus, the *Handbook of Policing* has a broader focus than has hitherto been possible in a single volume on policing, and one of its aims, therefore, is to attempt to provide the core reading for an entire course on policing, supplemented by other books and journals.

Clearly, the amount of criminological attention now paid to the police, and the quantity of research being undertaken, is significantly greater than in previous periods. The *Handbook* seeks to increase awareness of existing research, to provide the means with which to assess the major claims of such work, and to outline the social, political and cultural context in which the nature of policing is to be understood. It covers issues of theory, principle and practice, and seeks to engage with the major debates about the direction of policing and to explore the latest developments in the field.

As I have suggested above, its other main aim is to bring high quality scholarship, using experts in particular fields, to each of the topics in the volume. I noted in the first edition that I was extraordinarily fortunate that all of the authors that were originally approached to contribute to what we felt was a very ambitious volume agreed to do so. They were given a somewhat unenviable task: to attempt to capture, in a relatively short space, the key ideas, arguments and debates in their particular field in a way that would do justice to the complexity of the ideas, whilst remaining accessible to students. I am enormously grateful to them all for the hard work that has gone into achieving this.

One of the most difficult decisions in planning the volume was deciding where to set the boundaries, and what to leave out. In the event, most critics took little exception to the way in which the book was organised and, if sales are a reasonable measure, then it appears students have found it extremely



useful also. We have not sought radically to change a successful product and in the main the second edition is a consolidation and update of the first. There are, however, a few differences worth noting. We were always aware when putting together the first edition that, for perhaps understandable reasons, there was going to be a substantial emphasis on policing in England and Wales. An early plan to make the volume comparative was quickly abandoned as being so complex as to be unrealisable. However, in planning a second edition we wanted to correct that emphasis somewhat and to that end commissioned new stand alone chapters on policing in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. In addition, we have added a new chapter on forensics. One of the big changes in the last few years has been the prominence given to forensic science of various stripes, and we felt it impossible to publish a second edition of the *Handbook* without trying to acknowledge this developing body of activity.

The *Handbook* is aimed at students, researchers, teachers and practitioners. In relation to students the *Handbook* is appropriate for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in criminology and its sub-disciplines, as well as sociology, social policy, politics and management. There is also a very considerable practitioner audience consisting of police officers, either at management levels within the police service or those likely eventually to reach such levels, together with those working in other organisations whose work involves crime and policing related issues. The police service is currently quite well served in terms of specific and targeted training manuals. At a time when policing is under pressure, and to a degree is beginning, to devolve responsibility to local levels, police service staff – both officers and civilians – are increasingly having to manage staff and resources, are devising and implementing policing plans, accounting for budgets, and are taking on a set of managerial and administrative duties unknown to their predecessors. As a consequence, the knowledge required by the modern officer is in many respects quite different from what would have been distilled from traditional training programmes.

For the increasing number of highly educated and reflective officers working within an increasingly professionalised service, we hope that the *Handbook* will continue to prove to be a comprehensive and authoritative source on policing that they can turn to.

That said, the volume is critical in intent. Every effort has been made to think *critically* about the nature of policing and the issues affecting it. In some respects, policing is intrinsically conflictual and controversial. In addition, it has become the site of ever-greater political contestation. This volume reflects both this nature and the content of these debates. Authors write from different perspectives – from critical criminologist to chief constable. As a consequence there is much to be gained from reading chapters in conjunction with each other, contrasting different perspectives and approaches. What links the contributions is a commitment to critical scholarship; a willingness to question and provoke but, overall, a commitment to examining and evaluating evidence. All the chapters were completed in 2008. They are therefore up-to-date, drawing on the most recently published writing and research. Recent years have seen a number of important developments:



