LIVERPOOL AIRPORT CONSTABULARY—
A short history of policing Liverpool Airport 1950s to 1990s
By John Hutchinson

On the 1st April 1961 control of Liverpool Airport passed from the Civil Aviation Authority to Liverpool City Council. One of the first tasks facing the council was to decide how it would police the airport, a task previously undertaken by the now disbanded national police service the "Ministry of Civil Aviation Constabulary."

The ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ was to be formed and two tasks now faced Liverpool City Council’s Airport Committee; firstly to find suitable men to fill the approved manning level of the new police service and secondly to find a means of providing them with adequate powers to perform their duties.

The first problem was overcome without too much trouble for the new service. The officers had been selected and were in place after a period of training. None of the Constables of the Civil Aviation Constabulary were transferred to the new force - all were posted to other airports that remained under the control of the ‘Ministry of Civil Aviation Constabulary’. The known members of the ‘Ministry of Civil Aviation Constabulary’ stationed at Liverpool Speke Airport dated March 1961:–

- Sergeant T D’arcy
- Constable W Hurley
- Constable W Hall
- Constable E Ellis
- Constable T Lyons

The man to head the new force known as the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ was Chief Inspector John Buchanan. He received the ‘Ministry Civil Aviation Police’ warrant cards from the above officers mentioned and took over command of the police service at Liverpool Airport. On the 4th April 1961 the warrants were sent to the Chief Constable’s Office of the Liverpool City Police at their Hardman Street HQ and that chapter in the Airports policing history closed.

Later the ‘Ministry of Civil Aviation Constabulary’ was disbanded and its members formed the ranks of the new ‘British Airports Constabulary’ that policed Heathrow and Gatwick. After leaving Liverpool Airport Sgt D’Arcy was posted to Scotland, but came back to Liverpool with his family after he retired. A similar change took place at Manchester’s Ringway Airport with the formation of the ‘Manchester Airport Police’ under the command of Superintendent Tom Lewis, who resided for many years at the Airport Police House, now used as a car parking management office.

To form the new ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ involved a second task, which was more difficult, as no legislation under the provisions of the Liverpool Corporation Act had been passed to allow the Appointment of Airport Constables, or any provision to have them sworn in as Constables. To do so would require new legislation to be passed by Parliament that would take time to complete. In an effort to resolve the situation the Town Clerk approached the Chief Constable of Liverpool City Police and the Watch Committee for a solution. The Liverpool City Chief Constable agreed to the “Appointed Airport Constables” being sworn in as Special Constables of the City Police. The warrant cards issued to officers were signed by the Chief Constable and over stamped with the words “Airport Police”.

The jurisdiction of the Airport Constables would also take them over the Liverpool City boundary into the Lancashire County Constabulary area, which in those days ran in a line from Hale Road and Dungeon Lane. The location bordering Speke was at that time policed by the officers of the Lancashire County Constabulary stationed at Hale Village, Widnes, Halewood and Kirby.

Civil Aviation Authority Police at Liverpool circa 1961 - Sgt D’Arcy is seen on the left of the group. via John Hutchinson
Air navigation installations and landing lights extended well into the Lancashire Police area at Hale and were policed by the 'Liverpool Airport Police' mobile dog patrols up to 1974. The air navigation installation known as the 'Outer Marker' communications site located in the Cheshire Constabulary area of Runcorn old Town, was also visited by the 'Liverpool Airport Police' mobile section to ensure its security and safety.

Supervision of the new ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ force, which numbered at its operational peak 20 officers, was given to Chief Inspector John Buchanan.

The other supervisory officers were :-
- Sgt Steve Kelly.
- Sgt 2 Eric Fitton
- Sgt 4 Bill Noakes.

All these men were of a generation that had served our country during the Second World War. Chief Inspector Buchanan had served in the Royal Air Force and Sgt 2 Eric Fitton served with the Military Police.

Alongside Eric Fitton was the Senior Sgt Steve Kelly, a modest man well known among the Irish community in Liverpool. He had served with the Irish Guards and was an early member of a desert fighting group now called the SAS. In later life he devoted himself to helping out at the Irish centre in Mount Pleasant in Liverpool. He was highly respected by all who came into contact with him. He had the ear of many including the RAF fighter ace Group Captain Douglas Bader of "Reach for the Sky" fame.

