

## CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

TWO years ago, a man calling himself PC David Copperfield wrote a groundbreaking book called *Wasting Police Time*. In it, he described the working life of an ordinary bobby, trying to do his job but frustrated at every turn by a strange bureaucracy which seemed almost entirely unrelated to his work, even counterproductive to it. At the time, people weren't talking much about paperwork and targets and 'detections', but Copperfield revealed to the wider world what most rank and file police officers already knew – that our Criminal Justice System was in severe danger of becoming a complete joke.

It was very funny book, I thought, and also very brave. (Declaration of interest: this book is from the same publisher.) He was exposing things that some senior officers and members of the Government didn't want exposing, and I don't know a single copper of my rank or below who didn't think every single word in it was true. Typically, the Police Minister Tony McNulty MP denounced it in the House of Commons as 'more of a fiction than Dickens', but he had to backtrack on this when interviewed for a BBC *Panorama* programme about the book and its author.

I'm sure there was something of a hunt on to discover Copperfield's true identity, but eventually he unmasked himself as PC Stuart Davidson. By then, a lot of what he had said had filtered through into the mainstream media, with newspapers across the political spectrum joining TV and radio journalists in asking questions about the form-filling and time-wasting that beset the police.

Although I had already agreed to write this book by then, I was confident that Stuart had said it all and that change might follow – the powers-that-be couldn't possibly ignore this media pressure, could they? Indeed, a variety of initiatives *have* since been launched and grand promises made. There's been Sir Ronnie Flanagan's Independent Review of Policing, pledges of hand-held computers to cut paperwork, the ongoing drive towards Neighbourhood Policing, more PCSOs than ever and even a Green Paper.

But all that's really happened is a few of the Titanic's deckchairs have been shifted around. Ronnie's report was a major missed

opportunity, which skirts round the heart of the matter and will achieve nothing. Ditto, hand-held computers. Neighbourhood Policing and PCSOs are *part* of the problem, not the answers to it. The Green Paper was a rehash of old ideas and new nonsense that was rightly dismissed by the Police Federation as being full of empty promises. Despite recent ‘spin’ to the contrary, the situation with bureaucracy, political correctness and general target-driven baloney is now *worse* than it was before Copperfield, not better.

Lots of this stuff was brought in after scandals like the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the bungled Stephen Lawrence murder investigation. Some of it was certainly needed, and no-one can say there is no corruption or racism in the police, but the pendulum has swung *far* too far the other way. The actions of a few bent or incompetent coppers working, in many cases, before most modern officers were even born are simply not a sensible justification for the current levels of regulation and mistrust we labour under, particularly as they now seriously hamper our ability to deliver a decent service to the public.

Thousands of officers who could and should be on the streets deterring and nicking criminals are employed behind desks ‘auditing’ crime reports and managing detection figures. I am concerned that our insane obsession with largely irrelevant targets will eventually cost lives. It probably already has.

It is not enough to tinker around the edges: major change is needed if you want us to be able to respond quickly to your burglary or assault or mugging – or maybe even stand a chance of preventing them from happening in the first place.

Like PC Copperfield, I’m a real police officer writing under a pseudonym about his job as a front line ‘Response’ officer. There are lots of other cops, some doing very worthwhile jobs, others sat in offices doing nothing in particular, but I’m writing about leading those who come out (eventually) when you call 999. The people Response police arrest are probably not much like you. We don’t really deal with normal, law-abiding folks, we deal with seriously violent thugs who attack others for no reason, who viciously beat and rob old ladies, who pimp out their own children, who think first, last and always of themselves at the expense of others. Unlike Copperfield, I’m an Inspector, two ranks above him. This means that

## Perverting The Course Of Justice

I have a bit less of the day-to-day contact with members of the public than he had but more of a handle on the theory and practice of police bureaucracy\*.

I work for a force I call 'Ruralshire Constabulary'. Without being too specific, it covers a population well into seven figures, across an area of hundreds of square miles and a number of towns, some large, some small. I'm based in 'F Division' – a couple of hundred square miles, a population of around 300,000 people and six or seven decent-sized conurbations.

I'm ex-Army, and ex a few other things that would really surprise you. I'm married, I have kids and a dog called Kibble Chops. I'm not trying to bring down the Government, or embarrass my Chief Constable, and I'm altering names and other details to avoid identifying myself, my colleagues or members of the public. If you think you recognise yourself in these pages, it's coincidental. I have to make these changes for obvious reasons, but I hope they won't detract from the essential message. If that message seems a bit repetitive at times, this only reflects the nature of my job.

Lots of the stories and views in here are controversial; you won't find members of the Association of Chief Police Officers queuing up to agree with me. It's my thoughts and experiences, from my perspective. I don't trust official crime figures or press releases personally, but to get the full, unbiased picture you probably need to read that sort of stuff, too, and be aware that there are others who see things differently from me.

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\*It would be impossible in a book of this size to do justice to the scale and lunacy of police bureaucracy – all I can do is hint at it. If you'd like to get really up to speed – perhaps you have some time on your hands or are having trouble sleeping – visit <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk> and check out the slightly Stalinist-sounding 'National Policing Plan'. It's full of the usual meaningless buzzword bingo phrases like 'Key Milestones', 'Activity Based Costing' and 'National Strategic Assessment' – 'target' appears 34 times, 'prison' appears once and 'punish' and 'just desserts' don't rear their ugly heads at all. It contains the Home Secretary's key priorities for the police service and, according to the Home Office, 'should be seen in the wider context' of the 'Home Office Strategic Plan 2004-08' and the policy paper 'Building Communities, Beating Crime: A Better Police Service for the 21st Century'. It couldn't hurt to check out the National Community Safety Plan 2008-2011 while you're surfing.

