

Jonas Davy – the Farnhill Detective (13/8/1841 – 19/2/1884)

Jonas Davy was born in 1841 in a house on Starkey Lane, Farnhill. He was the son of a wool comber and as early as the age of 9 he was himself employed in the local mill as a worsted spinner; he subsequently became a postman.

One of his brothers, Stephen, moved to Nottingham where he eventually became a Superintendent of Scavengers for Nottingham Council. Many of Stephen's neighbours were policemen and it might have been their influence that made Jonas decide to join the Bradford Police Force. His exact date of enrolment is not known but, based on contemporary newspaper reports, it's clear that he was a Police Constable in Bradford by 1869. He had married an Annie Elizabeth Horsley in Bradford on the 1st October 1865, at which time his profession was given as book keeper, so we can assume he had acquired the skills of numeracy and literacy which would have stood him in good stead when joining the police.

His first reported involvement as a policeman in Bradford appears to have been in the November of 1869 when he was trying to control gangs of Irish labourers. The hotspot for trouble seems to have been the Silsbridge district of the town and in particular a public house called the "Traveller's Rest". Silsbridge was considered to be almost a "ghetto" of Irish immigrants and was by all accounts an appalling place to live and often troubled by "faction fights". A PC Light was asked by a man named McGowern to go and sort out a disturbance which had erupted in this pub but PC Light knew only too well what sort of reception was waiting for him and decided to call for reinforcements, at which point McGowern launched an assault on the policeman. McGowern's "gang" sensing an altercation piled into the affray. A crowd of some 200 or 300 people had soon amassed and were throwing stones at and using sticks on the policemen, who included a PC Davy who was hit on the breast by a stone.

In 1870 Michael Gallagher, an Irishman residing in Vincent Street, Bradford, was charged with keeping a disorderly house. The police had already established that barrels of beer had been regularly moved into the house and stored in the cellar and, on a Sunday morning in September at about 7am, PC Davy had observed eleven men wander out of the Vincent Street property. PC Davy went into the house and found pots of ale on the table. When he returned a little later, with another PC, 22 men were observed leaving the house, most of them drunk. Some of the inebriated men were apprehended and subsequently dealt with by the bench.

Also in 1870, PC Davy dealt with a case of stolen hens. The culprits were Alexander and Thomas Smith who had been pulling slates off roofs to get at the roosts. PC Davy discovered several owners' hens actually in the elder prisoner's house. Alexander was sent to prison for 2 months and a reformatory for 4 years. The younger culprit, who was just 10 years of age, was sent to the "Humber Training Ship" until he was 16.

By April 1871 Jonas and his wife had moved into 76 Orchard Street, Bradford.

Over the next few years, the name PC Davy appeared in a number of newspaper reports of police interventions, including those involving cases of fighting, drunkenness, robbery, and the restraining of a "mad dog".

The first reference to Detective Officer Davy appeared in a news report of October 1875; and by January 1876 Jonas had acquired the first of his nick-names, when the press referred to him as "Detective Davy – the man of the Locker".

In July 1876, in an article about a shop robbery, the Leeds Times reported that a suspect, who had got away from Bradford, was eventually apprehended by “that dark gentleman Detective Davy, of the photograph”. Whether the dark alluded to his complexion or that he moved in covert ways is not known but the latter is suspected.

By June 1877, the newspapers were referring to the “indefatigable” Detective Davy as having the soubriquets “the locker” and “the photographer”.

In 1879 Detective Davy was hot on the heels of a lard thief – rendered lard from a pork butchers no less. When he confronted the thief, together with a bowl of lard, it seemed like the case was solved. The thief however denied all knowledge of the lard. Yes it was his bowl but not his lard ! Seeking advice, Detective Davy was told no jury would convict on the evidence before them and he was advised to drop the case. No one could accuse Davy of not being tenacious !

By 1881 Jonas and Annie had moved into 8 Club Houses, Manor Row, Bradford, which appears to have been near to the Old Courthouse. This accommodation may have been in part of York House or adjoining. York House was originally built as a Bradford Gentlemen's Club and apparently later was used as a police station.

In July 1881 Detective Davy was involved in the apprehension of a pocket watch thief. The case is interesting in that there is mention of the victim picking out the alleged thief from a number of other men. This presumably was an early use of the Identity Parade, although research suggests this method had been intermittently employed since the 1820's. We also know that a portrait of the prisoner had been shown to the victim but he was quick to point out that he had not actually studied it until *after* he had identified the prisoner from the line up.

In May 1882 Detective Davy arrested a pair of confidence tricksters who had obtained goods from a shop on account and then absconded before settling the bill. Davy tracked the offenders to a house in Mirfield, some 8 miles from where the goods had been “purchased”. On searching the house he came across 3 bicycles, valued at £18 each, a chest of tea, coffee, flour and a large number of other articles. It appears that the husband and wife team had “bought” items from shops all over Bradford.

The last reported case in which Davy was involved was in 1883, when he travelled to Liverpool to arrest an alleged embezzler.

Jonas Davy died on the 19th February 1884, at his home at 14 Mint Street, Bradford. The cause for death was given as *morbus cordis*, heart disease; but this description was often used when the cause of death wasn't clear but where there were no suspicious circumstances involved. His age was given as 39 on the death certificate.

The Leeds Times dated 23rd February mentioned his sudden death and stated that he had been in the police force for 16 years – which suggests that he first joined up in about 1867/68.

Detective Jonas Davy's body was returned home to his place of birth and he was buried on the 22nd February 1884 at the Parish Church of St. Andrew, Kildwick.



His gravestone reads – “Sacred to the memory of Jonas Davy Late Detective In The Bradford Police Force Died Feb 19th 1884 Aged 43 Years. In the midst of life we are in death”.

There are three accounts of death all of which give different ages: 39, 42 and 43. The reason for this confusion seems to be that although Jonas was born on the 13th August 1841, his parents did not have him baptised until the 31st January 1846. This was a joint baptism for Jonas and his brothers Richard and Clarkson, and it was held on the same day that their deceased brother Henry was buried. Jonas was actually 42 at his death.

At the March 1884 monthly meeting of Bradford Town Council it was reported that:

“the proceedings of the Watch Committee will include a resolution ordering payment from the superannuation fund of an allowance of £75 16s and 8 pence to Mrs Elizabeth, widow of the late Detective Davy.”

Some notes on Jonas Davy's nick-names

During his time on the police force, Davy appears to have acquired a couple of nick-names.

“Man of the Locker”

This probably refers to the use of police cells to secure offenders or drunks, pending them being charged or released. An article in the Leeds Times from 1875 reported that when arresting a violent drunk in Silsbridge Lane, Bradford, PC Davy was kicked several times but this assault was not so severely as to cause the offender to be sent to the “locker”.

“Photograph” or “Photographer”

Photography and its use by the police was still in its infancy in the mid 1800s, but it is known that at Newcastle City Gaol, for example, pictures were being taken of prisoners in 1871; and earlier, in 1860, the Governor of Bedford Prison was having photo portraits taken of offenders to aid police identification in future arrests. It may have been that Jonas Davy was an early pioneer of this means of record keeping and detection and thus became known as the “Photograph” or “Photographer”.

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