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Policemen and their moustaches: (self-)fashioning professional identity in nineteenth century Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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Abstract

In April 1861, a local newspaper commented favourably on permission being granted to allow the policemen of Newcastle upon Tyne to wear moustaches, and on the moustaches they subsequently grew. The article demonstrates that these moustaches had an important role to play in the visual construction and performance of social, collective, and professional identities for individual members of the police force in Newcastle in 1861. It suggests that in requesting permission, acting upon it, and in the type of facial hair that they grew, the policemen revealed how they saw themselves, and how they wanted to be seen. This offers an opportunity to hear a voice often excluded from historical narratives, that of the ‘ordinary’ policemen in the provinces, exercising an agency that might be unexpected in the mid-nineteenth century. The article argues that their moustaches enabled Newcastle’s policemen to express a sense of belonging to their local force and their awareness of being part of a larger, nationwide phenomenon, evidence of the development of a police culture with a positive and specifically fashioned self-image. As such, it contributes an unusual perspective on police professionalisation and identity in an important period of change.

Key words

Police; professionalisation; moustaches; identity; self-fashioning; Victorian England; Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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Author Biography

Dr Clare Sandford-Couch is a Visiting/Associate Lecturer in the Law School at Leeds Beckett University. She practiced as a solicitor and was Senior Lecturer in law at Northumbria University and Visiting Lecturer at Newcastle University. She has a PhD in Art History from the University of Edinburgh. She has published on legal history, art history and the role of the arts and humanities in legal education. Her research interests largely address interactions of law, legal history and visual culture. Current research includes histories of crime in nineteenth century Newcastle upon Tyne and the history of Newcastle Gaol, with a focus on the women prisoners.

Policemen and their moustaches: (self-)fashioning professional identity in nineteenth century Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Introduction

THE MOUSTACHE - About a month ago, permission was given to the police force of this town to wear the moustache, and nearly every member of the force has availed himself of the privilege, and after a month's cultivation, many are now assuming quite a hirsute appearance. Taken as a whole, they are as fine a body of officers as any town in the kingdom can produce. It may, however, be regretted that the permission, now accorded, was not granted before the late severe winter set in, as there can be little doubt respecting the efficacy of the beard and moustache in the prevention of bronchial and chest diseases, especially among a class of men who are so much exposed to every variation of the weather.

(The Newcastle Journal 16 April 1861).

This comment appeared in a local newspaper on the decision taken in March 1861 to allow the policemen of Newcastle upon Tyne to wear 'the moustache'.¹ Before 1861 policemen in Newcastle had been prevented from wearing moustaches; by 1861, moustaches were evidently considered both sufficiently desirable that the policemen sought permission to wear them, and suitable because that permission was granted.² This was a popular decision, as within a month 'nearly every member of the force has availed himself of the privilege'. So much detail, in one short paragraph. Here I can address only some of the questions raised by this intriguing newspaper comment.

I want to explore what can be learned about the policemen of Newcastle in 1861 from their decision to ask for and act upon permission to wear the moustache. It is interesting that the permission was for the men to wear a beard and moustache, yet the *Newcastle Journal* article refers only to the moustache. It is of course possible to have one without the other; and the article appeared only one month after the permission was given, and beards take more time to grow than a moustache; but it is possible that the men themselves made a choice to prefer the

¹ *The Newcastle Journal* 16 Apr 1861, 2.

² The permission is recorded in the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne, Watch Committee Minute Book, 15th March 1861, vol 2, p.99; Tyne & Wear Archives MD.NC/274/2 (hereafter WCMB).

moustache. Therefore, the moustache is the focus for this article, with the beard addressed only in passing.³

The growing of a moustache can be foregrounded within ‘a network of framing intentions and cultural meanings.’⁴ This article explores how the moustaches of Newcastle’s policemen in 1861 can be ‘read’ for meaning. It reveals that their deliberate choice to grow moustaches would have important consequences for how Newcastle’s police were perceived by and in those communities they policed, but also how the men perceived themselves. I argue that it was the unusual liminal position of policemen in a force in the mid-nineteenth century that led them to request and act upon permission to wear the moustache. These actions are then a form of self-expression, as the policemen exercise their own agency in constructing or fashioning for themselves a particular identity or identities.

The research offers insight into the ‘ordinary’ policemen of a town in the English provinces in the mid-nineteenth century, a voice which has attracted surprisingly little academic attention. In part this may be attributable to the limited availability of relevant records and other resources. Policemen published autobiographies in the nineteenth century, but rarely the ordinary constable.⁵ (Even in the early twentieth century police constables tended to appear as a category, rarely as individuals).⁶ Few records of the Newcastle police from the mid-nineteenth century survive.⁷ Holdings in Northumbria Police and Tyne and Wear archives focus on the twentieth century. A valuable source has been the minutes of the Watch Committee of Newcastle upon Tyne in the City Council archives, in a volume covering 3 February 1860 – 14 June 1867.⁸ Indicating the difficulties of research in this area, the Minute Book of 1851 - 1860 is lost. This makes it impossible to be definite whether permission for facial hair was requested before 1861, but I regard it unlikely as no local newspapers reported to that effect in that period.