Another member of the team was Sgt 4 Bill Noakes who in March 1968 left the 'Liverpool Airport Police' to take up another police appointment. He was replaced by Sgt 4 Cox on the 1st April 1968. The appointment of Sgt 4 Cox who had been in the Military Police, alongside Sgt 3 Bruce Liggett put in place a very experienced team who remained together up to the day the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ was disbanded.

Sgt Cox’s father had been serving with the ‘Liverpool City Police’ about the time the airport had opened and often patrolled the airport. The former highly respected Assistant Airport Director Mr Brian Trankfield MBE remembers a chance meeting with Constable Cox when he was a young lad. Brian had visited the airport in 1937 with his father and the Constable obliged in taking a photograph – that Brian still holds.

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He was a big man in stature and a professional officer years ahead of others in aspects of community policing. He always viewed Liverpool Airport as a ‘Village’ in which the “Police only Policed with the Consent and Support of the Airport Community” – a concept that remains in place to this day at Liverpool’s John Lennon Airport. He extended his philosophy to all who visited and worked at Liverpool Airport. He was a very gifted and educated man and a very formidable prosecutor if called upon to do so at the Magistrates Courts in Liverpool.

The early ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ transport vehicles were made up of a blue coloured Vespa Scooter and a dark blue police specification Land Rover. Both the Land Rover and Vespa Scooter were in use by the ‘Liverpool City Police’ and were tried and tested. The Airport Police Land Rover was seen to be unique with the airport specification painted yellow roof and yellow hazard light, unlike the blue associated with police and emergency services of the early 1960s. Later a Mini Van and BMC J4 patrol van came into service, dark blue in colour with a yellow roof. Similar police vehicles were being used at Manchester and all the British Airport Authority policed airports.

With over seven miles of perimeter fence to patrol it was sometimes difficult to access areas on the airfield without the use of the Land Rover. The patrolling police dog handler was a familiar sight along the remote areas of the airport or when guarding high risk flights such as flights to and from Belfast.

Police dogs had been deployed at the airport since 1964 and all handlers were trained at the Home Office Training College at Mather Avenue in Liverpool. The Home Office course lasted six weeks followed by the officer attending one day a week for additional training in specialised subjects and also responding alongside the members of the Merseyside Police dog section. The police dogs were owned by the Home Office and allocated to an individual officer. Each dog was kennelled at the officers home and became part of the family. With the demise of the Airport Police in 1974 this ‘Mutual Aid Principal of Policing’ was lost by the Liverpool Airport Authority.

Known Police Dog Handlers from 1964 to 1972 :-

- Act Sgt 15 A Gallagher

- T Lunt
- J Pickering
- J Alford
- L Cunliffe
- L Birch
- D Rothwell
- K Barnes.

As example of the deployment of Airport Police at Liverpool Airport :-

- Monday 25th January to Sunday 31st January 1971 :-
  - Sgt S. Kelly* PC. F Ellis PC. Roberts PC. Cunliffe
  - Sgt. Fitton PC. Hutchinson PC. Weir PC. Dodd
  - Sgt. Liggett PC. Penney PC. Austin PC. Pickering
  - Sgt. Cox PC. Connor PC. Rothwell PC. Ellis
  - *Senior Sgt.
  - Act Sgt Gallagher

In addition newly appointed Airport Constable 16 Wagner, was attending an induction training course. He was the second member of his family to see service as a police officer with the Airport Police.

In 1964 consideration was given by the Airport Committee, the body responsible for the police, to introducing a helmet into the force. A prototype helmet plate was manufactured based upon the design worn at Heathrow Airport. This helmet plate was an eight point star with a circle bearing the words “Airport Police” and a Liver Bird centre. However after consultation with the Chief Constable of Liverpool a decision was made not to issue the helmets. The new style helmet was introduced at Manchester Airport and all BAA airports, including those in Scotland.

A system of personal radios was introduced in 1967- this allowed both foot and mobile patrols to remain in constant contact with the Airport Police Station, which was located at the corner of Hanger No.1 overlooking the Main Apron. It remained fully operational until 1974, when its roof mounted illuminated police sign was switched off and doors closed to the public. The radio communication system being used was manufactured by ITT. The radio units were small and very compact, years ahead in its design and concept. At that time police forces were introducing the two piece Pye Pocket Phone which was used for many years by most police forces around the UK. During the early 1970s the Liverpool Airport Police radio system was for a time linked with the Manchester Airport Police radio system. The building used as the Airport Police Station still stands and is used by a private company.