It's not all about pens and form-filling – we still do get to help people, catch criminals and lock them up, and I wouldn't change my job, for all its frustrations, for anything. Every day can bring moments of fear, distress and jubilation, often within the same hour, and not many people can say that.

## NANNY KNOWS BEST

ALL I want is a cup of tea. I have served this nation for the best part of two decades, both at home and abroad. I don't want medals and I don't want more money. I just want some tea.

Debbie has banned me from doughnuts and she can detect any offending behaviour faster than she would the perfume of another woman. Tea is just about the only indulgence I have left, come break time.

But I can't have a cuppa because electric kettles are prohibited in my workplace. Our Health and Safety department has banned them in case we kill ourselves or our colleagues by electrocution, burning or drowning.

Ah, well. It's hot today, anyway. I switch on my desk fan.

Ha ha... had you going there, didn't I? Of *course* I don't switch on my desk fan. I'm not allowed to use my desk fan until it has been checked and stickered as 'safe to use' by one of the highly-paid staff who descend upon Ruraltown nick every so often and examine everything in the place with beady eyes and subtle grins. It's August now; based on previous experience they will finally arrive to check the fans in early December.

Never mind. It's nearly time to clock off. Whoah! Almost caught *myself* out that time. The office clock's wrong. Of course it is, it's still showing GMT. We're not allowed to change the time, naturally. No, that would be dangerous and UNISON – the union of the official clock time changers – wouldn't like it, so we have to wait for one of those pesky engineers to come round from force HQ and set it for us. Last year I ignored this, got up on a chair and altered it myself. The next day, the nick's UNISON rep got up on a chair and *changed it back to the wrong time*. (This is not satire, or a joke, or a lie – this is

true.) The clock will start showing the right time around three weeks before we go back to GMT, and it will then show BST for the following 12 weeks before it's put right again.

Welcome to the public sector!

More than the tea, and the fan, and the clock, it's the trousers that get to me. A while back, we were issued combats which featured numerous and capacious pockets and, being a generally disorganised kind of person, I *loved* them. Instead of constantly having to remember where I'd last seen my pen/spare radio battery/Mars bar, I could simply load up those trews and crack on. Then they were withdrawn, at the behest of the Health and Safety Commissariat, in case bobbies injured themselves by falling over and pushing whatever was stuffed in their pockets into their thighs.

The weird thing is, when Saturday comes, and I'm facing a dozen drunken, violent and dangerous yobs outside the taxi rank in the High Street, with only three PCs and a guardian angel on my side, our Health and Safety officers are nowhere to be seen.

Kettles and trousers – too dangerous.

Tackling 250lbs of screaming, tattooed nightmare, armed only with a 50g tin of pepper spray which doesn't work and a weedy aluminium stick – you carry on, officer.

I climb two storeys to the top floor, where there's a newly-installed vending machine which dispenses quite vile hot-but-not-too-hot drinks for a price that verges on extortion. As I see the amount of takings in one week, I wonder if this isn't the real reason for banning kettles.

## CRIME REPORTS

HOW we police is no different, really, to how we make tea or change the clocks; that is, it often makes no sense at all. If your knowledge of our ways of working is limited to having watched *The Bill* or *Inspector Morse*, you may not 'get' much of what follows in this book. If you remember how policing used to be, or you try to imagine how it might work in a sane world, you will probably have similar problems.

## *Inspector Gadget*

Thus, to help you appreciate how ridiculous it all is, and to understand why we do some of the mad things we do, here's a basic run-through of our processes.

If you've never reported a crime to us, you would be forgiven for thinking that what happens is this:

1. You call your local police station and speak to an officer.
2. You explain what has happened.
3. The police officer decides, based on his or her experience and the outline you give, how urgent the matter is, and sends other officers out to the scene to investigate.
4. When they get there, they use their experience and knowledge to assess what crime has actually been committed – if any – and what should happen next.

The first thing to note is that you are most unlikely, nowadays, to be calling your local police station. In an attempt to cut costs and be more efficient, most forces have moved to centrally-based call centres which may be a very long way away from where you are, local knowledge having been deemed surplus to requirements some time ago. After all, with A-Z map books and GPS, no-one could ever get lost, or confuse High Street North with North High Street, could they? The answer to that is, of course they could. Sometimes, we'll send multiple cars to one minor incident after the people calling us all give slightly different locations to different operators – whereas a local controller would have realised immediately that they were all going to the same job. Other times, we will be directed to a local landmark – the cinema, say, or Argos – where some disturbance is occurring, and get there to find it's not even in our town, but somewhere else on the other side of F division.

The second point is that you are very unlikely to speak to a police officer when you ring up. Most of the people who answer the phones for us are civilians. Often, they are agency staff, with little knowledge of the law, reading from checklists and ticking off boxes on our Command and Control computer system as you speak. They typically have no experience or understanding of police work to bring to bear, but despite this they are the ones who decide whether you are actually reporting a crime and what our response to your call will be.

## Perverting The Course Of Justice

You're probably thinking, *What do you mean... decide whether I am actually reporting a crime?*

I'm taking it as read that you are intelligent and have a bit of common sense, and will only report 'real' crimes to us. Lots of people, unfortunately, are either not very intelligent, or lack common sense, or have lost all perspective as to what the police are *for*.