³ Much research has focused upon the beard; for example, Christopher Oldstone-Moore, ‘The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain’, *Victorian Studies*, 48.1 (2005), 7-34. Facial hair is addressed more broadly in Alun Withey, *Concerning Beards Facial Hair, Health and Practice in England, 1650–1900* (Bloomsbury, 2021). Evans and Withey, *Framing the Face* offers a multi-disciplinary approach.

⁴ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing the New Historicism* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 21.

⁵ On the activities of a London police constable, see Clive Emsley, *The Great British Bobby: A History of British Policing from the 18th Century to the Present* (Quercus, 2009), 119-134.

⁶ Discussed in Joanne Klein, *Invisible Men. The Secret Lives of Police Constables in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, 1900-1939* (Liverpool University Press, 2010).

⁷ For a review of accessible police records, see Ian Bridgeman and Clive Emsley, *A Guide to the Archives of the Police Forces of England and Wales* (The Police History Society, 1989); for Newcastle City Police, see 100-101.

⁸ WCMB.

As a legal historian this article developed from my research into the policing of nineteenth century Newcastle. It is clear that the newspaper comment could encourage research beyond a focus on the history of policing, or indeed the history of facial hair. As this article demonstrates, moustaches can be an important point of intersection for histories as diverse as those of policing, identity, masculinity, the body and the self. The close links between facial hair and ideas about masculinity and the male body have been explored in a number of studies.⁹ This case study could equally fit into the literature on the history of masculinity and ‘manliness’ in the nineteenth century; pursuing this line of research could help to shed light on causes of change in such concepts over time, the ways in which certain forms of masculinity were authorised or penalised by institutions, hierarchies which existed between masculinities, and how histories of social practices can connect to histories of cultural ideals.¹⁰ However, these themes are the subject of a vast literature and warrant deeper analysis than is possible here, where the focus is on police professionalisation and identity in an important period of change.

Researching this article has required interaction across several academic disciplines, encompassing history, law and legal history, and concepts of dress and identity, and a research process which drew upon material from a number of sources, including archive records and visual culture. This article integrates findings and insights from these areas to produce an interdisciplinary understanding of issues raised by the newspaper comment on the moustaches of Newcastle’s policemen in 1861. In considering the request for permission, the article examines what social and cultural factors may have influenced its timing, and what visual sources, although often neglected by legal researchers, can reveal of the facial hair of policemen in 1850s and 1860s. It then addresses what might have motivated the decision to wear the moustache, exploring the role their moustaches played in constructing identities for these policemen, followed by a short conclusion on the multiple meanings and interpretations of these moustaches. However, first, some information on the Newcastle police force in 1861 is needed.

The Police Force in Newcastle in 1861

⁹ For an overview, see Alun Withey and Jennifer Evans, ‘Introduction’, in Jennifer Evans and Alun Withey, *New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair. Framing the Face* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1-11.

¹⁰ I thank Dr Alun Withey and the anonymous reviewer for raising these possibilities.

The Newcastle ‘new police’ force was established in 1836 following the Municipal Corporations Act 1835.¹¹ By September 1861, the Chief Officer led a force of 126 men: 99 uniformed constables, five sergeants, 16 inspectors or superintendents, four detectives and a police surgeon; this was an increase of 5 constables on the previous year.¹² The social backgrounds of recruits to the Newcastle force in 1860-1862 support Clive Emsley’s view that ‘a high proportion of recruits were always drawn from the unskilled and semi-skilled working class’.¹³ Of 24 recruits appointed by Newcastle’s Watch Committee from February 1860-February 1861 for example, 8 were described as ‘labourers’; others included a blacksmith, a miller, a woodman, a tailor, three ex-servicemen and three police constables formerly with other forces. All bar one were aged 20-30 at the time of their recruitment, and with all bar 3 of a minimum height of 5’10” they would have been physically imposing.¹⁴

The Act placed forces under the direct and ‘absolute’ control of the local Watch Committee, consisting of the mayor and members of the town council.¹⁵ As evidenced by their need to secure permission before growing facial hair, control over the lives of the individual policemen – both at work and off duty - was tight, exercised by the watch committee, the chief officer, and senior ranking officers.¹⁶ Days off were rare, with policemen expected to be available for duty at all times.¹⁷ Uniforms had to be worn, even when off duty.¹⁸ The men worked long hours and patrolled a set beat, subject to inspection by sergeants, and disciplined for being absent or late.¹⁹ The Newcastle Watch Committee minutes include numerous examples of policemen disciplined or dismissed for being absent from their beat or drunk on duty. Many, especially young single recruits, lived in police barracks, and could be disciplined or discharged for being out of barracks without permission.²⁰ Everyday conduct had to follow a strict framework.²¹

¹¹ The term ‘new police’ was used in the mid-nineteenth century to distinguish the various ‘new’ police forces from previous arrangements for policing. On how far the ‘old’ and ‘new’ police differed in reality, see David Taylor, *The New Police in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester, 1997) and David Taylor, “‘Drops in the Ocean’: The Politics and Practice of Policing the West Riding of Yorkshire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century”, *Northern History* (2022), 59:1, 98-115.

¹² WCMB, 160.

¹³ Emsley, *Great British Bobby*, 143. On recruitment, see Clive Emsley and Mark Clapson, ‘Recruiting the English policeman c.1840–1940’, *Policing and Society*, 3:4 (1994), 269-285.

