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**‘I am just the man for Upsetting you Bloody Bobbies’: Popular Animosity towards the
Police in Late Nineteenth-Century Leeds**

David Churchill

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Most historians of police-public relations in the later nineteenth century have asserted that popular animosity towards the police rested on the contexts of specific encounters, rather than any broader, principled opposition to the police as an institution. However, scholars have yet to engage with the voices of the policed, and have instead relied on inferring popular attitudes from other evidence. This article uses police occurrence books from three out-townships of Leeds to explore popular responses to the police in unprecedented detail. It highlights how various norms within working-class culture – domesticity, masculinity, communal autonomy – precipitated opposition to the exercise of police authority. Moreover, it demonstrates that hostile reactions to the police were motivated both by the contexts of particular interactions and underlying, unsavoury notions of the police as an institution. Hence, police-public relations can only be adequately understood as an interaction between these two factors.

**‘I am just the man for Upsetting you Bloody Bobbies’: Popular Animosity towards the
Police in Late Nineteenth-Century Leeds¹**

David Churchill

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The quality of relations between the police and the public in nineteenth-century England is a foundational topic in the social history of crime. The key early intervention came from Robert Storch, whose two articles in this area were seminal.² Based on research on northern industrial towns and cities, Storch uncovered a rich undercurrent of popular suspicion and mistrust of the police. In the 1830s and 1840s, this took the form of a particular anti-police ideology – communicated through the radical press – which depicted the new police as an unconstitutional infraction of English liberty. The roots of this antagonism were many, but they were grounded principally in police suppression of popular customs and recreations, and their subjection of working-class communities to an intrusive regime of surveillance. Most visibly, these grievances fuelled the conflagration of anti-police riots in several localities. Although such dramatic examples of popular opposition dwindled after the 1850s, Storch claimed that principled opposition to the police remained firmly embedded in working-class culture well into the twentieth century.³

Subsequent to Storch, most scholars have diverged somewhat from his ‘pessimistic’ viewpoint. Research on police reform in diverse localities has produced little evidence of large-

¹ I would like to thank Paul Lawrence and Ros Crone for their support during this research. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ‘Work in Progress’ seminar of the International Centre for the History of Crime, Policing and Justice at The Open University on 12 July 2013; I am grateful to the attendees for their responses. Thanks also to John Carter Wood and the anonymous readers for their comments and criticisms.

² R.D. Storch, ‘The plague of blue locusts: police reform and popular resistance in northern England, 1840-57’, *International Review of Social History*, XX, 1 (Mar. 1975), 61-90; R.D. Storch, ‘The policeman as domestic missionary: urban discipline and popular culture in northern England, 1850-1880’, *Journal of Social History*, IX, 4 (Summer 1976), 481-509.

³ For similarly negative assessments, see B. Weinberger, ‘The police and the public in mid-nineteenth-century Warwickshire’ in V. Bailey (ed.), *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1981), 65-93; V.A.C. Gatrell, ‘Crime, authority and the policeman-state’ in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain*, vol.3 (Cambridge, 1990), 283-87. See also J. White, ‘Police and people in London in the 1930s’, *Oral History*, XI, 2 (Autumn 1983), 34-41. For a more recent study of anti-police politics and public opposition, see C.A. Williams, ‘The Sheffield Democrats’ Critique of Criminal Justice in the 1850s’ in R. Colls and R. Rodger (eds), *Cities of Ideas: Civil Society and Urban Governance in Britain, 1800-2000: Essays in Honour of David Reeder* (Aldershot, 2004), 96-120.

scale riot or sustained violent opposition outside of the industrial north.⁴ Moreover, other contributors to the debate have asserted that apparently ‘anti-police’ attitudes were in fact highly context-specific: antagonism was directed not at the police itself, as an institution, but rather at particular aspects of the police role. According to one historian, ‘There is only limited and indirect evidence to suggest that there was hostility to the police *per se*...but there was a dislike of certain police activities...and of the actions of certain policemen.’⁵ Similar assessments have led historians to adopt a rather different view of police-public relations at large; considering the diversity of police duties in the nineteenth century – which included ‘social service’ functions as well as recreational control – they deduce that attitudes towards the police must have been contingent and contradictory.⁶ David Taylor has pushed this argument furthest, claiming that relations between the police and public gradually improved over the second half of the nineteenth century, as working-class communities became increasingly ‘stable’ and ‘respectable’, and the police adopted a more suitably restrained approach towards law-enforcement. As a result, he asserts, ‘Policing by consent (however begrudging in certain quarters) had become a reality by the late nineteenth century.’⁷ Without disregarding conflict, these historians have thus established an alternative to Storch’s interpretation: public opposition was not directed at the police *per se*, but at particular officers and police functions. In other words, they emphasise the situational contexts of popular animosity over its ideological content.

This is in some respects a more nuanced view of police-public relations, yet it is not without its flaws. Some historians of this school are vulnerable to the charge that their reasonably optimistic conclusions cut against much of the evidence they produce.⁸ This in turn relates to a more difficult problem, that the case for a more positive view of police-public relations is in

⁴ See J. Field, ‘Police, power and community in a provincial English town: Portsmouth, 1815-1875’ in Bailey (ed.), *op.cit.*, 47-50; R. Swift, ‘Urban policing in early Victorian England, 1835-86: a reappraisal’, *History*, LXXIII, 238 (Jun. 1988), 232-36.

⁵ D. Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town: The Development of the Police in Middlesbrough c.1840-1914* (Basingstoke, 2002), 95. See also D. Taylor, *The New Police in Nineteenth-Century England: Crime, Conflict and Control* (Manchester, 1997), 82.

⁶ C. Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History*, second edition (Harlow, 1996), 78-82; Taylor, *New Police*, *op.cit.*, 126-27. See also J. Klein, *Invisible Men: The Secret Lives of Police Constables in Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham, 1900-1939* (Liverpool, 2010), ch.6-8.

⁷ Taylor, *New Police*, *op.cit.*, 137-38. See also R. Reiner, *The Politics of the Police*, fourth edition (Oxford, 2010), 61-62; Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town*, *op.cit.*, ch.9. Further on discretion and police restraint, see S. Inwood, ‘Policing London’s morals: the Metropolitan Police and popular culture, 1829-50’, *The London Journal*, XV, 2 (Nov. 1990), 130-140; Emsley, *English Police*, *op.cit.*, 74-75.

⁸ Consider the empirical material examined in D. Taylor, ‘Policing and the community’ in K. Laybourn (ed.), *Social Conditions, Status and Community c.1860-c.1920* (Stroud, 1997), 104-122, or Taylor, *New Police*, *op.cit.*, ch.4.

large measure an argument from silence – that there is ‘limited and indirect evidence’ for a more negative assessment. However, such claims must be grounded in the limitations of the sources used; as the same historian recognises, ‘the voice of the policed is rarely heard in the historical record’.⁹ Unable to recover public attitudes directly, most scholars have opted instead to infer sentiments from other evidence – for example, the level recorded violence against police officers, or (more broadly) material on the nature of everyday policing. In the latter case, duties assumed to be popular (crime-fighting, restoring lost children, helping the elderly across roads) are weighed against those deemed to be contentious (the policing of popular customs and street life). The problem with this ‘balance sheet’ approach is that it tends to strip such duties of their cultural context, and attribute opinions to the dead without adequate supporting evidence. In order to understand how police actions were understood by contemporaries – and how popular responses were mediated by pre-existing views of the police as an institution – one must engage more fully with the testimonies of ordinary people.