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- The Police Reform Act 2002 has further stimulated the pluralisation of policing.
- Increasing technological sophistication has led to a number of significant potential advances including DNA profiling and a more general emphasis on the use of intelligence in policing.
- A number of political developments, not the least of which was the terrorist attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon, have had an important impact on international and transnational policing.
- Some significant changes have been made to the nature of the police organisation including both the development of new central police organisations such as NPIA and SOCA and increasing emphasis on basic command units.
- Recruitment to, and promotion within, the police service has changed with greater emphasis placed on formal educational qualifications – perhaps the most obvious illustration of increasing police professionalism.
- Women officers remain a minority within the police service, but in recent years have become increasingly visible at ACPO level.
- Training of officers at all ranks is being reorganised and NPIA now has broad overarching responsibility in this area.
- Although it is now almost a decade since the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report, it continues to have a very substantial influence in relation to questions of policing and diversity.
- Much greater emphasis is now placed upon partnership or multi-agency working, particularly since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and subsequent legislation.
- New structures and new technologies have led to greater attention being paid to ‘new’ forms of criminality (such as cybercrime) and to some ‘older’ forms as well (such as white collar and organised crime).
- The changing political economy of Britain has stimulated the emergence of a variety of non-public ‘providers’ in all areas of public life, including policing (Reiner 2007).
- Changing political circumstances have reworked debates around governance and accountability, leading to more emphasis on performance management on the one hand and to a consideration of ethics and human rights on the other.
- The limitations of traditional systems of justice have led to a greater willingness to experiment with new developments (or modernised forms of traditional techniques) such as restorative justice.

The *Handbook* looks at all of these questions and more. This remains the most ambitious volume on policing at the current time, and it is one that seeks to take stock of the full range of developments and issues in this most important



of public services. In staking out its territory, the volume aims to set out the parameters for police studies as an important sub-discipline of criminology and to provide the basis for teaching in this area.

In covering this ground the volume is divided into four major sections. The first considers policing in its comparative and historical context. What are the major models of policing and how did they develop? How is policing best theorised and understood? How was policing organised and arranged before formalised state agencies became the norm in liberal democracies? How has policing developed in the past two centuries? All too often books on criminal justice generally, or policing in particular, avoid much discussion of history and origins. It is simply not possible, however, to make sense of where we are today unless we have a clear sense of how we got here, and how it might occur, and has occurred, differently elsewhere. The chapters in the first section of the book explore the development of policing internationally and historically, looking both at policing before the police and policing in its contemporary setting.

The second section of the volume looks at the context within which policing takes place. Policing, as I have alluded to, appears to be becoming increasingly fragmented and complex. Despite this, texts frequently assume that readers come fully equipped with a fairly comprehensive knowledge of structures and systems. This is more often than not a mistake. This volume seeks to describe, to analyse and to explain the contemporary topography of policing. What do international and domestic policing structures look like? How is the police service organised domestically? What do rank structures and organisational hierarchies have to tell us about modern policing? How does policing in England and Wales compare with Scotland and Northern Ireland? How is policing in its broad sense (the extended family of policing appears to be the currently favoured term) to be understood? How have international and, increasingly, transnational forms of policing developed? What powers are available to the police, how do they exercise them, and what might this tell us about the nature of police organisational cultures? And how is policing represented and understood in our media-saturated times?

The third section looks at how the police operate. How do the police analyse and investigate crime? Underneath the rhetoric and claims about the power of IT, is crime analysis revolutionising policing or are the changes more superficial? What do some of the major models of policing such as 'problem oriented policing' and 'intelligence led policing' mean, how widespread are they and what impact do they have on day-to-day policing? What approach do the police take to such issues as crime reduction and community safety, drugs and the policing of the streets? Have responses to terrorism and organised crime changed as a result of globalisation and the growth of transnational policing bodies?

The final section of the *Handbook* examines a range of key themes in contemporary policing. Some of these are debates of relatively long standing – such as that over governance and accountability – others are somewhat newer on the policing scene – such as ethics. However, what these and a number of other chapters in this section share is a common concern with how police behaviour and performance are determined, managed and governed.

All public services, including the police, are now subject to an increasingly bureaucratic system of performance management. This, together with some of the higher profile examples of apparent 'failure', have led to renewed scrutiny of police leadership and the chapters in Part IV explore both the general governance of the police and the more specific questions of what makes for effective management and leadership. As many chapters throughout the volume argue and illustrate, there is an almost inevitable tension between quantitative performance management and a focus on the quality of service being delivered. The treatment of women – by the police, as well as within the organisation – and more recently, the policing of minority ethnic communities, have drawn particular attention to some of these tensions and the way in which they are operationalised. The chapters which focus on these issues put questions about values, attitudes and appropriate conduct centre stage. This is examined in relation to leadership, to the treatment of staff, to the nature of police–community relations, as well as to the possible reorientation of policing styles through the adoption of restorative justice-influenced practices. Arguably, given the power of the police to exercise potentially violent supervision, it is precisely these questions – of values and ethics – that should dominate both our practical and our normative debates about the future of policing.

Note

- 1 Which first appeared as a one-off one-hour TV drama, entitled *Woodentop*.

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