¹⁴ Data extracted from WCMB, 2-100.

¹⁵ Thomas Alan Critchley, *A History of Police in England and Wales* (Constable, 1978), 124.

¹⁶ See Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History*. (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 84-93. See also, Klein, *Invisible Men*, 12-33.

¹⁷ Taylor, *New Police*, 53.

¹⁸ The Duty Band, a cloth band worn on the arm, indicated when the officer was on duty.

¹⁹ See Peter Joyce, ‘Recruitment Patterns and Conditions of Work in a Nineteenth-Century Police Force: A Case Study of Manchester 1842–1900’, *Police Journal* (1991), 64:2 140–50.

²⁰ For example, in Aug 1861, see WCMB, 144, 147.

²¹ See Taylor, *New Police*, 52-53.

Guides or manuals were produced, setting out rules, regulations, and advice for police officers.²² *The Police Officers Catechism* (1861) asked, “How is the efficiency of a Police Force maintained?”; the answer provided was, “By the strictest discipline”.²³ Such instruction books had to reassure the young recruits that ‘submitting to discipline even while off duty did not reflect poorly on their manhood or self-respect.’²⁴

Problems with pay, conditions, and required standards of behaviour, contributed to a high turnover of constables in most forces in England; many recruits served no more than a year. In one provincial force in the 1850s, at least 30% of recruits served less than one year, and 55% served less than 5 years; although many would have resigned, a large number were dismissed.²⁵ Similarly in Newcastle, almost every Watch Committee meeting included police resignations and dismissals. While 24 men were recruited February 1860-February 1861, 21 left the force: seven were dismissed (for drunkenness and/or absence from duty and/or fighting) and a further fourteen resigned. Various reasons led so many to leave police forces in England in the mid-nineteenth century; as David Taylor noted, ‘Becoming a policeman, as opposed to simply joining the force, was no easy matter.’²⁶ However, by 1850-60s many police authorities recognised that a stable labour force was preferable to a high turnover rate and sought to persuade their men to remain in service.²⁷ A meeting of Newcastle Town Council in February 1854 approved a Watch Committee recommendation that police wages should increase to improve recruitment and retention, given ‘the advance which the police of other boroughs, as well as working men generally, had received’. The Watch Committee acknowledged that, ‘It was notorious that some of the best men in the force had left it, in consequence of obtaining better wages as porters, carters, &c.’²⁸ Policing was just one employment option open to working men. The Watch Committee minutes provide evidence of moves by the ‘ordinary policemen’ to improve policing as a viable career choice by 1860s, as they requested improved working conditions, and resisted authoritarian management, as when, in 1862,

²² One example was written by the Chief Constable of Northumberland from 1857–1869 and updated by the Chief Constable of Newcastle (A. Browne and S. J. Nichols, *The Police Officers Catechism or Handbook* (Shaw & Sons, 5th edition, 1877). The 5th edition is a revised edition, but no earlier editions are accessible. Browne’s term of office suggests that the original edition was produced c.1860s. See also J. F. Archbold, *Archbold’s Snowden’s Magistrates Assistant and Police Officers and Constables Guide* 4th Edition (Shaw and Sons, 1859).

²³ William C. Harris, *Questions and answers framed for the instruction of constables, on joining the police (The Police Catechism)* (W. Clowes and Sons, 1861). I thank Dr Helen Rutherford for this reference.

²⁴ Klein, *Invisible Men*, 22.

²⁵ Taylor, *New Police*, Table 3.3.

²⁶ Taylor, *New Police*, 50.

²⁷ On police recruitment and retention, see Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman: A Social History of a Labour Force in Metropolitan London, 1829-1914* (Ashgate, 2002).

²⁸ *Newcastle Guardian* 4 Feb 1854, 8.

Newcastle's policemen complained about the level of discipline administered by the Chief Officer.²⁹ The need for a long-term stable workforce ensured that police employees were offered more favourable conditions of service than many other workers in Britain.³⁰ Some in the Newcastle force served long terms, particularly more senior officers.³¹ This may have set policemen apart from the working-class communities from which most were drawn, and which they policed.

Police officers in the mid-nineteenth century occupied an anomalous position. From around 1856, it became apparent that England was what Keith Smith termed a 'markedly more 'policed' society', as enforcement of laws against gambling, prostitution, itinerant trading, drunkenness, and vagrancy became more systematic; this led to 'long-term friction between the police and predominantly working-class sections of the population', exacerbated by the perception that such laws effectively amounted to imposing 'middle-class mores and codes of behaviour on the working classes.'³² To an extent this was inevitable. The urban working class, particularly men, lived a more 'public' life than the middle and upper classes, chiefly because they lacked 'private' space. Census returns confirm that accommodation was often crowded, shared between large families and lodgers. It was through meeting in public, whether on the street, or in public houses, that plebeian men worked and sought work, and shared experiences of drinking, eating, gambling and confrontation, sometimes violent.³³ Living life in public carried the risk of attracting more police attention, compared to the more private middle and upper class lived experience.³⁴ The resulting suspicion of the police and some resistance,

²⁹ WCMB, 280-284.