This article makes use of valuable sources – police occurrence books – to analyse more closely popular animosity towards the police in late nineteenth-century Leeds. These records survive from the 1870s and 1880s, and cover three outlying parts of Leeds: Farnley (a largely industrial township); Beeston (a mixed agricultural and mining settlement); and Headingley (an affluent residential suburb).¹⁰ These were diverse districts, none of which was considered by contemporaries as a site of acute social problems, or to present particular difficulties for the police; hence, the largely unflattering view of the police-public relations which they present was not the product of a ‘rough’ neighbourhood or notorious rookery.¹¹ The precise provenance of the occurrence books themselves is unclear: the recording practices which shaped them were clearly highly selective, and the frequency of entries varied markedly over time.¹² While the

⁹ Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town*, *op.cit.*, 79.

¹⁰ Further on the out-townships, see R. Baker, ‘On the industrial and sanitary economy of the borough of Leeds, in 1858’, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, XXI, 4 (Dec. 1858), 428; R. Pearson, ‘The Industrial Suburbs of Leeds in the Nineteenth Century: Community Consciousness among the Social Classes’ (Ph.D., University of Leeds, 1986).

¹¹ A return of 1858 showed that the police apprehended far fewer persons in these townships than in other outlying parts of Leeds: 11 were arrested in Headingley, 8 in Beeston and just 2 in Farnley, whilst the average number arrested across all out-townships was about 39 (West Yorkshire Archives Service (W.Y.A.S.), LLC5/1/5, Leeds Watch Committee Minutes, vol.5, 6 February 1858, 275).

¹² The books may have been copied up from other documents, which do not survive; one report of 27 January 1874, which was inserted out of date sequence (between 7 and 12 January), was thereafter crossed through, and reinserted verbatim a few pages later: W.Y.A.S., WYP/LE/A137/182, Beeston Occurrence Book (B.O.B.). For 1875, the same book contains 26 reports for the months January-June, compared with just 5 for July-December.

books contain insertions of various kinds – police ‘informations’ regarding specific offences, notes on accidents and fatalities, crime reports following information from victims – those which feature exchanges between policemen and the policed are mostly reports of arrests. Therefore, the majority of cases analysed below related to a charge brought by the police, and it seems likely that they were recorded in such detail in order to provide evidence of riotous or disorderly conduct on the part of the accused – or aggravating circumstances surrounding their arrest – which could be deployed against them in court. As a result, these books only detail problematic encounters (and almost exclusively *men’s* interactions) with the police, and hence document just one aspect of police-public relations.

However, the vivid detail they give of encounters between policemen and members of the public means that occurrence books provide a rich (though almost entirely untapped) resource for historians.¹³ Although the inclusion of ordinary people’s testimonies in these documents was determined by the requirements of police record-keeping, they nonetheless facilitate a sustained engagement with the voices of some of those who found themselves on the receiving end of policing late in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ These testimonies were overwhelmingly the product of contentious episodes in street policing – and a good many were further fuelled by drink – yet they still allow sources of anti-police feeling to be identified. The approach adopted here is to glean from this evidence something analogous to the ‘hidden transcripts’ of police-public relations – unsavoury attitudes, normally voiced out of earshot of policemen, which allow us to peer behind the ‘public transcript’ of cautious consent and acquiescence.¹⁵ Naturally, much of the material presented below provides additional fodder for the ‘pessimist’ view of police-public relations in the nineteenth century; more importantly, it illuminates some of the cultural and

¹³ These sources were known to Storch, but he confined himself to a ‘cursory examination’ of them (‘Domestic missionary’, *op.cit.*, 485), and the citation of one ‘random example’ (‘Blue locusts’, *op.cit.*, 89). Some Lancashire occurrence books are used in S. D’Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (London, 1998), though for quite different purposes than those pursued here. There is also a short discussion of abuse towards the police in Liverpool, based on daily report books, in Klein, *op.cit.*, 170.

¹⁴ In order to provide contextual information on the specific individuals concerned, the occurrence books have been supplemented by searches of digitised census returns, via www.ancestry.co.uk. Regrettably, it has not been possible positively to identify each person by this method.

¹⁵ See J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London, 1990). Scott’s model of public and hidden transcripts is loosely applicable to this study, yet there are highly significant contrasts between the disposition of ‘subordinate’ groups in a *relatively* open society (nineteenth-century England) opposed to a fairly *new* form of authority (professional policing), compared with the grossly hierarchical and authoritarian regimes prominent in Scott’s work (including slavery and serfdom). For this reason, his precise typology of subordinate responses to authority (18-19) is rather too rigid for present purposes.

intellectual foundations upon which adverse reactions to the police were based, and exposes how they intersected with everyday policing in specific situational contexts.

Evidence from the occurrence books confirms that police interference in everyday life was repeatedly perceived as unwelcome. Late one afternoon in 1874, Constable Grundy came across one Robert Wright, who was drunkenly ‘making a great noise’ in Town Street, Beeston. After the Constable requested that he move on, Wright ‘swore he would not go away either for him the officer or for any one else’.¹⁶ On the same beat some nine years later, Constable Whitaker found William Parkinson using abusive language towards his wife. When the Constable told Parkinson to ‘go away home’, the latter replied by telling ‘the PC he could go to Hell if he liked’.¹⁷ When police duties cut across popular understandings of proper or rational behaviour, intervention could be met with incredulity. Despite a measure of change in popular attitudes towards animals in the nineteenth century, many remained attached to cruel methods.¹⁸ In 1879, Constable Palmer found two brothers, John and Robert Barroclough (cattle dealer and butcher’s man respectively) working a horse in a violent fashion in a Beeston field: ‘John [was] beating the Horse on the Back with [a] Shovel and Robert kicking it on the Legs and on the Body in a most Unmerciful manner’. On the officer challenging the men’s conduct, John protested that ‘we have not marked it and it does not hurt it’, before resolving, ‘we Will master it or we Will Cut its Bloody Heart Out’.¹⁹

Such hostile responses to police intervention were grounded in the priority accorded to street order in nineteenth-century policing. As Storch demonstrated, the police assumed an ‘omnibus mandate’, not just to prevent and detect crime, but also to regulate the customs and daily lives of ordinary (predominantly working-class) people.²⁰ Subsequent scholars have rightly emphasised the limited impact of policing on recreational practices; the intensity of surveillance was modified by operational restraint, while many ‘deviant’ leisure pursuits – drinking,

¹⁶ B.O.B., 2 February 1874.

¹⁷ B.O.B., 14 July 1883.

¹⁸ F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London, 1988), 279-283; H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), ch.3.

¹⁹ B.O.B., 18 April 1879; 1881 Census, RG11/4495, f.96, 15 (spelt ‘Barraclough’).

