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FIT FOR PURPOSE: INSTITUTIONS FOR DISPENSING LAW AND JUSTICE: Devonport Police

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FIT FOR PURPOSE: INSTITUTIONS FOR DISPENSING LAW AND JUSTICE

Devonport Police

Devonport Borough Police In 1808 a privately funded force, based on the Thames River police and one of the first of its kind, was established at Plymouth Dock but failed to flourish because of opposition from Plymouth. The **Municipal Corporations Act 1835** permitted county boroughs to set up and fund their own police force supervised by the local Watch Committee. In 1838 a new Police Station was built at the rear of the Guildhall, partly as a money saving exercise for local ratepayers. Initially the new Borough force comprised one Superintendent and 12 constables but this expanded rapidly to deal with the burgeoning problems of crime and low level offending and mix of residents, military personnel and visiting sailors. The **County and Borough Police Act 1856** restructured many county forces including Devon, but because of its population Devonport kept its Borough force and by 1892 had increased to 59 police officers. Devonport Police. Pay at the time: Inspectors, 23s 4d; Sergeants, 21s; first class constables 18s 1d; second class, 17s 6d; third class, 16s 4d; fourth class 15s 2d (the latter was a probationary class, after 15 weeks constables could be promoted to a higher class.



Ker Street Police Station

These **police cells** held those arrested at night and thought likely to abscond (back to barracks or aboard ship where they would be less easily extracted or identified) before they could appear before the magistrates the following morning; or persons remanded by the magistrates for up to one week to gather more evidence about them and their offences. A small number awaited transfer, usually to Exeter jail, to appear at the Assizes, charged with serious crimes such as murder and rape.



How times have Changed... or Not?

1912: Population 81,078 Devonport Borough Police - Head Constable, 5 Inspectors (inc. Chief Clerk), 10 sergeants and 76 constables and 45 Special constables. The photograph (left) is of their Annual Inspection.

Judicial Statistics England & Wales 1912: 136 known indictable crimes and 153 persons proceeded against of which 101 convicted. Summary offences including petty crime: 725 persons proceeded against, 690 convicted and 91 case proved and order made without conviction. Annually 36 convictions for drunkenness per square mile.

2017 Population: c.15,000 (2011 Census) Devonport now part of Plymouth Command Unit.

Devonport Policing team - 1 Inspector, 1 Sergeant, 1 Constable and 5 PCSOs.

[Police.UK crime Map](#) 1,127 reported crimes (indictable and summary offences) for the year 2016 averaging 100 per month, for example 98 crimes were reported in August 2017 typically anti-social behaviour, violence and sexual offences.



Amalgamation In 1914 Devonport was amalgamated with the Plymouth police force. The last meeting of the Devonport Watch Committee took place on 15 October 1914. A new police station was built on Exmouth Road supported by police telephone boxes and pillars, the forerunner of the 999 system used today. Plymouth was one of the first forces to introduce pillars, when a member of the public opened the door they were automatically connected to the Police exchange.

In the late twentieth century the Police Station was housed in a former bank at 7 Marlborough Street. Despite a petition signed by 400 residents it was closed to the public for 2 years from 2004-2006 as it was no longer fit for purpose for health and safety reasons. It is now The Old Station a fish and chip shop.

A New State of the Art Building

In 2004, Inspector Sally Hutchings petitioned the Police Authority for a new station: 'Devonport's community needs a police station where we can bring everyone together' (*Plymouth Herald*, 30 October 2012). Part of the regeneration project, Clarkebond architects were commissioned to build the new station which cost £3.6m at the junction of Chapel Street and Fore Street. Completed in 2013 it is one of the 'greenest' in the Force and was nominated for an Office Corporate Workplace Award – a far cry from the original cold stone building on Ker Street – there are no cells, custodial facilities or front desk, connectivity and crime reporting is now encouraged and operationalized via social media.



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