³⁰ Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'The Making of a Police Labour Force', *Journal of Social History* (1990), 109-134; and Clive Emsley, 'The Policeman as worker: a comparative survey c. 1800-1940', *International Review of Social History*, (2000). 45(1) 89-110; but see David Taylor, 'The Standard of Living of Career Policemen in Victorian England: The Evidence of a Provincial Borough Force', *Criminal Justice History*, 12 (1991), 107-131.

³¹ WCMB, 176; and see Helen Rutherford and Clare Sandford-Couch, "'13 yards off the big gate and 37 yards up the West Walls". Crime scene investigation in mid-nineteenth century Newcastle-upon-Tyne', in Alison Adam (ed.) *Crime and the Construction of Forensic Objectivity from 1850* (Palgrave, 2020), 161-188 (171-6).

³² Keith Smith, 'Stumbling Towards Professionalism: The Establishment of English Policing in the Nineteenth Century', *The Oxford History of the Laws of England: Volume XIII: 1820-1914 Fields of Development* (Oxford, 2010), 21-57 (36).

³³ On working class masculinities and identities in urban environments, see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (University of California Press, 1997), 25-30.

³⁴ See David Churchill, *Crime Control and Everyday Life in the Victorian City: The Police and the Public* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 98-122.

including physical assaults, was a concern: efficient professional policing required the consent and cooperation of the policed.³⁵

Relations between police and public in nineteenth-century England have been the subject of much study and some disagreement.³⁶ While some historians took a pessimistic view, others argued that problems declined after the 1850s, with lingering hostility tending to be against specific police actions or activities.³⁷ In 1851, *Punch* observed that ‘the blue coats – the defenders of order – are becoming the national favourites’.³⁸ However, Emsley noted that while from 1850 the police were generally recognised as the first line of defence when a problem of public order arose, this did not necessarily make them popular.³⁹ Some towns experienced anti-police riots.⁴⁰ Others reveal a level of co-operation between public and police, by the mid-nineteenth century tending towards a ‘begrudging acceptance’ of the role of the police.⁴¹ This may have been most noticeable amongst the middle and ‘respectable’ classes, who - perhaps having most to gain and less to fear from effective policing - had come to believe that the professional policing of the ‘new police’ offered ‘a daily reminder and embodiment of the criminal law and a powerful expectation of social stability.’⁴² However, a detailed examination of popular animosity towards the police in Leeds in the 1870s-1880s uncovered a culture which rejected the legitimacy of the police presence, and expressed this often through verbal and physical abuse.⁴³ Popular responses to the police in the provinces reveal a mixed picture.⁴⁴

³⁵ Smith, ‘Stumbling Towards Professionalism’, 42. On the limitations of policing by consent see David Taylor, ‘Protest and Consent in the Policing of the ‘Wild’ West Riding of Yorkshire, c. 1850–1875: “The Police v. The People”’, *Northern History*, 51:2 (2014) 290-310.

³⁶ The debate surrounding Robert Storch’s policeman as ‘domestic missionary’ indicates some of the problems in analysing popular attitudes to the police: see Robert D. Storch, ‘The Plague of Blue Locusts: Police Reform and Popular Resistance in Northern England, 1840-57’, *International Review of Social History* 20/1 (1975), 61-90; Robert D. Storch, ‘The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850-1880’, *Journal of Social History* 9/4 (1976), 481-509; V.A.C. Gatrell, ‘Crime, authority and the policeman-state, 1750-1950’, in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* ed. by F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 243-310; and Emsley, *English Police*, 74-76.

³⁷ D. Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town: The Development of the Police in Middlesbrough c.1840-1914* (Basingstoke, 2002), 95. This may explain some examples of anti-police feeling in Taylor, ‘Protest and Consent’.

³⁸ *Punch*, Jul-Dec, 1851, 173; quoted in Emsley, *English Police*, 62.

³⁹ Emsley, *English Police*, 65.

⁴⁰ See Taylor, ‘Protest and Consent’; and, D. Foster, ‘The East Riding Constabulary in the Nineteenth Century’, *Northern History* (1985) 21:1, 193-211.

⁴¹ Taylor, *New Police*, 126.

⁴² Smith, ‘Stumbling Towards Professionalism’, 40.

⁴³ David Churchill, ‘I am just the man for Upsetting you Bloody Bobbies’: popular animosity towards the police in late nineteenth-century Leeds’, *Social History*, (2014) 39:2, 248 – 266; see also, Churchill, *Policing the City*, 215-240.

⁴⁴ Taylor, *New Police*, 89-135, especially 108-127.

Evidence of the community's attitude to the police in Newcastle, and the police's attitude to the community they served, can be hard to pin down. Lacking surviving police memoirs or diaries, and no official records of the force in the period save the Watch Committee minutes, the best evidence may be found in local newspapers. Newspaper reports indicate that policemen were rightly wary of being attacked while on duty, particularly at night. In 1860, newspapers carried reports of six separate assaults on police officers in Newcastle that led to court appearances. In February 1860, a 'violent assault' on a police constable.⁴⁵ In April 1860, a police officer sustained a black eye when arresting a man for being drunk and disorderly in a public house at 1am.⁴⁶ In September 1860 a policeman was struck by a drunken elderly man.⁴⁷ More seriously, in October 1860 two 'strong-looking young men' were charged with assaulting the police, while a third man was charged with 'exciting the mob to rescue the other prisoners'.⁴⁸ In November 1860, in a violent assault on two police officers by two militia men, a female accomplice tried to 'excite the mob to rescue the prisoner but finding no one ready to assist her, she struck [a Sub-Inspector] on the head with a knife'.⁴⁹ In January 1861, a pistol was pointed at a police officer, later found to be unloaded.⁵⁰ As Emsley noted, 'A policeman's beat could ... be a dangerous place and it needed a tough man to walk it'.⁵¹ Threats of violence and physical harm would inevitably shape how the policemen approached their work. Emsley categorised policing as 'an organisation where a man's toughness and physicality won him respect among his mates as well as from his opponents'.⁵² In such circumstances, developing strong bonds of team loyalty and mutuality, fostering an identity shared between those facing such challenges, could prove important.