²⁰ Storch, ‘Domestic missionary’, *op.cit.*, 481-496. The quotation is from Storch, ‘Blue locusts’, *op.cit.*, 64.

gambling, street games – were simply too popular to be effectually suppressed.²¹ Nonetheless, transformative or otherwise, such everyday discipline remained at the heart of the police mission, and formed a very common (and unwelcome) context for public interactions with the police. Figures from Leeds indicate that around two-thirds of arrests made in the 1870s and 1880s fell into ‘class six’ – the so-called ‘other offences’, prominent amongst which were drunkenness and disorderly conduct (which typically constituted about a third of all arrests), offences under local acts and bye-laws (including offences arising out of prostitution), offences under the Vagrancy Act and breaches of the peace.²² In short, offences against morals and public decorum – rather than more serious crimes against life, property or the state – were the bread and butter of the urban beat.²³

Subtle continuities in popular culture ensured that this form of policing stoked popular animosity late into the nineteenth century. Although much attention has been lavished on the growth of working-class ‘respectability’ in this period, a large section of the population remained vulnerable to police discipline. Respectability was a complex phenomenon – throughout most the century, diverse cultural affiliations remained open to labouring families and individuals, and they often slipped between one and another with greater fluidity than many historians have allowed.²⁴ Thus, while it is true that some offensive customs visibly declined during the nineteenth century (cock-fighting, dog-fighting), others lived on and prospered. Gambling, for instance, remained extremely popular amongst the urban working class; similarly, the estimated rate of alcohol consumption peaked as late as the 1870s, and stayed high for the remainder of the century.²⁵ Hence, most people did not simply opt to ‘trade in’ familiar pastimes for supposedly restrained, commercial entertainments (the music hall, seaside holidays) in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In any case, the persistent poverty of large sections of the working class

²¹ See especially Inwood, *op.cit.*, 129-146; A. Davies, ‘The police and the people: gambling in Salford, 1900-1939’, *The Historical Journal*, XXXIV, 1 (Mar. 1991), 87-115.

²² D.C. Churchill, ‘Crime, Policing and Control in Leeds, c.1830-1890’ (Ph.D., Open University, 2012), table 3.3.

²³ See also D. Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1982), 150-51; C.A. Williams, ‘Counting crimes or counting people: some implications of mid-nineteenth century British police returns’, *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés*, IV, 2 (2000), 83, 91-92. If anything, the scale of street order policing became still more intense in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: see Gatrell, *op.cit.*, table 5.1; S. Slater, ‘Street disorder in the metropolis, 1905-39’, *Law, Crime and History*, II, 1 (2012), 59-91.

²⁴ See especially P. Bailey, “‘Will the real Bill Banks please stand up?’ Towards a role analysis of mid-Victorian working-class respectability’, *Journal of Social History*, XII, 3 (Spring 1979), 336-353.

²⁵ A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992), ch.6; A.E. Dingle, ‘Drink and working-class living standards in Britain, 1870-1914’, *The Economic History Review*, new series, XXV, 4 (Nov. 1972), 608-612.

would have rendered this impossible. As a result, those with limited opportunity for commercial leisure, for whom the street remained the primary terrain of enjoyment and excess, remained under regular police surveillance.²⁶

Resistance to this intrusive system of policing was frequently expressed by resort to violence.²⁷ In Beeston in 1877, Constable Prewer ordered James Halstead, who was drunkenly swearing in the street outside his house, to go inside. Halstead initially complied, before coming back out again, upon which Prewer tried to arrest him; however, ‘Halstead then took hold of the officer by the collar and commenced to kick him he then broke away and ran into the house’.²⁸ As this case indicates, violence was often instrumental – used to obstruct arrest, commonly by associates attempting to ‘rescue’ the detainee.²⁹ Earlier that same year, Prewer had observed a large group of people obstructing the causeway in Beeston Road, Holbeck; upon approaching them the group had fled, yet Prewer took up pursuit, eventually apprehending George Harrison (stone mason). However, shortly after taking his suspect, Prewer ‘was set onto and Harrison rescued from him by Mary Ann Greenwood [iron-moulder’s wife]...and Martha Middleton [bricklayer’s wife]...and a great number more that [sic] he did not know’.³⁰ The recurrent difficulties encountered by Prewer, who seems to have made arrests in quite contentious circumstances, suggests that his conduct was deemed especially odious;³¹ however, records of further rescues from across Leeds indicate that such tactics were quite widely used to resist street order policing at this time.³²

It seems, though, that the use of violence against the police was not uniformly instrumental – rather, some instances indicate a greater measure of planning and pre-meditation. Barbara Weinberger observed that the custom of baiting policemen was known to Warwickshire

²⁶ Davies, *Leisure*, *op.cit.*, 45-47.

²⁷ The context was commonly a police order that drunken men ‘move on’: Storch, ‘Domestic missionary’, *op.cit.*, 493; Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town*, *op.cit.*, 84-86; J.E. Archer, *The Monster Evil: Policing and Violence in Victorian Liverpool* (Liverpool, 2011), 54-56.

²⁸ B.O.B., 6 November 1877.

²⁹ See also D. Woods, ‘Community violence’ in J. Benson (ed.), *The Working Class in England 1875-1914* (London, 1985), 180-83; Archer, *op.cit.*, 56-57; White, *op.cit.*, 37-38; Klein, *op.cit.*, 181-82.

³⁰ B.O.B., 30 May 1877; 1881 Census, RG11/4498, f.47, 2 (Harrison); 1881 Census, RG11/4498, f.50, 8 (Greenwood and Middleton).

³¹ Assaults on police officers most likely ‘clustered’ upon particularly resented individuals: Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town*, *op.cit.*, 87-88.

³² B.O.B., 2 February 1874; W.Y.A.S., WYP/LE/A90/258, Farnley Occurrence Book (F.O.B.), 21 July 1883; *Leeds Times*, 3 April 1875, 5; *Leeds Daily News*, 20 March 1882, n.p.; 1 May 1882, n.p.; *Leeds Times*, 21 February 1885, 3. Onlookers sometimes threw stones, or even bricks, in order to disrupt an arrest: see for example B.O.B., 20 July 1872; *Leeds Evening Express*, 2 January 1872, 4; *Leeds Daily News*, 14 March 1881, n.p.; *Leeds Times*, 16 May 1885, 3.

youths by the 1870s,³³ and there is some evidence of such practices in Leeds too. In 1884, Constable Knappy was patrolling down Chapel Lane in Headingley when his face caught a string trip-wire which had been set to a lamppost, bringing a brick crashing down from a wall above the footpath. The Constable was seemingly unhurt, and he had little trouble detecting the perpetrators: ‘the PC went a little lower down and stood in the dark when...4 lads went to the lamppost to look at the string’.³⁴ Other cases indicate some level of prior preparation to resist police interference. In 1874, Constable Henry was on patrol when he came across a drunken man, who was sat down in Town Street, Beeston; upon being instructed to go home, ‘the man got up and run [sic] at the Officer and Struck him on the head with a stone he had in his hand and knocked him down and kicked him on the arm he [Henry] then became Insensible and knew no more’.³⁵ In these instances, violence was seemingly deployed for its own sake, reflecting an undercurrent of hostility towards the police amongst a portion of the public.

While objections to police interference in street life were common, sensitivities were also aroused when constables strayed towards domestic space. Policemen who approached private dwellings were in danger of receiving a hostile reception regardless of the purpose of their visit. It is well documented, for instance, that constables were usually reluctant to become involved in incidents of domestic violence, for they frequently met with the wrath of both parties.³⁶ Even when one might expect a measure of sympathy for the constable, the police presence in and around domestic space could provoke negative reactions. In 1888, on duty just after midnight in Farnley, Constable Wall passed through Shaw Farm, where he was attacked by a dog ‘in a very savage manner’. The bailiff appeared upon hearing the commotion, and Wall rebuked him for failing to secure the dog. Yet despite the constable’s evident injury, the bailiff was far from

³³ Weinberger, *op.cit.*, 70.