The high standards of the force are well illustrated by the following.

A major problem for the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ was theft from cargo by airport staff and many arrests were made and long jail sentences followed.

In 1970 Airport Police Constables, L Cunliffe and F Petty received a commendation which read—

“For keenness and determination in the detection and arrest of members of the warehouse staff at Liverpool Airport for theft of

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Cargo in transit and in the manner and style of the presentation of their evidence for the Prosecution at the Crown Court both these officers received the Commendation of Her Majesty’s Judge and a conviction was obtained”.

A more serious side of their difficult duty was the random use of firearms in and around the perimeter of the airport. Armed trespass on the Airfield was a very serious problem and encountered many times by officers on patrol – especially during the hours of darkness. Poaching had always taken place in the areas in and around the Speke Hall Estate and the Garston area of the River Mersey. One of the first arrests in the country under the provisions of the ‘Firearms Act 1968’ was affected by a member of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ and the officer received a Home Office Commendation for his work. The sight of persons carrying loaded firearms in and around the airfield was a constant battle and officers had to have their wits about them.

The need to ensure the safe approaches by aircraft to the runways was always a priority and the sight of men carrying guns in and around airfield was often reported. The dog handlers did not need armed back up in those days the police dogs did the work for them. The recovery of such firearms often lead to many serious crimes being cleared up and many arrests followed.

During the early 1970s the crime detection and arrest rate by members of the Airport Police was outstanding. The officers involved helped to bring to the courts both local criminals and others at a national and international level. The Airport Police officer involved would charge and process all the necessary paper work for prosecution at the local police stations, including fingerprinting and statement taking etc.

The former ‘Liverpool and Bootle Police’ members - later Merseyside Police who were stationed and worked out of the Speke district and Heald Street Police Station in Garston are all remembered for their professional support and outstanding devotion to their duties during that period. Also remembered are the folk from Speke, Hale and Garston for the support they gave the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ over the years. Particular Senior Officers remembered included Detective Chief Inspector M Mulloy, Detective Inspector T. Hall, Superintendent J. Greenham, Chief Superintendent N Dainty and Detective Chief Superintendent W Sergeant.

During that time the members of the Special Branch, H. M. Customs and Immigration (now called the United Kingdom Border Agency) all helped to ensure that the Airport and the City remained free of terrorism and serious criminal activity. Such activity was perpetrated by organisations such as the ‘Provisional Irish Republican Army’ and others in far off places.

There are many stories to be told about those difficult times and the airports involvement – difficult times for all involved, but Ireland is now more peaceful and we pray it remains that way.

In 1972 the force comprised of Superintendent John Buchanan his four Sergeants and fifteen Constables - four of whom were dog handlers. The motor transport fleet consisted of the Austin J4 van and a Minivan as previously mentioned, with yellow roofs and orange roof mounted flashing light fitted. Police markings were displayed on the front and back of each vehicle and the title Airport Police was on each door, all markings were in white. Officers driving on the airport were required to pass a CAA driving test and were issued with a special CAA driving licence, in addition vehicles carried a radio set tuned to the airfield wavelength, plus a police radio. Officers by now received six weeks local training, based on the syllabus of the Air Transport Training Board. The Airport Police vehicle acted as the lead vehicle during Royal visits and the like – escorting in and out of the operational areas followed by the usual police outriders.

In 1972 ‘Liverpool Park Police’ and the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ were disbanded. The records of the ‘Liverpool Parks Police’ extending back to the 1860s, which included early photographs were destroyed on the orders of the Chief Security Officer of the newly formed Liverpool Corporation Security Force. Sensitive information was handed to Liverpool and Bootle Constabulary.

The City Council had employed Chief Superintendent Frank Haigh of the former Docks Division of the Liverpool and Bootle
Constabulary as a Security Advisor. He subsequently was appointed Chief Security Officer of the newly formed Liverpool Corporation Security Force.

By this time John Buchanan held the rank of Police Superintendent. He, like his colleagues, felt very let down with the disbandment of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ – disbanded in favour of the political idea of a city wide ‘Liverpool Corporation Security Force’. He retired after serving his City for many years. He died shortly after his retirement and in a sense faded into the City’s history, without acknowledgement or true recognition of all he had achieved for the city and its people.

Another officer with strong principals was Sgt 3 Bruce Liggett a former member of the RAF – who refused to be part of the Liverpool Corporation Security Force and was dismissed.