What does this mean in practice? Well, we might get Mr Hughes ringing the call centre and complaining that his ex-girlfriend has just sent him a nasty text message. The police response to this ought to be: 'You are a grown man. Why not turn your phone off, or just ignore the texts? Because we do have fatal accidents, suicides, rapes, stabbings, battered old ladies and missing children to deal with, you see.'

But what is far more likely to happen is that an inexperienced call taker will create a crime report of 'harassment' and two officers will be sent around to Mr Hughes' house to take a statement from him. I'll talk later about the huge amount of paperwork generated and police time wasted by this, but you can take it from me that it could well soak up 10 or 20 hours and a small rainforest over the next few weeks and months. The girlfriend will be arrested and interviewed, and her phone seized and kept for three months while we go through the very lengthy and bureaucratic process of proving she sent the complained-of message (even if she admits she did). Then she will accept a caution, or the case will be dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service. (The following week, Mr Hughes will text his ex something unpleasant, and the whole charade will start again, only in reverse.)

In point 4 above, I said you might think that the two cops would be able to 'use their experience and knowledge to assess what crime has actually been committed and what should happen next'. Surely they can circumvent the nightmare created by the civvie call centre worker and tell Mr Hughes, politely, that this is not a police matter?

A nice idea, but sadly it's not as easy to do as it is to write.

We are all now working within a framework set up by the Home Office specifically to remove discretion and experience from the game. The National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) was adopted with the aim of 'recording crime in a more victim-focused way' and 'maintaining greater consistency between police forces in

the recording of crime'. The Home Office Counting Rules 'provide a national standard for the recording and counting of notifiable offences'. I'll talk a bit more about NCRS later, and you can read all about it on the Home Office website if you really want to, but what it means in practice is that once that crime report is generated on our computer system it is extremely hard to get it to go away, even if no crime has been committed. A PC can, in theory, 'no-crime' these jobs, but to do so takes a lot of time filling in forms to explain why.

Officially, I imagine the reasoning behind this is that we don't want bent, lazy or incompetent bobbies playing God with crime, because that ends up with the Birmingham Six. (Except that, no, it doesn't. For really serious cases, some important checks and balances have been brought in; no-one is going to beat up Mr Hughes' ex to get her to cough to phone abuse.)

Unofficially, the senior management team (SMT) don't like it – what they want is for this to remain a crime and for it to be 'detected' (solved) for our figures. Trivial stuff that we can actually get people to admit to is our bread and butter, because it balances out all the other stuff we can't clear up; any officers who no-crime too often will have to justify themselves to their bosses.

So, more often than not, we cross every 'T' and dot every 'I' and then employ a small army of back office police and civilian auditors to make sure we haven't missed any.

People say, 'But what happens if Hughes' ex stabs him to death a week later?'

Believe me, in 99.999% of cases she won't – and how much other crime, including real stabbings, has happened because we're chasing after her and a million other silly texters to prevent ones that never will?

Because that's the point – this is at least partly why you're left sitting at home for hours and hours wondering why we haven't turned up yet to your burglary/assault/mugging.

Rules and processes brought in to save time and money and make things fairer have ended up costing time and money and hampering us in our attempts to fight crime. This is about well-meaning idiocy, the usurping of front line professionals by managers and bureaucrats and the law of unintended consequences. All themes to which I will return throughout this book.



## FAT DOGS

WE GET hundreds and thousands of jobs like that of Mr Hughes and his spiteful text messages.

We don't get too many like The Case of the Fat Dog, but it helps to amplify some of the points I've just made, about the loss of common sense and the police fear of no-criming stuff.

Mrs Kelly came back from her two weeks in Greece and went to collect her black Labrador, Samson, from the dog walker.

Unfortunately, she didn't think that old Samson was looking his best; in fact, she was convinced that he had put on weight during her time away. Only one conclusion could be drawn from this – the dog walker hadn't been exercising him properly.

Unsatisfied with his fitness levels, Mrs Kelly withheld payment. The dog sitter retaliated by refusing to hand over Samson.

There followed a sort of middle-class stand-off, at the end of which Mrs Kelly phoned the police.

She got through to a communications centre worker who listened for a while and then informed her that this was a case of blackmail and that a patrol would be sent out to 'take details for a crime report'.

The patrol duly arrived to find two middle aged women, each refusing to back down, and a fat dog sitting between them with his tongue out. A problem, yes, but wasn't there a time when these women would have sorted this out between themselves, or been advised to if they had called us?

I happened to overhear some of the traffic bating to and fro on the radio, and (after a risk assessment that things weren't going to get properly ugly) I intervened and instructed the two PCs to suggest to the two women that they resolve the matter in the civil courts, and then leave the address.

Later, I spoke to the two bobbies – both young in service.

'We would have crimed it if you hadn't got involved, sir,' they said.

They knew how barking this was, if you'll excuse the pun, but they wouldn't dare leave a 'blackmail' call without a crime report because it would look like they weren't doing anything about what

looked, on paper, a serious matter. The Crime Audit Team from HQ would have seen this and sent threatening emails to them and their Sergeant, which would have required paperwork, time and embarrassment to sort out.

I can only listen to the radio so much of the time, and not all Inspectors would intervene like this – if you're looking for promotion, it's not very sensible. It's not hard to see how other 'Fat Dog' cases go a lot further.