³⁴ W.Y.A.S., WYP/LE/A90/255, Headingley Occurrence Book (H.O.B.), 17 March 1884. One of the boys – Tom Rayner – was the son of a local merchant: 1881 Census, RG11/4538, f.83, 35.

³⁵ B.O.B., 28 February 1874.

³⁶ C. Emsley, *Hard Men: The English and Violence since 1750* (London, 2005), 67-68; Archer, *op.cit.*, 58-59, 151-53.

contrite: ‘he told the P.C. that he had no business on the premises & that he should cut the dog loose anytime when he thought fit’.³⁷

Even when policemen called upon householders with helpful intentions, they were sometimes perceived as an interfering nuisance. Taylor argues that ‘[t]he image of the ever-watchful policeman, protecting the innocent while they slept’ by checking doors and windows were secure, won the police support at all levels of society.³⁸ However, when calling up residents in the night to report such lapses in security, constables were never certain as to the welcome they would receive. One evening in 1885, Constable Hall summoned Edmund Swallow at 10.45pm, having found his fowl house door open. However, far from being grateful for such diligent attention to his property, Swallow ‘found fault with the PC. for disturbing him & said he was not to be called up any more for anything of the kind’.³⁹ Just a few weeks later, Constable Forrest found an umbrella on the doorstep of the house belonging to Mr Pawson (woollen cloth manufacturer) at 2.10 in the morning. Perhaps to avoid disturbing him, Forrest took the umbrella to the police station, where Sergeant Spink ordered the duty constable to return it at 9 o’clock. Understandably, Pawson was rather rattled at having his property taken: ‘Mr Pawson found very great fault with the Police for interfering with it & told them not to do so again’.⁴⁰ By contrast, in 1884 a slaughter house proprietor complained at not being woken when his premises were found insecure at 4 o’clock one morning; however, in self-defence, the occurrence book records that ‘this place has been found open many a time & the Police have been blackguarded on more than one occasion [sic] for calling them up to secure it’. To be clear, there is no record of hostility or resentment in many similar cases; nonetheless, these examples signal that popular suspicion of the police was heightened in a domestic setting.

Resistance to such police interference arose out of a deep attachment to domestic privacy in popular mentalities. Historians have noted the significance of cultures of ‘domesticity’ across late nineteenth-century society; while there were profound differences in attitudes between social groups, the notion of a basic right to privacy and moral seclusion in the home was widely shared.⁴¹ This sentiment explains why the police presence on private property was frequently

³⁷ F.O.B., 24 September 1888.

³⁸ Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town*, *op.cit.*, 176.

³⁹ F.O.B., 31 May 1885.

⁴⁰ F.O.B., 25 June 1885; 1891 Census, RG12/3680, f.25, 8.

⁴¹ On working-class domesticity, see A. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), ch.14; M.J. Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class*

resisted, almost regardless of its context. The notion of freedom from domestic intrusion was buttressed by the actual content of the criminal law; although police powers were extremely wide-ranging in the nineteenth century, encompassing all manner of petty nuisances and obstructions, they were confined principally to offences committed (and ‘deviants’ present) in public spaces.⁴² This fed back into popular notions of liberty in the home, which might be deliberately exploited to taunt the police. Such was the case in 1880, when Sergeant Pool ordered Joseph Broxup, who was drunk and using bad language in Town Street, Beeston, to go home. Broxup initially refused, asserting ‘I can go when I like’, before two ‘Companions got hold of him and took him home’. However, as Pool reported, this was not the end of the matter:

he afterwards Came Out of the house and assailed me I then went towards him and he then Run [sic] into the house and Secured the Door I then left the house when I heard him Come out of the house and Come making a great noise I then Run [sic] towards him and he then Run [sic] into the house again and then secured the Door I then told him I should Report him.⁴³

This elaborate game of cat-and-mouse between Pool and Broxup underlines the sense of protection from police discipline which ordinary people (with some justification) felt their homes afforded them.⁴⁴ It is therefore unsurprising that the presence of police officers on private land or domestic space often prompted adverse reactions.

Thus far, the analysis has remained concerned chiefly with how animosity arose in specific contexts (the policing of drink, orders to ‘move on’, domestic intrusion). While such contexts were highly significant, attention to them must not preclude analysis of the cultural and intellectual content of popular attitudes towards the police. Recent studies have tended to evade

Housing 1850-1914 (London, 1983), ch.11; J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, 1994), ch.3; Thompson, *op.cit.*, 193-95.

⁴² See P. Lawrence, ‘The Vagrancy Act of 1824 and the power to arrest on suspicion’ (unpublished paper presented at the Social History Society conference, 3 April 2012, University of Brighton).

⁴³ B.O.B., 4 July 1880.

⁴⁴ According to Shani D’Cruze, ‘The police had quite clear views about the privacy of domestic space’: *op.cit.*, 69.

the notion that hostility between the police and the public rested upon any clear principles, and have instead reduced public opposition purely to the contexts of police action; however, as we have seen, historians have yet to exploit those sources which permit analysis of the ordinary people's testimonies (see above, 4-5). By further mining the occurrence books, the remainder of this article turns to languages of abuse and dissent, to expose the ideas and sentiments which lay behind antagonistic responses to the police.⁴⁵ It reveals that some level of principled opposition to the police – to the very institution itself – persisted late into the nineteenth century.

Several jottings in the occurrence books indicate more than just annoyance at specific police duties – they suggest a more coherent conception of the illegitimacy of the police role in enforcing street order. One afternoon in 1885, William Hirst Gillerstroyd was seen by Constable Single drunkenly swearing in the street in Farnley. The Constable 'requested him to go quietly home', to which Gillerstroyd replied 'what the Hell have you to do with it [?]'.⁴⁶ Evident here is Gillerstroyd's sense that police had no right to interfere in essentially harmless aspects of everyday life. He drew upon a particular strain in late nineteenth-century popular culture, which held that disputes should be resolved privately between individuals. Those offended by Gillerstroyd's language should seek redress; it was not the place of a policeman – an outsider – to intervene. This sentiment lay behind several other altercations. In 1882, Constable Johnson told Edwin Gibson he would be reported for leaving a cart standing unattended in Elland Road, Holbeck, for 15 minutes; in reply, Gibson said, 'I have done it before and *you have nothing to do with it*'.⁴⁷ Similarly, in 1887, Constable Wall found Henry Farrar ('general labourer') in Town Street, Farnley, drunk and disorderly and using bad language. When told he would be reported for such conduct, Farrar indignantly retorted, 'I was not swearing at you'.⁴⁸ Such cases signal a particular kind of animosity towards the police, grounded in the pettiness of street policing, and combined with its perceived encroachment onto the rights of private individuals to conduct themselves as they pleased. Yet they also hint at a more fundamental rejection of the police role in enforcing an impersonal system of social regulation – the policeman was a man like any other, and if a matter did not concern him personally, then he had no right to involve himself in it.

⁴⁵ This is not meant to suggest that anti-police ideas are analytically prior to actual encounters, nor that the former were more significant in determining public attitudes than the latter. The interaction of these two factors is in fact much more complex.

⁴⁶ F.O.B., 28 February 1885.

