

The Parish Constables of Wickhamford, Badsey, Aldington, Bretforton and Offenham

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 allowed Borough Councils to organise a police force, but implementation was slow. By 1837 only 93 out of 171 boroughs had done so. The Rural Constabulary Act of 1839 allowed any of the 54 English counties to raise and equip a paid police force. Then, in 1842, a new Parish Constables Act was passed in response to political unrest associated with the Chartist Movement. The appointed Parish Constables were part time and poorly paid, if at all. Nationally, the posts often attracted only a low calibre of persons, who were not prepared to risk life and limb to arrest anyone. This situation did not appear to be the case in villages in the Badsey area.

In the records held at The Hive, Worcester, are annual lists of Parish Constables in the Evesham District. Those for 1842, 1843 and 1847 to 1851 inclusive have survived. From those lists the tables below has been prepared, giving the names of the Parish Constables for Wickhamford, Badsey, Aldington, Bretforton and Offenham. The census returns of 1841 and 1851 show the main occupations of these men in most cases. Nearly all of the Constables were drawn from the ranks of the local farmers and tradesmen.

Name of Parish and Constable	Occupation of Constable	Years of service						
		1842	1843	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851
Wickhamford								
Samuel Smith	Miller	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Badsey								
William Knight	Farmer	Y						
Thomas Sheaf	Farmer	Y						
Richard Oldaker	Blacksmith		Y		Y			
Joseph Cherry	Silk winder		Y					
Thomas Taylor	Butcher			Y				
James Aldington	Master cordwainer			Y				
William Phillips	Baker				Y			
William Henry Bishop	Farmer					Y	Y	Y
Edward Laughner Blew	Master gardener					Y		
John Phillips	Baker						Y	
Edward Cooke	Baker & Grocer							Y
Aldington								
John Keen	Miller	Y		Y	Y			Y
John Sherwood	Farmer		Y					
Charles Sherwood	Farmer's son					Y		
Thomas Byrd	Farmer						Y	

Name of Parish and Constable	Occupation of Constable	Years of service						
		1842	1843	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851
Bretforton								
Thomas Banning	Farmer	Y	Y					
Caleb Cull	Land surveyor	Y	Y					
William Hays	Wheelwright			Y				
John Berkeley	Master cordwainer			Y				
Charles Lockett	Tailor				Y			
John Phipps	Cordwainer				Y			
William Shephard	Statuary mason					Y		
George Geden	Tailor					Y		
Thomas White	Mason						Y	
Thomas Banning	Labourer						Y	
James Hayward	Wheelwright							Y
Thomas Slatter	Cordwainer							Y
Offenham								
Richard Hopkins	Farmer	Y	Y					
John Pearce	Schoolmaster	Y	Y					
John Baylis	Bricklayer			Y				
John Gibbs	Farmer			Y				
Wilson Smith	Farmer				Y			
William Stephens	Carpenter				Y	Y	Y	
John Harris	Farm Labourer					Y		
Thomas Canning	Coal dealer						Y	Y
Henry Moore	Blacksmith							Y

Wickhamford Parish Constable

Whilst in the nearby villages the occupant of the post of Parish Constable changed frequently, in Wickhamford, Samuel Smith kept that post for many years. The Constables and 'Overseers' (those appointed to look after the poor) were appointed at the start of every financial year and Samuel's name appears as Parish Constable for the village in editions of the *Worcester Chronicle* in April 1859, 1861, 1862 and 1865. An entry also appears for him as an 'Overseer' when he and Amelia Pethard were appointed in Wickhamford in 1872. The Overseers reported to the Parish councils and also represented the village when reporting in to the Rural Sanitary Authority (later Rural District Councils).

It seems as if Samuel Smith had no known competitor for the post of Parish Constable from 1842 until 1865 at least. No entries have been found in the Newspaper Archive for any arrests made by him ! Samuel Smith died in 1879 after many years of service to the village both as miller and Parish Constable and Overseer. (*More information of the Smith family and Wickhamford Mill can be found in the web-site article on that topic.*)

In around 1850, Worcester County Police Force took over the Borough Police Forces. From sometime in the 1860s, P.C. Surrell from the "Persore Division" of Worcester County Police Force, was a Police Constable in Bretforton. Earlier, John Wigley was recorded as 'Police Man' in Bretforton in the 1861 census. This means, that towards the end of the 1850s, Worcester County Police Force had "village police constables" keeping law and order. They were all issued with "occurrence books" and walked miles covering their duties in their appointed villages. Wickhamford was covered by the Bretforton policeman, and P.C.Surrell also dealt with Aldington, Badsey and the Littletons. It was not unusual for a "village copper" to have lots of villages to look after.

"Parish constables" were abolished as soon as the village copper was around. In the vast and complex development of law and order and of organising authorities and social law and order Parish Constables came into being when the manorial rule ceased. They stopped when the village policeman appeared, and in this area it was in the 1860s.

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Tom Locke – May 2014