## KIBBLE CHOPS

TALKING of fat dogs, here's a great example of how we lost the support of the public in a completely unnecessary way to satisfy a few bean counters somewhere far from the front lines.

The subject might seem minor, but it represents a few drops from a free-flowing tap of similar rubbish.

We're a nation of dog lovers, right? Well, until recently, local people would occasionally bring in stray or lost dogs they had picked up wandering the streets near our nick.

We'd place these animals in the kennels in the back yard, feed and water them and enter the details of when and where they were discovered into a 'Found Property' book.

We'd give the RSPCA or the local kennels a bell and after a few hours someone would arrive and take them away. If the particular pooch was unwell or looked undernourished, the RSPCA would have it. If it was simply 'unclaimed', it went to the local kennels.

It didn't take much time or effort on our part – it was just one of those traditional non-crime things the police have always done, like helping grannies cross the road or telling you the time of day – but the public *really* appreciated us for it. We liked doing it, too. Most of *us* are dog lovers, after all, and simple things like this help us to build a rapport with our local residents, which is always good – tomorrow, they might be witnesses to a crime.

That was before SLAs.

I don't want to get too technical with the jargon (it's hard to avoid in the modern police), but these are 'Service Level

## Perverting The Course Of Justice

Agreements’ which we now have to negotiate with other local agencies to agree responsibility for various things that need doing in our area. It’s all part of the force’s ‘Best Value’ strategy – which I think means providing a better service, year-on-year, for less money. Best Value is our current management religion, having just about superseded ‘Citizen Focus’ in the hierarchy of gobbledegook. This is ironic, as it’s also the reason why we lost our *actual* citizen focus in the first place.

Looking after lost dogs ‘had to go’ under Best Value. In fact, a lot has had to go – usually the kind of things you can’t really define, which local people value but accountants don’t. Someone at Headquarters probably worked out that bobbies and front counter staff would have X more hours available each year if we didn’t waste time with these dogs, and that we could cut the budget or the staff or deliver more for the same or offer more citizen focus or something utterly abstract like that. We were told to stop taking the animals in, and instead to agree new, formal SLAs about lost dogs with Ruralshire County Council, where – as before – the RSPCA would take responsibility for sick or ill-treated ones and the kennels for the lost or stray (only no longer on a goodwill basis).

Try explaining this to members of the public when they walk in with an animal they’ve just found.

‘Sorry, madam, we don’t take in lost dogs any more.’

‘What do you mean, you don’t take in lost dogs?’

‘Yeah, sorry, it’s our Service Level Agreements.’

‘Your Service *what?*’

‘You’ll have to take it to the kennels, I’m afraid.’

‘How far’s that?’

‘Oooh... five miles or so?’

‘But I haven’t got a car.’

‘Well, I’m sorry but we can’t take them in now. It’s Citizen Focus, you see.’

‘Can I just use your phone then? I’ll call my husband and he...’

‘Sorry, I’m afraid you can’t use the police station phone any more, because of Best Value. Have you got a mobile?’

Eventually, an angry and upset and confused and resentful person storms out of the nick, muttering. Sometimes, they find a way to take the dog to the kennels. Quite often, they will leave it tied to the

railings outside as they go. That makes the Chief Inspector very angry. ‘What is wrong with these people?’ he says. ‘Don’t they understand Service Level Agreements?’

And, as with any system devised by bureaucrats, there are unforeseens, loopholes and inconsistencies. Shortly after the introduction of the SLAs, this happened:

A local youth called Robbie was arrested for beating up his father and stealing his dole money for alcohol. This is, unfortunately, quite a common occurrence on some of our worst estates.

Robbie had a habit of bringing home various animals, then losing interest and leaving them for his parents to look after. The day he beat up his dad, he had come home with a dog and when he was arrested after running away from the house he still had it with him.

It was getting dark when he was nicked, and the dog was placed in the kennels at the police station (against the new policy) and looked after overnight.

At court the following morning, Robbie was remanded to prison.

Now, what about the dog?

If it had been lost or stray, or maltreated, the local kennels or the RSPCA would have had responsibility for it. But it was neither: we knew who the owner was, he just couldn’t look after it in jail.

In the old, pre-SLA days, we would have closed this loophole by ringing up the kennels and explaining the situation, and someone would have come down and collected it, as I say, out of goodwill.

Now, because we have these formal SLAs, with roles and responsibilities clearly delineated, that’s no longer an option.

The kennels wanted £70 a day to take Robbie’s dog for the period that he was on remand. The DI in charge of the investigation was not about to blow his overtime or equipment budget on kennel fees. What to do?

What actually happened is that Kibble Chops came to live at the Gadget household with me, Debbie and the kids. It was squared with Robbie, who didn’t want him anyway, and, a couple of years on, he hasn’t looked back. But there is a limit to how many dogs Mrs Gadget will let me bring home from work.

## SCHOOL CROSSINGS

DOGS are only the half of it.

A headmaster rang up, extremely concerned because his lollipop lady had just quit after yet another near miss with a speeding motorist. Commuters in big German cars were roaring past the school gates, doing 40mph or more in a 20mph zone, and the head wanted something doing about it.

I came across the details of his call on our computer log. It's fairly quiet for us at that time on a school morning, so I decided to send a couple of bobbies up there the following week and put in some road checks, stop a few cars, hand out some tickets – the sort of stuff a Duty Inspector is expected to do, really.

I stuck this on our 'taskings list'. The next thing I knew, a more senior officer had come down to see me.