The 31st March 1972 may have seen the disbandment of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ and its integration into the new ‘Liverpool Corporation Security Force’ - but this was not the end of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ it was in fact the beginning of two difficult years which were to see many hopes dashed and a strained working environment develop.

The members of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ officers felt they had been forced into the ‘Liverpool Corporation Security Force’ and believed they had been contracted to the airport and should remain there. By June 1974 a number of bodies were expressing concern over the security situation at Liverpool Airport; it was felt by moving Airport Police Officers away specialist knowledge and skills were being lost. Problems also existed with movement around the airport as the Board of Trade did not recognise the ‘Liverpool Corporation Security Force’ officers as airport operational staff and restricted their movements accordingly. Tension rose when the members of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ reported that they had been threatened with dismissal if they did not sign new employment contracts in relation to their work with the Liverpool Corporation Security Force.

A very similar situation developed some time later involving the former ‘Liverpool Parks Police’ Constables. The ranks of the ‘Liverpool Park Police’ were sworn Constables and the six man dog section under the supervision of Act. Sgt. J. Putt was highly respected by both local and national police bodies. The Dog Section of the ‘Liverpool Parks Police’ also trained at the Home Office establishment at Mather Avenue in Liverpool.

During the early demise of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ the then Prime Minister Harold Wilson asked a number of questions and expressed concern about the disbandment of the Liverpool Airport Police.

Prime Minister Wilson often had contact with the members of the Liverpool Airport Police. During his many visits to his Huyton constituency he would arrive on an RAF flight from London. Before he departed from the airport he always took time to approach and thank the Airport Police Duty Sgt for receiving him and his staff.

Both Sgt Steve Kelly and Eric Fitton had for many years been “Quiet Diplomats and Ambassadors’ for the people of Liverpool and the airport. Over the years the team had formed a close working relationship that ensured all was done to assist many in government, including members of our Royal Family. That list extended to pop stars such as The Beatles who often visited the Police Office and were looked after by Sgt Eric Fitton in his usual fatherly diplomatic way. That very private and restricted protocol also included members of the Jordanian Royal Family on their visits to family residing in Liverpool. The ranks of the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ were all members of the International Police Association and helped to foster relationships with other police officers from all over the world who visited Liverpool Airport.

The situation involving the new ‘Liverpool Corporation Security Force’ continued and on the 9th June 1973 the council met representatives of the Airport Police to try to overcome the situation but unfortunately no progress was made and tension...
remained.

By early August the situation had not been resolved and some airport police officers were saying they would rather resign than be forced to sign new contracts, the council’s Personnel Committee had wisely decided to review the situation by this time. On 1st October the men reaffirmed their wish to remain a separate entity within the new security force by returning contracts with the proviso added that they should only be employed at the airport. An uneasy relationship was maintained for most of 1973 until finally in September things took a more serious turn, as a result of a decision to post two airport police officers away from the airport strike action was taken by some men based at the airport. The dispute which lasted four days was finally resolved on the 19th September after a meeting with Chief Security Officer of the Liverpool Corporation Security Force. In February 1974 a City Council report recommended that the officer’s special constable’s powers be reviewed and that they be given new uniforms in order that they could be distinguished from police officers – but they were still Airport Police Officers holding a Constables authority and the situation remained the same for years to come.

It was hoped that Liverpool Airport would become a “Designated Airport” under the Policing of Airports Act 1974 which allows the respective Airport Police Officers the career protection wished for. A similar situation had taken place with the Manchester Airport Police and the ranks of the British Airports Authority Police, all of who were sent for additional training to the Police Training School at Warrington. This was not to be - however on the 1st April 1974 the airport passed to the control of Merseyside County Council. A number of officers had by this time left other police services, but five Airport Constables remained to police the airport.

The appointment of Mr John Lord resulted in a direction from central government to place ‘Their Man’ at the airport to oversee the aviation security task. He was in professional conflict with the Liverpool Corporation Security Force Chief Security Officer on a day to day basis. This resulted in the formation of a new Airport Security force of the Merseyside County Council on the 1st of April 1974. The five remaining Airport Constables formed the nucleus of this new force headed by Mr John Lord, a former senior member of the RAF Police who went on to employ a team of first rate officers, several of who left other police forces to join the new service.