⁴⁷ B.O.B., 20 February 1882, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ F.O.B., 5 February 1887; 1891 Census, RG12/3680, f.8, 10.

This view keyed into certain core components of popular culture at this time. Some historians have seen in the late nineteenth century the formation of settled, apparently ‘respectable’ working-class communities, which they claim provided the basis for improved relations with the police.⁴⁹ However, such developments did not necessarily promote harmonious relations with the police. The growth of more ‘settled’ communities probably reinforced popular suspicions of outsiders, and figures of authority in particular.⁵⁰ The formation of self-contained, introverted neighbourhoods (itself a patchy and fragile phenomenon, especially before 1914) sustained aspirations to communal autonomy in various fields of social life, and thus fostered hostile responses to figures of authority, including policemen, sanitary inspectors and school attendance officers.⁵¹ One might argue that the out-townships of Leeds under discussion here – which had the feel of distinct villages about them – were peculiarly affected by such exclusionary tendencies: indeed, a clear sense of local distinctiveness was a factor in the resistance of several townships (excluding Headingley) to the extension of the Leeds Police to the city’s hinterland in the 1840s and 1850s.⁵² Yet more wide-ranging suspicions of the state, beyond everyday encounters with authority, were firmly embedded in the associational culture of the working class, which strove to bypass the state via mutual solutions to social problems.⁵³ Thus, exchanges with policemen were rooted in a culture of self-help and mutual association –

⁴⁹ Taylor, *New Police*, *op.cit.*, 138; Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town*, *op.cit.*, 182. See also Emsley, *English Police*, *op.cit.*, 80; Reiner, *op.cit.*, 77. On the re-formation of working-class communities around this time, see M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940* (London, 1994), ch.4; C. Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914* (Manchester, 1995), ch.5; A. August, *The British Working Class, 1832-1940* (Harlow, 2007), 95-97.

⁵⁰ Similar sentiments had deep roots in popular mentalities: see K.D.M. Snell, ‘The culture of local xenophobia’, *Social History*, XXVIII, 1 (Jan. 2003), 1-30.

⁵¹ See Woods, *op.cit.*, 177-78; Thompson, *op.cit.*, 356-58; S. Auerbach, “‘The law has no feeling for poor folks like us!’ Everyday responses to legal compulsion in England’s working-class communities, 1871-1904’, *Journal of Social History*, XLV, 3 (Spring 2012), 700-702. More broadly, see J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939* (Harlow, 1989), 131-33; Thompson, *op.cit.*, 359-360; August, *op.cit.*, 158-59. On suspicions of ‘strangers’, see Bourke, *op.cit.*, 167-68.

⁵² The County and Borough Police Act (1856) eventually mandated comprehensive coverage of the borough under a single police authority: D. Churchill, ‘Local initiative, central oversight, provincial perspective: governing police forces in nineteenth-century Leeds’, *Historical Research*, forthcoming. More broadly on localism in the out-townships, see Pearson, *op.cit.*, *passim*.

⁵³ S. Yeo, ‘State and anti-state: reflections on social forms and struggles from 1850’ in P. Corrigan (ed.), *Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory: Historical Investigations* (London, 1980), 127-130, 133-37, though see also P. Thane, ‘The working class and state “welfare” in Britain, 1880-1914’, *The Historical Journal*, XXVII, 4 (Dec. 1984), 877-900. In the final analysis, the everyday mentality of the working class cannot be dissociated from this associational culture: see R. Colls, ‘When we lived in communities: working-class culture and its critics’ in Colls and Rodger (eds), *op.cit.*, 306.

however imperfectly such ideals were realised in practice – which sustained the notion that most aspects of daily street life were improper objects of police concern.

This kind of principled objection to the police presence also arose out of the challenge they posed to alternative means of norm-enforcement. As John Carter Wood has illustrated, the ability to enforce order independently, including through violence and rituals of popular justice, remained an aspiration of working-class communities late into the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Popular opposition to police interference in ‘fair’ fights⁵⁵ can only be understood in this context. Late one night in 1882, Constable Johnson encountered two brothers John and Rothery Crowther (coal pit carpenter and coal miner respectively) in Town Street, Beeston, stripped and ready to fight, surrounded by ‘a great number of people’. Upon being asked to disperse, the men initially refused, before John was prudently escorted away by his ‘friends’. Perhaps lacking such sage counsel, Rothery struck out at his wife in frustration, before retreating home to grab a weapon and taunt the policeman. Standing in his doorway – perhaps exploiting the partial protection offered by domestic space – he ‘made Use of Very Bad Language and threatened the Officer and that [sic] he would knock his Bloody Rotten Brains out with the Poker’.⁵⁶ A similar occurrence took place two months later in Farnley, in which Constable Spink was sworn at after asking Joseph Horsfall – ready to fight, and surrounded by a crowd of people – to ‘be quiet & go home’.⁵⁷ Such cases reveal popular opposition to police intervention in rituals of dispute resolution. Furthermore, they highlight resistance to the police role, and the continued appeal of settling conflicts without recourse to the law.⁵⁸

This ‘customary’ mentality of violence was also deployed directly to resist police authority. Some of those who took exception to police interference attempted to reduce their encounter with state authority to a simple physical challenge between men. In 1879, Constable

⁵⁴ J.C. Wood, ‘Self-Policing and the policing of the self: violence, protection and the civilising bargain in Britain’, *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés*, VII, 1 (2003), 114-120; J.C. Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (London, 2004), ch.3-4, 6. See also Storch, ‘Domestic missionary’, *op.cit.*, 494; Woods, *op.cit.*, 175-77.

⁵⁵ Typically these were contests by mutual agreement, in which combatants stripped to the waist and were surrounded by a crowd of onlookers: see further Wood, *Violence and Crime*, *op.cit.*, ch.4.

⁵⁶ B.O.B., 28 October 1882.

⁵⁷ F.O.B., 27 December 1882. The previous decade, Horsfall had been identified as a coal miner: 1871 Census, RG10/4540, f.32, 22.

⁵⁸ Of course, use of the law was by no means incompatible with such strategies – the metropolitan poor made extensive use of both ‘state’ and ‘popular’ judicial practices: see J. Davis, ‘A poor man’s system of justice: the London police courts in the second half of the nineteenth century’, *The Historical Journal*, XXVII, 2 (May 1984), 319-320.

Knappy interrupted two labourers, George Barrett and Richard Tilby Gerald, who were drunk and fighting on Meanwood Hill, just north of Headingley; when the Constable spoke to them, ‘they wanted to fight him’.⁵⁹ Such a response was not uncommon. One night in 1884, Constable Forrest encountered Benjamin Croft drunkenly cursing in Town Street, Farnley: ‘the officer requested him to be quiet & go home when he challenged the officer to fight him’.⁶⁰ However, the most vivid instance comes from 1882, when Constables Johnson and Coates were called to the White Hart pub in Beeston to eject William Hewett (coal miner) and some other men who were causing a disturbance. The police record underlines both Hewett’s indignation at being removed from the pub, and his eagerness to settle the matter personally, man-to-man:

when the PCs ordered Hewett to leave the house he commenced cursing and swearing the PCs then turned him out of the house and he called them bloody rotten buggers and other offensive names and wanted to fight Johnson and said he had served two months for that bloody Palmer and he whould [sic] serve seven for them and if they whould [sic] take there [sic] clothes off he whould [sic] pay them in two minutes.