'You can't do this,' he said.

'Why not?'

'We have Service Level Agreements with the local authority about traffic outside schools – before we do anything, you need to get up there and find out what their safety, transport and roads policy is.'

'What?'

'Schools have to produce a policy about traffic calming, and safety, and school crossing patrols, and walking buses, and if having police up there is not in his policy we can't do it.'

I went over to see the headmaster with the traffic guy from Area. And we talked about signage and barriers and budget and length of time... all *I* wanted to do was take a patrol up there. It transpired that, officially, we couldn't do that because it wasn't in the various plans. The argument is, if we do that for one school, soon they'll *all* want it. Then it will become a demand, and then it will become a complaint if we can't fulfil it. And if we do that, we're not doing something else. Above all, it's about the letter of your agreements: it's the school's job in conjunction with the local authority and Highways to sort out their traffic issues. If the police do it for them they will abdicate their responsibility and spend the budget somewhere else. (Everyone in the public sector is at each others' throats like this now, though they will officially deny that.)

If I say all this to the head, and refuse to come out, what's going to happen? He's going to tell the parents that we don't give a toss about their kids at the next PTA meeting, or stick it in the school newsletter, and soon everyone will know, and they'll all tell 10 other people about it, and then our name is mud everywhere.

The public are not interested in SLAs; they expect the police to deal with motorists speeding outside schools.

Actually, I *also* expect us to do this, so I just sent my officers up there anyway. It's not illegal, after all, it's just against policy. Ironically enough, most of the cars we stopped and ticketed were driven by parents who were dropping their kids off and then racing off to work.

But this is where we're at now: much of the stuff people expect from us, culturally, traditionally, we no longer do. Once you start thinking about the police like a quasi-commercial operation, with customers and core business and auxiliary business, and using business management and accountancy models, you start to *run* it like a business. There's no money in what we do, but there are Home Office targets we can meet, which bring us funding and promotions and so on. Sadly, there are no targets for motorists outside schools and lost dogs.

## **LEFT HAND, RIGHT HAND**

THE people at the top of the police are not necessarily bad people. Most of them are very good people. But the majority, to a greater or lesser degree, are out of touch with reality. Perhaps this is inevitable, given the distance between them and the streets, where real policing happens.

I used to know a very senior officer very well. He was a really good egg and, since he was now a long way from the front line, he would occasionally ring me – and other Sergeants and Inspectors whom he knew – to chew the fat about operational matters. He was an intelligent, thoughtful and highly experienced man, but some of the questions he would ask me were shocking.

He got on the blower one time about a bit of a situation they'd had in one of our big, rough towns.

## Perverting The Course Of Justice

A man who was on some ballistic drug that makes you virtually impervious to pain – crystal meth or PCP or crack or something – had broken into a pensioner’s flat and gone absolutely berserk.

Two officers were called and when they arrived he *really* went ape.

He picked up an occasional table with one hand and a massive knife with the other and started fighting. The bobbies had their little lightweight aluminium sticks and tins of CS. After 20 minutes or so, the officers had all-but collapsed with exhaustion. Drug boy had a broken arm, a fractured skull, he was blind in one eye and he had stabbed himself in the leg. But he was still raring to go.

A dog team was called: he picked up the dog and threw it out of the window.

Firearms arrived and asked for permission to arm. Permission was refused, so they self-armed and fired a baton round at him. When he got back up, he picked up the baton round and used it as a weapon on them.

Eventually he jumped out of a window and knocked himself unconscious. He was then wrapped up in ERBs (emergency restraint belts) and taken away.

He was really seriously injured by now. The two officers originally involved were suspended pending an investigation – clothing seized, interviews, the works – despite the fact that they were pretty badly hurt themselves.

It was during this big internal investigation that the very senior officer phoned me.

‘Gadget,’ he said, ‘why didn’t they get the shields out of the back of the vehicle? Why didn’t they get the big Arnold batons out, rather than those silly little sticks?’

I said to him, ‘We don’t *have* shields and Arnold batons in the back of the vehicles any more. They were withdrawn by the Diversity Department eight months ago because they made ethnic minority teenagers feel uncomfortable.’

‘*What?*’ he said.

‘But you must know about this,’ I said. ‘It was done in your name. ACPO\* signed up for it.’

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\*ACPO – Association of Chief Police Officers, which speaks on behalf of Chief Constables, Deputy Chief Constables, Assistant Chief Constables and their equivalents in the 44 forces of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

He didn't know it had happened, or that it had been signed off in his name; to his credit, he overturned the policy. Now we have proper batons in our vehicles again.

No-one wants to make innocent kids feel uncomfortable, but sometimes you really do need a big stick to defend yourself with.

## A DEAD MUM

THE main reason I wrote this book is because I am worried about the gulf that has opened up between us and our core supporters – law-abiding, tax-paying folks living ordinary lives – and I'd like to try to bring us closer together again. This is important, because we police with consent and without the support of the majority we are lost.

We can try to change the things that prevent us giving you a decent service vis-à-vis crime, but we could also do a better job of getting across all the other stuff we do. If you understood some of that, maybe your appreciation of us would be better. That's my hope, anyway.

I'm lucky that my service in the Army came before today's dangerous, high tempo tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, but I still saw death three times when I was in the forces. One guy was killed in Northern Ireland, another drowned on a training run and the third was a good friend of mine who was crushed between two armoured vehicles; I went to his funeral, sat with his girlfriend, all very emotional and difficult.