For the men who accepted their situation and remained in the force, 'Policing was not a job, but a way of life.'⁵³ Although strictly speaking policing was not a profession, from the mid-nineteenth century, policemen began to 'believe that they had learned knowledge and skill that set them apart from the population at large', qualities often associated with professionals.⁵⁴ The

⁴⁵ *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury* 11 Feb 1860, 4.

⁴⁶ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 26 Apr 1860, 2

⁴⁷ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 8 Sep 1860, 2

⁴⁸ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 30 Oct 1860, 2

⁴⁹ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 20 Nov 1860, 3

⁵⁰ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 7 Jan 1861, 2, and 8 Jan 1861, 2

⁵¹ Emsley, *Great British Bobby*, 145.

⁵² Emsley, *Great British Bobby*, 149.

⁵³ Klein, *Invisible Men*, 22.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *New Police*, 76, note 71. See also Chris A. Williams, 'Policing the Populace: The road to professionalisation', in David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday (eds.), *Histories of Crime: Britain 1600-2000* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 160-179. On understandings of 'professionalisation' by nineteenth-century actors,

County and Borough Police Act 1856 has been seen as the foundation of subsequent professionalisation of policing.⁵⁵ It established a framework for nationwide policing, leading to the ‘development of a police culture with a positive self-image that emphasised the value of a policeman’s job’, which went alongside a ‘sense of belonging’.⁵⁶ Newcastle officers holding a Badge of Honour for twelve months received increased wages; Good Conduct medals were awarded.⁵⁷ Steps to forge a team spirit are evident in the Newcastle Police Force Annual Dinner in January 1861, promoted by the Chief Officer; of a possible 124 men, 120 attended, in two sittings.⁵⁸ The sense of being part of a nationwide phenomenon would have been fostered by publications focused on police matters. Police manuals can be seen as ‘a key source for institutional self-representation’, and their production as evidence of efforts to ‘develop policing as a full-time, highly disciplined profession’.⁵⁹ Such publications, as well as handbooks, and police newspapers and trade journals which began to be published from the 1860s, would encourage a growing awareness and discussion among policemen of their occupational context and their role in society, contributing to a process of professionalisation and the construction of a professional identity.⁶⁰ This sense of a ‘professionalising’ force was bolstered by the system of annual inspections and reports by an Inspectorate of Constabulary, established under the 1856 Act. In the Inspector’s report for 1860, ‘the efficiency of the [Newcastle] police force during the whole year was considered to have been satisfactorily maintained.’⁶¹ The Recorder at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Sessions on 16 October 1860, was reported as saying that, ‘He believed the police force of Newcastle was an example to any in the kingdom’.⁶²

Having introduced the police force in Newcastle, the next section explores their request for permission to wear the moustache in 1861.

see Heather Ellis, ‘Knowledge, character and professionalisation in nineteenth-century British science’, *History of Education*, (2014) 43:6, 777-792.

⁵⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80* (Routledge, 1984), 26-7.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *New Police*, 75.

⁵⁷ WCMB 24-25; 121.

⁵⁸ *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury* 12 January 1861, 5.

⁵⁹ David G Barrie and Susan Broomhall, ‘Introduction’, in David G Barrie and Susan Broomhall (eds.) *A History of Police and Masculinities 1700-2010* (Routledge, 2012), 1-34 (7).

⁶⁰ The *Illustrated Police News* was established in 1864; the *Police Service Advertiser* (‘A Journal for the Police and Constabulary Forces of Great Britain and the Colonies’) and the first national police newspaper, *Police Service Advertiser*, were established in 1866.

⁶¹ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 20 Dec 1860, 3

⁶² *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury* 20 Oct 1860, 3

The Request for Permission

Permission was granted on 15 March 1861, with the following words: ‘Beard & Moustache. Resolved that this Committee do not object to permission being granted to the men to wear a Beard and Moustache.’⁶³ It seems significant that permission to wear a beard and moustache was sought – and granted – for all ‘the men’: it was not restricted to certain ranks or a specific division.⁶⁴ But why was permission sought then?

