

# The Development of a Police Force

The first professional police force in the UK, funded by local taxation, was set up in Glasgow in 1800. At the time, the City of Glasgow police undertook more duties than modern police, including fire-fighting. It served Glasgow right through until 1975. In 1822, the Irish Constabulary was set up and became the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1867.

The first professional policemen, in England, known as 'Peelers' or 'Bobbies', were set up in London in 1829 by Robert Peel, the then Home Secretary, after 'The Metropolitan Police Act' of 1829.

It was the start of a campaign to improve public law. Reform, however, was slow as there was distrust of the police at all levels.

## **The First Policemen in London**

By September of 1829, the first Metropolitan Police were patrolling the streets of London. There were 17 divisions, which had 4 inspectors and 144 constables each. The force headquarters was Scotland Yard, and it answered to the Home Secretary.

The 'Peelers' wore a long blue coats and strengthened tall hats, which protected them from blows to the head and they could use to stand on to look over walls. Their only weapon was a truncheon although they also carried a rattle to raise an alarm.

At first, the quality of officers was poor. Of the first 2,800 new policemen, only 600 eventually kept their jobs. The first Metropolitan policeman (who was given the number 1), was sacked after only four hours, for drunkenness. Things eventually settled down.

## **Policing the Counties and Boroughs**

Despite rising crime levels, most counties retained their Parish Constable. Many people were concerned about the idea of a uniformed force and feared that the police would be used to arrest opponents of the government, stop protests and destroy free speech.

By 1848 there were still 22 boroughs that did not have a police force and, in 1850, only 36 counties that did. In 1855, there were still only 12,000 policemen in England and Wales. This was despite the fact that the police force in London was proving effective in reducing crime and increasing detection.