When challenging a policeman to a stand-up fight, the practice of stripping clearly took on greater symbolic significance than usual; visibly, the constable was thus reduced from an agent of the law (as distinguished by his uniform) to a man like any other. Hewett’s plain attempt to subvert the criminal justice process in this way was ultimately frustrated: he was led away by his friends before he could engage the constables, and was later fined ten shillings and costs (or seven days’ imprisonment) for riotous conduct.⁶¹

Evidence from the occurrence books thus indicates the persistence of principled opposition to the police late into the nineteenth century. It sheds light on an anti-police standpoint; the fact that this sentiment found expression in particular contexts does not diminish its intellectual credibility. Furthermore, some abusive exchanges also reveal the ideological content of anti-police perspectives, including the persistent appeal of the idea of the policeman as a ‘blue

⁵⁹ H.O.B., 24 December 1879. (Occupational information from the occurrence book.)

⁶⁰ F.O.B., 5 January 1884. In 1871 Croft had been listed as a coal miner: 1871 Census, RG10/4540, f.32, 22.

⁶¹ B.O.B., 12 April 1882; 1881 Census, RG11/4495, f.62, 21 (spelt ‘Hewitt’).

locust'. This phrase, amongst others – 'blue idlers', 'blue drones' – dated back to the radical politics of the 1830s and 1840s, when it served as shorthand for the view that policemen were useless parasites: excused by their position from productive labour, they lived off taxes paid by honest working men.⁶² Although this notion receded from public discourse with the decline of English radicalism after 1848, it was still spat out in anger in outlying parts of Leeds a generation later. In 1872, Constable Booth was attacked on his beat in Beeston by a vicious dog. He met with its owner, a colliery banksman named Robert Holmes, outside his house:

when spoken to by the Officer he [Holmes] placed himself in a fighting attitude and put his fist up to the Officer's face and said I will pause [kick] your eyes out he then swore and said that he had paid Licences for his Dog in this Contry [sic] but he the Officer did not pay for been [sic] in this Contry [sic] and that if he the Officer did not leave the fold he would kick him out of it...Holmes [sic] wife then came up and pressed against the Officer and would not allow him to go round the fold saying such like was not wanted there.⁶³

This encounter again raises the domestic context of popular animosity – the policeman had no legitimate purpose in going 'round the fold', taking issue with the affairs of the household. Yet it also signals the perception of policemen as parasites: Holmes 'had paid Licences for his Dog in this Contry [sic] but he the Officer did not pay for been [sic] in this Contry [sic]'. Unmistakeably, this demonstrates the perpetuation of anti-police ideas which had disappeared from political debate over twenty years previously. As such, despite the contextual factors at work, this exchange provides further evidence of popular opposition to the police institution in itself.

There are multiple possible explanations for the recurrence of this language of police idleness. One might argue that it arose organically out of an environment of regular antagonism and conflict between the police and ordinary people; after all, taunts of 'we pay your wages' have been repeated in one form or another down to the present day. This kind of anti-police sentiment thrives on the significance of labour in working men's sense of identity – which was crucial in the nineteenth century⁶⁴ – and the petty, interfering qualities of the police presence.⁶⁵

⁶² Storch, 'Blue locusts', *op.cit.*, 70-71, 87.

⁶³ B.O.B., 20 May 1872; 1871 Census, RG10/4520, f.25, 15. This example is cited in a more condensed form in Storch, 'Blue locusts', *op.cit.*, 89.

⁶⁴ K. McClelland, 'Time to work, time to live: some aspects of work and the re-formation of class in Britain, 1850-1880' in P. Joyce (ed.), *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge, 1987), 190-95; K. McClelland, 'Masculinity

However, it is also possible that the late nineteenth-century populace inherited this language from the earlier, radical political discourse of the ‘blue locust’. Attitudes towards the police are not the simple product of interactions with constables from day to day; instead, these interactions are filtered through pre-existing perceptions of the police as an institution, which take root in a broader cultural context and are often handed down from one generation to the next.⁶⁶ The late nineteenth-century working class was bequeathed powerful and repellent images of the police by the previous generation. The political struggles of the 1830s and 1840s were studded with radical representations of the police – as ‘blue locusts’, agents of political repression, conduits of the New Poor Law, and so on.⁶⁷ To a greater extent than even Storch appreciated, the new police were contested in the municipal politics of certain industrial cities. In Leeds, Chartist councillors struggled (with some success) to reign in municipal police spending, and (without success) to dismantle the force entirely.⁶⁸ For those who remembered these battles at least, the critique of police ‘idleness’ must have retained a special resonance late into the nineteenth century.

Although expressed with unusual clarity, Holmes’s outburst was not an isolated incident. Eight years later, a similar exchange took place between Richard Kilburn and Constable Palmer. The policeman told Kilburn he would be reported for leaving a wherry standing in Elland Road, Holbeck, for two hours, to which Kilburn sourly replied: ‘you may Summons us and then we Will Remove it *we have to help to pay your Wages and find you Clothes* if you Summons us it Will be a Little more and then we Will Remove it’.⁶⁹ Again, offence at the policeman’s presence – petty and interfering – centred on the fact that he was subsidised by the taxes of ordinary people. In this case, however, the ‘idleness’ of the policeman was brought into especially stark relief by his direct meddling in productive, commercial enterprise (the transportation of goods).⁷⁰ The specific reference to uniform (‘Clothes’) is also revealing. The provision of uniforms – one of the few perks of police employment – was a regular trope in insults used against ‘idle’

and the “representative artisan” in Britain, 1850-80’ in M. Roper and J. Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991), 80-84; S.O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), ch.6.

⁶⁵ It is closely related to the notion that the police should instead be out catching ‘proper criminals’.

⁶⁶ See M. Brogden, “‘All police is conning bastards’ – policing and the problem of consent’ in B. Fryer, A. Hunt, D. McBarnet and B. Moorhouse (eds), *Law, State and Society* (London, 1981), 205; I. Loader and A. Mulcahy, *Policing and the Condition of England: Memory, Politics, and Culture* (Oxford, 2003), 42-44.

⁶⁷ Storch, ‘Blue locusts’, *op.cit.*, 69.

⁶⁸ J.F.C. Harrison, ‘Chartism in Leeds’ in A. Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), 92. On analogous developments elsewhere, see Williams, ‘Sheffield Democrats’, *op.cit.*, 96-120.

⁶⁹ B.O.B., 9 March 1880, emphasis added.