The facial hair of policemen in 1860s

The request of the Newcastle policemen may have been prompted by similar moves in other police forces. The question of whether policemen could or should wear moustaches was much debated. In April 1860, a member of the Watch Committee in the neighbouring borough of Tynemouth, questioned whether any regulation prevented its policemen from wearing a moustache, noting that, of the force’s thirty men, ‘not one of them was to be found wearing that fashionable and healthful appendage – the moustache’. The meeting was not aware of any such rule and when it was pointed out that the Superintendent of the force had a moustache, a member of the committee thought that set the men a good example.⁶⁵

However, newspapers across the country reported that ‘an anti-moustache “movement” has begun in official quarters’, when on 20 October 1860 the Metropolitan Commissioner ordered his policemen to shave off their moustaches.⁶⁶ Newspapers offered critical commentary:

a really petty tyranny has been practised on our London policemen. Many of these men have daringly allowed their moustaches to grow. They have actually allowed Nature to assert a little of her superiority over conventionalism without asking the Commissioners whether they might do so or not. All of a sudden the fiat went forth that the moustaches must come off, and off they came accordingly. Now if this be not petty tyranny, I know not what it is. Surely the ill-paid policeman ought to have been allowed a moustache

⁶³ WCMB, 99. It is not recorded who made the request for the men, most probably the Chief Officer.

⁶⁴ ‘A’ Division requested permission to wear Beards in January 1863: WCMB, 293.

⁶⁵ *Shields Daily Gazette*, 26 Apr 1860, 2.

⁶⁶ See *Birmingham Gazette*, 27 Oct 1860, 7; *Derby Mercury*, 31 Oct 1860, 3; and *Leicester Journal*, 2 Nov 1860, 3.

these cold dreary damp nights, if it so pleased him. It could do no harm, it could do good.⁶⁷

This is interesting evidence that London policemen were rebuked after apparently acting without authority in making a choice for themselves to cultivate moustaches. Perhaps this was a lesson learned by the Newcastle policemen when only six months later they sought permission from their Watch Committee. It seems significant that they were willing to make their request, so soon after the ‘anti-moustache’ order in London. Notable too is that these discussions in 1860 indicate that generally policemen preferred the moustache over the beard.

Visual sources reveal reasonably clear evidence of a shift in the facial hair of policemen from 1850s and 1860s.⁶⁸

Photographs

Sadly, no photographs of Newcastle policemen from the mid-nineteenth century appear to have survived. Photographic images of lower-class men from that time were more scarce than of elite and middle-class men. Those of policemen were rarer still, and with few accurately dated or identifiable as members of a specific police force, a systematic visual analysis by force or date is impossible. However, some conclusions can be drawn from the very few surviving examples, found in books, newspapers, periodicals or databases. Using aspects of uniform, the photographs can be reasonably accurately dated to pre- or post-1865. The wearing of a stovepipe hat indicates a photograph taken before the more military style pointed helmet was introduced in 1865. Of the examples examined, featuring members of provincial forces from across England (including Bristol, Cardiff, Catford, Essex, Gateshead, Gloucestershire, Manchester, Northampton and Norwich), without exception photographs of policemen in stovepipe hats (likely to pre-date 1865), reveal policemen either clean-shaven, or with sideburns, or whiskers extending under the chin (the ‘chin beard’), but no moustaches.⁶⁹ These surviving photographs indicate that while certain facial hair was accepted, the moustache was

⁶⁷ The same report, usually attributed to ‘Our London Correspondent’ appeared in many newspapers, including in the north-east, the *Hartlepool Free Press and General Advertiser*, 27 Oct 1860, 2.

⁶⁸ Some of these images are discussed in Jane Matilda Card, ‘From Blue Lobsters to Friendly Giants: Visual Representations of the Police, c.1840–1880’, <https://legalhistorymiscellany.com/2018/08/27/visual-representations-of-the-police-c-1840-1880/> [accessed 6 February 2023].

⁶⁹ Conforming to this description is a sadly undated photograph of John Hope Constable No 1.G, who joined the neighbouring borough of Gateshead police in Aug 1842, retiring in Jul 1859, aged 54. Hope had previously served with Newcastle Police – for 1 year 11 months – before being discharged in Aug 1838 (no reason is given for his discharge): <https://www.gatesheadpolice.org/officers.htm> [accessed 6 Feb 2023.]

considered unsuitable for members of many of England's police forces. Photographs of policemen wearing the pointed helmet (i.e., post-1865), feature moustaches, side whiskers and beards, and some clean-shaven. This visual evidence reveals that a change took place c.1860-1870 regarding the acceptability and type of facial hair for policemen; the Newcastle force's request must be considered in this light.

Newspaper or periodical cartoons

A cartoon in *Punch's Almanac* for 1854, captioned 'The Police wear beards and moustaches. Panic amongst the street boys', featured six uniformed policemen marching in line: of differing height and physique, all sported stovepipe hats, and copious facial hair; the beards are full, and the moustaches are extraordinary.⁷⁰ Small boys fled in horror; presumably the sight of such hirsute policemen was sufficiently unusual (and controversial) as to induce alarm. Although the cartoon portrayed the sight as humorous, it appeared without comment, making the original intention behind the image unclear. *Punch* ran a series of cartoons in 1853-4 on men and facial hair, and 'the tenor of the pictures and comments in *Punch* remained equivocal'.⁷¹

Its inclusion in an almanac of 1854 may have reflected changes in the appearance of policemen across England (and the widespread popularity of male facial hair after the start of the Crimean War in 1853, discussed below). In January and February 1854, newspapers reported Watch Committees in Bath, Birkenhead, Durham, Ipswich, Reading, Wakefield and Wirral, granting permission for their policemen to adopt the moustache (and sometimes a beard). There is no evidence that the Newcastle policemen joined these other forces in adopting facial hair in 1854. It may have been too early to effect such a radical change in appearance. Wakefield police abandoned the practice in April 1854, as had Durham police by May 1854. As noted above, London policemen's attempt to adopt moustaches in 1860 was quashed.