Things like that stay with you forever, and I've had far more of them in the police.

You're never far from death in the police. Well, *some* police officers are never far from death. One in every ten things a Response PC goes to is a death or a serious injury – a suicide, a road accident, a nasty assault. As a Response Inspector, *everything* I go to is serious – otherwise, why would I go? Hangings, people who have thrown themselves off motorway bridges, people who've jumped in front of trains, people who have blown their own heads off, or been stabbed to death, or been crushed in industrial accidents, or just died of



## Perverting The Course Of Justice

natural causes... in a patch as big as ours, there are unpleasant jobs to visit, all day every day, and almost all of them have a dead body or a seriously injured person on the end of them. As I write this, in the last fortnight I've dealt with five.

Seeing bodies is something that takes a bit of getting used to, even though, mostly, they're not too gruesome, there are no suspicious circumstances and they just look like they are asleep.

My first road death came on the day I was sent to a school where a 14-year-old boy was threatening his French teacher with a pair of scissors and refusing to let him leave a classroom. As we pulled up in the school carpark, the headmaster came running out.

'It's alright,' he said. 'He's let the teacher go, he's dropped the scissors and his mother is on the way.'

The boy was crying and remorseful, other teachers were talking to him and the French master was none the worse for it.

Those were the days – and I'm only talking a few years ago – when you said, 'Fine, thanks very much, we're out of here.' If it happened now we would have to get a detection out of it – the boy would have to be arrested, there would have to be statements from everyone, DNA and other forensics taken, CCTV examined, the lot, when actually the head teacher had things under control and further involvement from us was unnecessary.

Just then, a call came over the radio. There had been a serious accident about two miles away. We jumped back in the car, stuck the lights and sirens on and were there within two or three minutes.

The smash had happened on a bend under a railway bridge on a narrow and winding road.

The first thing we saw was a white Transit van parked at an odd angle, with three or four other cars stopped nearby and people running about. We stuck our car behind the van with the lights on, and went round to the front.

I was obviously nervous about what I was about to see. What I saw was a green estate car, smashed up and half buried in the Transit's grill. Both vehicles were now hard up against the brick of the bridge. The van was on the correct side of the road: you didn't need to be an expert accident investigator to work out that the estate had been straddling the white lines as it had come round the bend and had hit the Ford head on.

There were children's clothes and toys everywhere; a kid's car seat was even hanging from a tree above us. But we couldn't see any children. People often fly out of vehicles in collisions, so we spent five minutes out of our minds with panic and worry, looking under the car, under the van, everywhere, until we finally worked out that, thank God, there had been no kids in the vehicle.

The driver, a woman in her mid 30s, was in the front. My colleague Paul tried to wrench open the passenger door to get to her while I went round the back and squeezed myself along the wall, grazing and scratching myself to pieces on the rough old bricks to get to her door. Her window was down. She was sitting in the driver's seat, not a scratch on her, eyes open, staring ahead but unconscious. Silent, but alive. I leaned in and held her hand, as Paul put his hand on her shoulder.

I looked into her eyes and said, 'It's OK, we're going to get you out.' At that moment, she died.

Seconds later, the paramedics appeared, and a fire crew with all the cutting gear, so I got out of the way.

The ambulance crew tried very hard to resuscitate her, but she was gone: it turned out that she had been hit very hard by the steering wheel and had died from internal injuries. It took three hours to cut her free. Eventually, she was lifted gently from the vehicle and laid out on the road by undertakers.

She had two children, and she'd been on her way to pick them up from swimming; I thought about them waiting for a mum who was never going to arrive.

About three months later, I had a message that the woman's husband had called to speak to me so I phoned him and asked him how I could help.

He said that something was troubling him. 'I've been thinking about it all,' he said. 'How she was still alive when you got there, and that she died with you by her side?'

'Yes, that's right,' I said.

'I can't get it out of my head,' he said. 'I just want to know, did she say anything about me or the children?'

This is really hard. Part of me wanted to say she'd asked me to tell them all she loved them. It's a natural human instinct – you want

to comfort the grieving. But we're taught never to play God like that: the implications are unknown.

'I'm sorry, but she didn't say anything,' I said. 'She was unconscious, and she didn't regain consciousness.'

He said, 'If she had been conscious, what was going on? What would she have seen and heard when she died?'

I said, 'I was holding her hand and my colleague was holding her shoulder, and we were saying to her, "*It's going to be OK. We'll get you out of here.*" That's the last thing that she would have heard.'

He was grateful for that and I'm sure it would have been of some small comfort.

It was an emotional experience for me, obviously. Despite the fact that you're in uniform, you can't help thinking, *This could be my family*. You try not to let it spill beyond those fleeting thoughts and, ultimately, we have to remain professional, but it can be hard.

I felt sorry for the van driver. A young lad, he'd just got his licence, the skid marks showed he'd been doing less than 30mph.

Accidents happen, it wasn't his fault, but he'll never forget it.

## A NUMBERS GAME

THE other Friday, someone said to me, 'In my day, there was an Inspector, two Sergeants and 16 PCs at my nick.'

I said, 'We haven't got that many on duty in the whole *division* tonight.'

As I say, F Division covers around 200 square miles. It has a population of very close to 300,000 spread across several major conurbations. We have motorways and major A roads, main railway lines between cities, an awful lot of villages and winding rural B roads... the number and variety of potential issues, and the travelling time between them, can be huge. It's tough to provide people with what I would regard as a decent service with the strength we have on *paper* – with the strength we have in *reality*, it's near enough impossible.