⁷⁰ I am grateful to Chris Williams for pointing this out.

policemen, who were urged to pay for their own clothes, rather than relying upon others.⁷¹ The potential power of such abuse is borne out by the words of Constable Green of the Birmingham Constabulary, who said the following of police work in 1872: ‘It was the very last employment he would have sought, for the performance of police duties not only deprived them [policemen] of their comfort but of their liberty, and when they put on their uniform they became the scoff of every low blackguard in town.’⁷² Green’s reference to policemen being ‘deprived of their liberty’ demonstrates not only the severity of work discipline within the new police forces, but also the force of the ‘blue locust’ critique within police ranks. As Carolyn Steedman argues, recruits did not simply shed their working-class, masculine worldview upon entering police service.⁷³

One further example – perhaps the most elaborate to survive – will suffice to demonstrate the survival of the ‘blue locust’ critique. In 1883, Constable Coates was working his beat in Beeston, when his attention was drawn to Edward Boulton, who stood drunkenly in his doorway, ‘Cursing & Swearing and Using Very Bad Language’ with ‘a number of people Colected [sic] Round him’. Upon Coates requesting that he go indoors, Boulton launched into a furious rant, suffused with contempt for the police: ‘Dam [sic] & Bugger the Bloody Bobby [sic] Let him go to hell out of the World you are a Rotten Idle Bugger or you would not Wear them [sic] Clothes I have a Bloody Book in my house that teaches me more Law than you ever will know I will do as the Bloody Hell I like in my own house’. One cannot blame Coates for letting the man cool off, before returning to inform his wife that he would be reported for drunken and riotous conduct.⁷⁴ Boulton’s tirade was atypical, and that it was fuelled by alcohol may be taken as read. Yet this does not diminish its significance; indeed, the influence of drink may have brought forth criticisms of the police which ordinary people normally felt forced to choke back.⁷⁵ Grasping for words to convey his indignation, Boulton struck upon these ones. The policeman’s uniform was again highlighted, this time as a symbol of a despised institution; it was not Coates the man whom Boulton resented, but Coates the cog in an intrusive, impersonal disciplinary machine.

⁷¹ Weinberger, *op.cit.*, 83-84.

⁷² *Police Service Advertiser*, 19 November 1872, cited in *ibid.*, 83.

⁷³ C. Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80* (London, 1984), 105. See also Klein, *op.cit.*, 221. Green’s reference to the loss of liberty also signals parallels between working-class attitudes towards policemen, and skilled workers’ perceptions of ‘dependent labour’: McClelland, ‘Time to work’, *op.cit.*, 202. Of course, notions of police were severely aggravated by the contexts of police action.

⁷⁴ B.O.B., 1 October 1883.

⁷⁵ I am indebted to Pete King for this suggestion. See also Scott, *op.cit.*, 41.

Furthermore, the police were associated with an alien conception of order: instead of implementing true justice – the ‘Law’ of Boulton’s ‘Bloody Book’ (surely the Bible)⁷⁶ – the constable spent his time prying into the conduct of a working man in his ‘own House’, that treasured private space. In short, Boulton drew eclectically upon various, inter-connected threads of an oppositional discourse of police which remained a part of popular culture in the late nineteenth century.

Such exchanges highlight the survival, late into the nineteenth century, of a distinctive anti-police ideology. However, while encounters with the police were sometimes political, they were also personal. Everyday police discipline was experienced by individuals rather than whole communities. Hence, oppositional statements must be understood not just as an expression of ‘popular’ disapproval, but also as evidence of the ways in which men and women attempted to negotiate the exercise of police authority. One must seek, in other words, to reconstruct the impact of policing on individuals, and deduce what purposes were served by their hostile reactions to policemen.

Negative responses to the police were often personal acts of defiance, which enabled men to assert their self-worth in the face of the indignities of police discipline.⁷⁷ As we have seen, an impersonal system of policing contravened customary notions of dispute resolution; given the centrality of toughness and physicality in working-class conceptions of manliness at this time,⁷⁸ police discipline thus threatened to emasculate those subjected to it. In this context, demanding to fight a policeman, besides challenging the police system itself, also served as a means of challenging the policeman’s masculinity.⁷⁹ Police constables were duty-bound to refuse such

⁷⁶ The Bible suffused popular mentalities in the nineteenth century, shaping those notions of right and justice which fed into labour organisation and popular protest: see K.D.M. Snell, ‘Differential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and Wales’ in M.L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500* (Harlow, 1992), 171-76.

⁷⁷ Further on indignity and power relations, see Scott, *op.cit.*, 111-13.

⁷⁸ See Emsley, *Hard Men*, *op.cit.*, passim; A. Davies, ‘Youth gangs, masculinity and violence in late Victorian Manchester and Salford’, *Journal of Social History*, XXXII, 2 (Winter 1998), 349-369; J.E. Archer, “‘Men behaving badly’?: Masculinity and the uses of violence, 1850-1900’ in S. D’Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950: Gender and Class* (Harlow, 2000), 41-54.

⁷⁹ Policemen shared in the culture of manly toughness: see M. Clapson and C. Emsley, ‘Street, beat and respectability: the culture and self-image of late Victorian and Edwardian urban policemen’, *Criminal Justice*

challenges, and although such fair fights with policemen must have gone on, constables appear for the most part to have expressed their manliness via the rough handling of prisoners.⁸⁰ The challenge to fight also provided individuals with an opportunity to express their own masculine pride: we have already encountered William Hewett, who told two officers that ‘he had served two months for that bloody Palmer and he would [sic] serve seven for them and if they would [sic] take there [sic] clothes off he would [sic] pay them in two minutes’ (see above, 19). Similar cases abound. One night in 1883, Constable Whitaker found 21-year-old Joseph Illingsworth drunk and riotous outside his house in Dewsbury Road, Beeston. The constable requested he go indoors, ‘when he [Illingsworth] said dont [sic] come here you Bugger Interfering with me because I am just the man for Upsetting you Bloody Bobbies he then begun to take his Coat of [sic] to Fight the PC’.⁸¹ Sometimes, when the police intervened in fair fights, popular responses blended masculine pride in toughness with resentment of the police. In 1881, two constables came across John Robinson (bricklayer’s labourer) in Weetwood Lane, Headingley, stripped down to fight and surrounded by a crowd of some ‘30 or 40 people’. According to the police report, ‘as soon as he saw the PCs he call [sic] them Big rotten B. & Big fat headed B. *there was not a Bloody policeman in Headingley that [sic] could catch him*’.⁸² Robinson was clearly fond of this taunt, for he repeated it some four months later while drunkenly parading down Otley Road.⁸³

The same defiant tone can be discerned in most similar threats of violence. When landlord William Bailey was ordered by Constable Harland to ‘go a way [sic]’ from Bailey Place, Headingley, for being drunk and swearing audibly, ‘he said he should not go away for a Big fat headed B. like him, if he came near him he would split his Bloody big head open old farmer glory’. Although the incident did not occur at Bailey’s home, Harland had still interfered with the man on private land, with predictable results: ‘Bailey said he was on his own premises and he would do as he liked’.⁸⁴ On Boxing Day, 1883, Constable Brown faced similar abuse

History, XVI (2002), 122-24; P. Lawrence, “‘Scoundrels and scallywags, and some honest men...’” *Memoirs and the self-image of French and English policemen, c.1870-1939* in B.S. Godfrey, C. Emsley and G. Dunstall (eds), *Comparative Histories of Crime* (Cullompton, 2003), 131-35.

⁸⁰ Archer, *Monster Evil*, *op.cit.*, 46-47, 49. It is easy to imagine certain locally-renowned, ‘hard’ policemen taking up the invitation to fight: see Emsley, *Hard Men*, pp.135-36.

⁸¹ B.O.B., 24 July 1883.

⁸² H.O.B., 3 July 1881, emphasis added; 1881 Census, RG11/4538, f.131, 40.

⁸³ H.O.B., 29 November 1881.