Cartoons or engravings in newspapers and periodicals indicate further changes to police appearance in the 1860s, and support the evidence of the photographs. For example, in two 1862 cartoons by Charles Keene for *Punch* the policemen wore a stovepipe hat and side

⁷⁰ *Punch's Almanac* for 1854, x. See <https://magazine.punch.co.uk/image/I0000bSL7htwZ8Gc> [accessed 6 Feb 2023].

⁷¹ Susan Walton, 'From Squalid Impropriety to Manly Respectability: The Revival of Beards, Moustaches and Martial Values in the 1850s in England', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 30:3 (2008), 229-245, 232.

whiskers, but no moustache.⁷² However, after 1865, images of policemen wearing the pointed helmet feature moustaches and beards. For example, in 1867, two images showed Metropolitan policemen, variously with sideburns, chin beards, full beards, with or without moustaches, and some clean-shaven.⁷³ Similarly, a cartoon in *The Graphic* (1869), featured six policemen; of the four faces clearly visible, one policeman sports whiskers, one whiskers and moustache, one moustache and beard and one a moustache only.⁷⁴ These images show the change that took place c.1860-1870 regarding the type of facial hair considered suitable for policemen.

Artworks

Policemen in artworks confirm that whilst whiskers may have been acceptable, few wore the moustache before the mid-1860s. Two portraits of policemen in Weston-super-Mare, dated 1850-1856, show the sitters' head and shoulders; both wear side-whiskers, but no moustache.⁷⁵ Policemen in William Powell Frith's *Derby Day* (1858),⁷⁶ George Hicks' *The General Post Office, One Minute to Six* (1860),⁷⁷ and William Holman Hunt's *London Bridge on the Night of the Marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales* (1863)⁷⁸ conform to this analysis. A later image, Frank Holl's *Deserted – The Foundling* (1873), featured two Metropolitan policemen in pointed helmets, one with no facial hair, the other with beard and moustache; this again indicates a change in facial hair practice and some personal choice by individual policemen, post-c.1865.⁷⁹

The evidence from visual sources indicates that c.1860-1870, many forces across England overturned any previous reluctance to allow policemen to cultivate beards and moustaches. It

⁷² Charles Keene, 'The Assistance of the Law', and 'Pic-nicing under the Poaching Act': see https://magazine.punch.co.uk/image/I00004P4BEz1_ipo [accessed 14 Feb 2023]

⁷³ *Illustrated London News* 19 Oct 1867, p.8; *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 21 Dec 1867.

⁷⁴ *The Graphic*, 11 Dec 1869, 9.

⁷⁵ Artworks in the collection of North Somerset Council: *Isaac Pearce (policeman of Weston-super-Mare)*, unknown artist: https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/isaac-pearce-311275/view_as/grid/search/keyword:policeman/page/6; *Mr George Reid (policeman of Weston-super-Mare)*, unknown artist: https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/mr-george-reid-311278/view_as/grid/search/keyword:policeman/page/6 [accessed 14 Feb 2023]

⁷⁶ William Powell Frith, *Derby Day* (1858); © Tate Collection; <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/frith-the-derby-day-n00615> [accessed 14 Feb 2023]

⁷⁷ George Hicks' *The General Post Office, One Minute to Six* (1860), Collection of the Museum of London. <https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/102702.html> [accessed 14 Feb 2023]

⁷⁸ William Holman Hunt, *London Bridge on the Night of the Marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales* (1863), © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford <http://collections.ashmolean.org/object/373039> [accessed 14 Feb 2023]

⁷⁹ Frank Holl, *Deserted – The Foundling* (1873), collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/4599/?> [accessed 14 Feb 2023]

is equally clear that many policemen availed themselves of the opportunity. The Newcastle police were obviously not alone in seeking permission to wear the moustache and beard, but why did they do so in 1861?

A 'Hairy Movement' in North East England in the 1860s

The 1850s-1860s was pivotal in the revival of male facial hair in England, and the request of the Newcastle policemen must be considered in this light. Reasons for this increasing popularity are unclear.⁸⁰ However, by the 1850s, and especially following the start of the Crimean War in 1853, journals such as *The Westminster Review*, *Illustrated London News* and *The Naval & Military Gazette* contributed to a rising 'beard and moustache movement' or 'Hairy Movement' across England. In 1853 a beard manifesto was published in Charles Dickens' widely-read magazine *Household Words*, entitled 'Why Shave?'⁸¹ Fashions could change; in 1853 Dickens shaved his beard but kept his moustache. From the mid-1850s, wearing the moustache alone was most strongly associated with the military. Although earlier prohibited from wearing beards and moustaches, British soldiers in the Crimean War (1853-56) were instructed to grow facial hair as protection from the cold. From 1854 moustaches became mandatory in the British Army: 'The chin and the under lip will be shaved, but not the upper lip. Whiskers if worn will be of moderate length'.⁸² The popularity of the moustache across social classes at this time may reflect changed or changing perceptions of the military, and the ordinary soldier, which became more favourable (even heroic) following the Crimean War and the Indian Rebellion (1857).⁸³ This important connection may have been relevant again in 1859, when fears of potential invasion by the French led the War Office to authorise the raising of a Volunteer Force. In Newcastle, the volunteers maintained a public profile 'by frequent parades on the Town Moor' and marching 'through enormous crowds on Newcastle's streets.'⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Discussed in Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 55-78; see also Walton, 'From Squalid Impropropriety', 232; Lucinda Hawksley, *Moustaches, Whiskers & Beards* (National Portrait Gallery, 2014), 67; and Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men. The Revealing History of Facial Hair* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 189-190.