I think most really senior police officers don't appreciate how few people we have physically out there every night, and I'm sure

the media and politicians are equally unaware. I do think the public are starting to cotton on, but who cares about them?

Part of the problem, I think, is that the majority of officers of Superintendent rank and above come from a time when a much bigger proportion of the total police strength actually *was* on the ground, doing the job. Even if they're told that we're stretched, they look at the number of staff the force employs and it just doesn't make sense to them. So they don't believe it.

As PC Copperfield always said, there may well be enough police – there may well be more than there ever *have* been – it's just that a huge number of them are working 9-5, Monday to Friday on Neighbourhood Policing or in offices, auditing and managing. We need them out on the streets, at night, at weekends, able to respond when crime actually happens.

I sit in our morning meetings, and I listen to the tactical plans being discussed, and I think, *Where are they getting the bodies from for all this?*

You can quite often find yourself on your own policing a sizeable town. You will start with your team on a Saturday night, and you're immediately nicking people for criminal damage, smashing shop windows, drink driving, fighting. Within an hour, everyone else is tied up and there's only you still out and about. One evening a while ago, I remember standing in the High Street on my own, with hundreds of people around me, thinking, 'That's it. All my people are gone, back in Central Custody, nine miles away. I am the only police officer left.'

Just then, my radio went, calling me to a heroin-wracked shoplifter who was threatening to stick needles into a member of staff at a late-night chemists she was trying to steal drugs from.

And no sooner had that call come in than there was another, to go to a pub where the management were asking for urgent assistance because one of their people had been bottled and the guy was still there.

I stood there, literally thinking, *Who is most likely to die?*

I decided that I had to go to the chemists, on the basis that there were bouncers at the pub and none at the shop. Luckily, as soon as I got there the offender was compliant. But I had to nick her – and that was me gone as well. In the end, I managed to get officers down from

## Perverting The Course Of Justice

another town to transport her to custody, though they didn't want to come because that meant *their* town was empty. This stuff is going on day after day, but if you talk to people at Headquarters, where the car park is rammed during normal office hours, they don't seem to get it.

Recently, the trainers from force HQ came down to work through our procedures for a major crime scene – something we practise fairly often.

They put up a huge map of a fictional town. Then they turned to me. 'Right,' said one of them. 'It's 1am on a Saturday, Gadget. Your division, you're the Duty Inspector. The call comes in that there's a male dead in the street with a knife in his back. What are you going to do?'

I ran through our standard actions – securing the scene, protecting the public, starting the investigation and keeping the rest of the county running.

Eventually, one of the trainers stood up. 'That's all very well,' he said. 'But you're missing a few things, here. What you need to do with this scene is have uniformed cordons here, here, here and here. You then need to place two separate uniforms at the scene. There's a prisoner to be conveyed by one unit in a separate vehicle, and the victim's family in another to avoid cross-contamination. As part of our custody strategy, you'd then look to use other officers to...'

I stuck my hand up. 'Hang about a sec,' I said. 'Where are all these people *coming* from? You're talking about 15 or 20 officers here.'

'Well, that's not a problem,' he said. 'When we get a murder scene, we just get the bodies in.'

They do for the investigation, sure. But for all these cordons?

'There is no point in building SOPs around a fantasy that doesn't exist,' I said. 'It's not right. We need to be looking at things in terms of the practicalities.'

'We cannot compromise the National Core Investigation Model,' said the trainer.

'But your National Core Investigation Model *is* compromised,' I said. 'It's compromised by the fact that there are actually only eight of us on duty and most of them are tied up with prisoners.'

He looked at me for a moment. Then he said, 'Talk to control and they'll send you more people.'

‘From *where?*’ I said. ‘From a magic box somewhere inside Headquarters? And you’re assuming that we only get one incident at a time. We get a dozen incidents at a time.’

‘What are you saying?’

‘I’m saying that we will deal with bodies with knives in them, and we’ll do it professionally and properly, but that we need a bit of reality regarding cordons and the custody strategy and so on.’

‘I am not prepared to compromise the National Core...’

I said, ‘Look, I’m sorry about this, but can I just ask, when was the last time you actually *policed?*’

The answer was 12 years ago, in a big town where there were (then) far more cops on the street than we have now.

There should be tenure at training school – work there for two years at a time, and then back to the street. That way, they would stay in touch. As it is, some of them are like Hitler in his bunker, pushing fantasy battalions around the map as the Soviet troops pour into the streets of Berlin.

I can’t do that, much as I might like to: I have to work with reality.

## REALITY

SO what is reality?

When I come on as the Duty Inspector on a Thursday, Friday or Saturday night – in these times of 24/7 licensing and all that brings with it – I will have something like three Sergeants and 20 PCs on Response, plus a couple of Custody Sergeants and a few gaolers. Available to me from the centre will be one dog unit, as long as it’s not employed elsewhere. I also have the ability to get firearms units in, if necessary.

Neighbourhood Policing have all gone home, because they work Monday to Friday, 9-5 – you know, when all the crime happens. All the squads – Domestic Violence, Car Crime, Burglary etc etc – have gone home, too, for the same reason. As have all the PCSOs, because they’re not allowed to work after dark in case they get attacked.

## Perverting The Course Of Justice

I've explained how big my area is. I have 20 PCs, split around six different reporting stations (most of which are closed to the public) to cover it.

Only I don't.