⁸⁴ H.O.B., 13 January 1882. Bailey’s occupation was recorded as ‘income from property’: 1881 Census, RG11/4538, f.128, 33.

when he encountered a group of some 16 or 17 men using bad language in Otley Road, Headingley. After asking them to move on, Brown was confronted by two labourers, William Wincup and James Norton:

Wincup walk [sic] a few yard [sic] up the road swearing what he could do at [sic] the Bloody Bobby he came back and said he could Knock his Bloody head off same as Knocking a Bullock down, Norton came up to the PC and took his belt off and said he would cut his Bloody face open if he laid hands on Wincup.⁸⁵

Again, the significance of physique in popular masculine identities shines through here: the reference to ‘Knocking a Bullock down’ was presumably meant to emphasise Wincup’s physical prowess. Yet this sentiment must be situated in the context of confrontation with the police. Violent defiance can thus be seen as a psychologically defensive reaction by those who found themselves on the receiving end of police discipline; such challenges to fight – and some actual assaults – arose as attempts to salvage a sense of manliness in the face of a potentially humiliating regime of control.

Further varieties of defiant response served similarly defensive purposes. The boasts of men subject to police surveillance best make sense as an attempt to ridicule police authority, to render it contemptible. In Farnley in 1884, John Waterworth (boiler-smith) abused Constable Forrest, calling him ‘a damned scamp & a lying Villain’, for which he was told he would be reported. Yet Waterworth had the last word, declaring: ‘I shall stand in the street as long as I like.’⁸⁶ Steedman argued that popular contempt for the police modified the purchase of antagonism,⁸⁷ yet this sentiment is better understood as part of a broader repertoire of defiant reactions. In 1882, Constable Johnson told Joseph Edward Lee (tanner) he would be reported for being drunk and riotous in Elland Road, Beeston. In response, Lee boasted: ‘I don’t Care if you send me a Cart Load of Summonses I have got plenty of money’.⁸⁸ Similarly, when two cart drivers were reprimanded by Constable Potter for not having proper control over their horses,

⁸⁵ H.O.B., 26 December 1883; 1881 Census, RG11/4538, ff.117-18, 10-11.

⁸⁶ F.O.B., 12 July 1884; 1891 Census, RG12/3680, f.13, 20.

⁸⁷ Steedman, *op.cit.*, 67-68.

⁸⁸ B.O.B., 14 March 1882; 1881 Census, RG11/4495, f.115, 1.

they both ‘did nothing but laf [sic] at him’.⁸⁹ The drunken men of Farnley mustered a variety of derisory responses to the interfering constable: Oliver Beauland ‘told the Officer to go to Hell & do his worst’;⁹⁰ Joseph Horsfall ‘said he did not care a d---’;⁹¹ and James Barrett told Constable Forrest ‘you can do as you like.’⁹² These encounters highlight the uses of insult in everyday life, which could provide a measure of psychological insulation for those upon whom the impact of policing fell most heavily. Yet constables were also treated with contempt by those higher up the social hierarchy. Reported for leaving his cart standing in the street, Francis Oxley – a farmer of 32 acres – told Constable Carney: ‘get out with you and mind your own Business I can talk to a Higher man than you’.⁹³ The image of the policeman as a pathetic puppet of his elite paymasters thus formed a ready instrument of resistance in the late nineteenth century.

This article has presented substantial evidence of antagonistic encounters between police and public in the late nineteenth century. Such resentment was grounded in the nature of policing, especially the petty, intrusive regime of order it sought to impose upon ordinary people. However, those historians who have reduced popular resistance purely to particular encounters – to the contexts of police action – have obscured the survival of coherent anti-police opinion late into the nineteenth century. These views both fed into, and were sustained by, actual encounters with authority. Evidence from the police occurrence books demonstrates the existence of a culture which rejected the legitimacy of the police presence, through insult, abuse and violence. Of course, this material does not capture the nuances of popular attitudes towards the police; doubtless anti-police perspectives co-existed with more moderate views, and were deployed selectively in particular contexts. A full assessment of police-public relations at this time – which would require consideration of numerous additional factors and reference to more diverse sources – is beyond the scope of this article. The oppositional sentiments examined above certainly cannot be taken as typical; however, the foregoing does demonstrate that an anti-police

⁸⁹ H.O.B., 24 January 1881; 1881 Census, RG11/4485, f.16, 25 (Benjamin Mills); 1881 Census, RG11/4509, f.104, 8 (Alfred Knott).

⁹⁰ F.O.B., 19 March 1880.

⁹¹ F.O.B., 15 December 1883.

⁹² F.O.B., 20 June 1885.

⁹³ B.O.B., 21 February 1879. It seems likely from the nature of the offence that this was the response of Oxley the father (farmer) rather than the son (colliery book-keeper): 1881 Census, RG11/4495, f.85, 14.

ideology – freely mobilised to resist the exercise of police authority – retained some purchase late into the century, and dovetailed neatly with several constituent elements of popular culture at this time. On this basis alone, it would seem that a broader re-assessment of police-public relations in the second half of the nineteenth century is overdue.

What sustained such deep pockets of resistance and opposition to the new police? Part of the answer has to do with the scope of everyday policing. The discipline of street conduct and other forms of low-level ‘deviance’ routinely set the police and a large section of the populace in mutual opposition, however much this might be mediated in practice by the judicious exercise of discretion. Yet anti-police modes of thought also drew sustenance from a more general opposition to external interference of various kinds. Opposition to the police was perhaps strongest amongst the coalminers of Beeston, whose attachment to the customary mentality of violence was most clearly in evidence. This might be explained by their particularly cohesive community structure – based around the distinctiveness of pit, neighbourhood and out-township – and by the lively culture of trade unionism in that locality.⁹⁴ Yet the draw of mutual association and hostility towards the state extended beyond any one locale or occupational group, and continued into the twentieth century. Writing of interwar Hunslet – a highly industrial southern township of Leeds – Richard Hoggart discerned the following of popular attitudes towards officialdom: ‘Working-class people only make use of “Them” when absolutely forced: if things go wrong, people feel then, put up with them: don’t get into the hands of authority, and, if you must have help, only “trust yer own sort”’.⁹⁵

As this quotation indicates, perceptions of the police can only be understood in the context of popular culture more broadly. A nagging suspicion of outsiders, and hostility towards figures of authority in particular, was deeply ingrained by the late nineteenth century, as was an attachment to communal means of settling interpersonal disputes. Such considerations – together with the persistent appeal of images of policemen as ‘idle’ parasites – remind us that views of the police reflected inherited notions as well as present realities. Sentiments were shaped by police practice, but they were also mediated by the whole fabric of collective norms and values;

⁹⁴ See Pearson, *op.cit.*, 193, 205-210, 223. Carolyn Baylies identifies Beeston as one of the more militant branches of the Yorkshire Mining Association in the period 1885-1904: *The History of the Yorkshire Miners 1881-1918*, ebook edition (London, 2005), table 7.7. Research on similar sources elsewhere might lead to a fuller appreciation of the regional and local dimensions of anti-police sentiment.

⁹⁵ R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments*, new edition (London, 1992), 76.

oppressive and humiliating encounters with the police keyed into these mentalities, which offered barren ground for more benign understandings of the 'British Bobby'.⁹⁶ Thus, resistance was directed at once at particular, unwelcome police interventions, and at the institution itself. In other words, the situational context and ideological content of popular attitudes towards the police were inseparable; together, they worked to sustain sometimes bitter resentment in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁶ See Brogden, *op.cit.*, 221. On the idealisation of working-class policemen in national culture, see C. Emsley, 'The English Bobby: an indulgent tradition' in R. Porter (ed.), *Myths of the English* (Cambridge, 1992), 114-135.