The same uniform continued to be worn by the former members of the Airport Police including the cap badge. At the same time a new badge had been introduced by the Merseyside County Council for the newly formed “Merseyside County Council Liverpool Airport Security Force” made up of an eight point chrome star with the title Merseyside County Council Airport Security on a dark blue ring. The badge’s centre comprised the Merseyside County Council logo.

On the formation of a new Airport Security Force the Airport Police Warrants Cards were handed into the care and custody of the Chief Constable by the remaining Airport Police in 1978. Men similar in background to John Lord began to appear at other airports – the task was to coordinate a national policy of aviation security.

The former ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ members were appointed by John Lord to the senior ranks of the new force – with Inspector Tony Gallagher of the former ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ taking full operational control.

A six week training course was undertaken with the Merseyside Police and other agencies. Still outstanding was the question of the Constables authority – officers needed to be given the powers of Airport Constables to ensure the task was done correctly. Interestingly though the Draft Green paper of the County of Merseyside Act 1980 was to include powers to appoint Airport and also to establish a Merseyside County wide Parks Police service, similar to the Royal Parks Constabulary which had been established a few years before and was based on the Liverpool Parks Police. Both provisions of the act never survived to be included in the final act.

It was rumoured that Merseyside County Council had begun to formulate plans to disband the Mersey Tunnel Police and introduce a new force without police powers and uniform in line with the airport. A new badge was to be issued similar in design to the new Airport Security Force – but the ranks of the ‘Mersey Tunnel Police’ remained loyal to the Crown being Sworn Constables. That idea died a quick death with some saying it was a political attempt with hidden criteria. The Mersey Tunnels Police badge is now headed with Queen Elizabeth’s Crown.

The Merseyside County Council Airport Security members looked after the airport and the safety of the general public for 12 years until the 1983. The Local Government Act led to the abolition of the county council on the 1st April 1986. The Airport was privatised into the hands of British Aerospace. Mr. Chris Preece, a former executive of British Aerospace was appointed Managing Director of Liverpool Airport plc along with Mr. Rod Hill Financial and Commercial manager who came from Knowsley Council.

In the early 1990s Mr Rod Hill took up the position of Managing Director. An Accountant by profession, this resulted in him taking daily or even hourly looks at the financial situation in all areas of the airport before making any operational decisions. It was only a matter of time before he put the Airport Security Force in his target sight. He made many of the airport staff redundant including the Airport Security Force, who were a highly professional team of officers, the envy of other airports.

At the same time, out went Mr Reg Moss PGM the Airport’s Head of Security, a former senior officer with the Merseydise Police who had taken over from Mr John Lord. The policing
and security task was then left with the unregulated security industry and remained that way for some time before the deployment of uniform members of the Merseyside Police to the airport. Historically those who had served in the ‘Liverpool Airport Police’ and later left for other police forces did well in their careers that followed – but each and every one always remained loyal to the Liverpool Airport Police.

In the later part of 2010 we now have a new framework regarding the policing of Liverpool John Lennon Airport. The new framework is contained in the National Aviation Security Programme known as NASP. This programme brings together all involved in airports security issues, including the Airport Director, the Airport Operator and the airlines - alongside the UK Border Agency and the Merseyside Police Service.

But what of the future?
Recently the Isle of Man Airport Constabulary was reintroduced, “Is that the way forward I ask” Having been around for some time I suspect our new Conservative Coalition Government will be looking at the idea of forming some sort of a national airport police policy - maybe handing over the role to the British Transport Police. In reality the BTP is ideal for the task, an operational extension of the remit of the Metropolitan Police. All Railway, Dock and Airport statutory undertakings are in reality private premises similar to car factories or large industrial sites, with of course statutory provisions uniquely applicable to their operation and importance to the country’s infrastructure and security.

The formation of such a service would free the Merseyside Police and other similar forces to allow them to concentrate on other policing and crime prevention undertakings. Such an idea is not new - a similar concept was being looked into way back in Prime Minister Harold Wilson days in office.

However the number one priority of the police service over the many years remains the same - “To ensure that Liverpool John Lennon Airport in the United Kingdom remains a safe, crime free place to visit, work at and fly from. In doing so I remember the officers I worked alongside to achieve that object - “It was an honour for me that they were part of my journey through life”

If you can add anything to this short history of the Airport Police or have any photos of any past Officer or vehicles used by the Airport Police—please get in touch with me via the 09/27 Editor’s usual addresses - Many thanks

John Hutchinson