The moment I start work, one of the Central Custody Sergeants will be on the phone saying that his oppo is sick so he needs a Sergeant down there – and he does need one, because they will be turning over a lot of prisoners during the night. So I'll have to pull one of the skippers (Sergeants) off the street and send him to custody, replacing him with a PC as an acting Sergeant (so that's a PC out of a crew.)

Then we'll discover that two of the gaolers are off – one is sick and the other is on a course. So I'll have to provide a couple of PCs for custody, too.

From the shift itself, with colds and flu and sickness bugs and busted noses and courses and secondments, there will always be two or three people missing from the 20 down on paper. Let's say one Sergeant and two PCs (that means another PC is acting-up as a Sergeant).

Another will be on annual leave. Two more will be working on MISPER enquires (of which, more later).

Then, as sure as eggs are eggs, I will have two officers out making an arrest and the suspect will 'collapse' and claim he has taken an overdose. This will obviously be a lie, but we can't be too careful, can we, so my guys will have to take him to hospital and wait with him until he is given the all-clear. (We have to use two officers to transport prisoners now, in case allegations are made against us and for Health and Safety reasons – a lone officer concentrating on driving is too vulnerable to attack from the kind of nutters we deal with.) By the time he's been seen by a doctor and admitted as a precaution, five or six hours have gone by and those two officers will therefore be out of action for the entire shift. As soon as he is judged fit to be released, he will be brought to the station. As soon as he gets to the station, he will claim he has 'chest pains'. Two different officers will then convey him back to hospital and wait with him again. This is a game, and it is happening all over Britain, all the time; I don't think that senior officers, politicians and the media really appreciate that.

Now, the main nick's front counter will need covering later on; civvies don't like working there at night, because all the lunatics come in ranting and raving and trying try to take them out across the desk, so I'll lose another bobby there.

Where does that leave me, an hour into the evening?

I'm down 10 PCs and two Sergeants.

I haven't even mentioned my own sickness and leave and courses, yet.

So even the 23 bodies I've got on paper, with which to cover 300,000 people across our vast area, isn't reality.

When we start arresting people, the very thin blue line we have shrinks further still. I'll talk in a bit about the length of time it takes to nick people and book them in but, for now, suffice it to say that having someone in for a simple criminal damage can easily take an officer out of the game for four hours, even when the suspect admits it.

There is Late Turn\*, yes, which overlaps until the early hours, but these guys have been taking emergency calls, solid, since the afternoon. They are in custody with prisoners, or waiting for solicitors or interpreters or appropriate adults, or interviewing, or calling CPS Direct\*\*, or writing, photocopying and faxing reams of paperwork, or transporting people to mental hospitals, or at cordons at road crashes, or at people's houses taking statements, or trying to get something to eat. They may have gone off duty sick or injured, or they may be up at the hospital getting details from a road crash victim or waiting with another 'overdoser', or they may be doing breathalysers, but the one thing they are not doing is waiting for me to click my fingers so they can come running. Trust me, they are fully soaked up.

We get 3,000 calls a day in my force, spread across a number of divisions. In my patch, I have a dozen or fewer people to cover our end of it; I don't care what the stats say, or *anyone* says, that is reality, that is the bottom line.

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\*Late Turn is one of our three shifts. Early Turn runs from breakfast time to mid-afternoon. Late turn is mid-afternoon until the middle of the night. Nights is the middle of the evening until breakfast time. There's an overlap of about two hours between Late Turn and Nights.

\*\*CPS Direct is part of the Crown Prosecution Service – more detail about this later.



## Perverting The Course Of Justice

I have *never* seen Tony McNulty or the Area Commander, or anyone from ‘Human Resources’ or the Press Office or Training, down on the streets with me on a Saturday night, physically counting heads (or cracking them). They have *no* idea *at all* what it is like.

You do, occasionally, see an ACPO rank out. But when a Chief comes down on the street there are more uniformed police out than there would be for England vs Germany in the World Cup final. Neighbourhood are out, Specials are out, anyone with arms, legs and a functioning pelvis is out; why the Chiefs can’t see what’s going on I do not know, because it must have happened in their day. But apparently they can’t – they walk around, nodding and grinning and surrounded by blue serge tunics and hi-vis jackets, and they think it’s all hunky dory.

In the Army, an infantry battalion of 500 men will consist of 75% front line soldiers – people with rifles, there to deal with the enemy – and 25% in HQ support roles. In the police, 10% are on the front line and everyone else is back at base, drinking tea and making plans. It’s quite mad.

You can still be reassured, I think, that our ability to respond to level two criminality – what would be classified as serious crime like rapes, stabbings and murders – is and will remain very good, because we find ways of dealing with that sort of stuff. But in terms of keeping the lid on day-to-day ‘volume crime’ – the anti-social behaviour, the criminal damage, the assaults, the drunkenness, the violence, the car theft, the problems that you’re most likely to suffer from... Being ex-Army, I’ve learned the hard way to make the most of what I have in front of me. We get on and do our jobs, whatever the manning levels. Somehow, we have made it happen without major outbreaks of live anarchy. How much longer we can continue along this road, I really don’t know.

The frustrating thing is, the answer is reasonably simple. Get police officers out of cushy offices and 9-5 jobs, onto the streets. Spend the money wasted on PCSOs on more proper cops. Cut paperwork and stop massaging figures. Stop chasing targets and trying to socially engineer a new country. Concentrate on criminals, missing kids and road accidents.

But maybe that’s all too revolutionary for modern tastes.