⁸¹ Henry Morley and William Henry Wills, 'Why Shave?', *Household Words* Volume VII No 177 (printed 13 August 1853).

⁸² *The Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Army* (HM Stationery Office), paragraphs 1695-96.

⁸³ See Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Psychology Press, 1994), 79-207; and Holly Furneaux, *Military men of feeling: emotion, touch and masculinity in the Crimean War* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸⁴ T L Hewitson, *Weekend Warriors From Tyne to Tweed* (Tempus, 2006), 83-92 (90).

The *Newcastle Journal* stated that there was ‘little doubt’ that beards and moustaches would have offered the town’s policemen protection against the severe winter of 1860/1, expressing regret that permission had not been granted sooner, given the apparent ‘efficacy’ of the beard and moustache in preventing bronchial and chest diseases. The utility of facial hair in protecting against disease was a popularly held opinion.⁸⁵ The author of *The Philosophy of Beards* (1854) praised ‘the moustache’ for its qualities of warming and filtering the air before it entered the lungs.⁸⁶ Medical men emphasised the importance of facial hair for these qualities.⁸⁷ In November 1860, the editors of the *Lancet* advocated facial hair for all men:

We hope science and common sense will come to the rescue and not only let soldiers and policemen continue to wear on their faces the natural covering they have been given, but induce wheezing, sneezing, sore-throated, shivering mortals, who have trembled more at the keen edge of a January air or March wind than of a razor, to cease wasting their time.⁸⁸

Evidently some policemen wore moustaches at this time, but in which force is not clear; it may have referred to the Metropolitan force before the order to remove them in October 1860.

Medical arguments in favour of facial hair often derived from military experience. In 1861, contemporaneous with the *Newcastle Journal* comment, a correspondent to the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* wrote, ‘the moustache is emphatically nature's simple respirator, while the hair covering the jaws and throat is intended to afford warmth and protection’.⁸⁹ The author, Mercer Adam, a Lincolnshire physician, questioned ‘*Is Shaving Injurious to the Health?*’, reflecting a popular belief in its supposed dangers.⁹⁰ Adam claimed to have discovered the benefits of the mandatory military moustache as surgeon at the army camp at Aldershot, where new shaved recruits suffered more bronchial infections than those ‘whose upper lips were plentifully clothed with hair’.⁹¹

⁸⁵ See Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 60-70.

⁸⁶ Thomas S. Gowing, *The Philosophy of Beards. A Lecture, Physiological, Artistic and Historical* (J. Haddock, 1854), 9.

⁸⁷ For example, ‘The Effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and Civic States and Habits of Living on Health and Longevity’, *Edinburgh Review* 111 (January 1860), 5.

⁸⁸ ‘The Uses of Hair’, *Lancet* 76 (3 November 1860), 440; quoted in Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men*, 188.

⁸⁹ Mercer Adam, ‘Is Shaving Injurious to the Health? A Plea for the Beard.’ *Edinburgh Medical Journal* 7 (1861), 566-73, 568.

⁹⁰ See Jacob Middleton, ‘Bearded patriarchs’, *History Today* (February 2006), 26-7.

⁹¹ Adam, ‘A Plea for the Beard’, 571.

It was commonly held opinion that there were medical reasons for men working outdoors – such as policemen - wearing the beard and moustache.⁹² The mid-nineteenth century saw rising concern about poor air quality in industrial, urban environments and its physical ill-effects.⁹³ This may – in part - have motivated the request of the Newcastle policemen in 1861, exposed to such conditions walking their beats. However, many of the ascribed health benefits of facial hair could apply more to the beard than the moustache. Withey argues that ‘after a brief initial trend for moustaches, the fashion for full beards gathered momentum’, making the choice of the Newcastle policemen to favour the moustache in 1861 particularly interesting.⁹⁴

With the majority of the Newcastle force recruited from the working or labouring classes, their preference for the moustache may have reflected contemporary fashions within their socio-economic backgrounds. On 23 January 1854, a public lecture in Newcastle extolled the benefits of wearing the beard and moustache; similar events were held across England.⁹⁵ The matter arose again in the north-east in 1860, when J. Baxter Langley, the editor of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, delivered a lecture on ‘The Beard and Moustache’ in Newcastle.⁹⁶ He delivered a lecture of nearly two hours on the same topic at the Blyth Mechanics’ Institute in Northumberland.⁹⁷ In April 1861, Langley gave possibly the same lecture at the Spennymoor Reading Room in County Durham, stating:

that the practice of allowing the natural growth of hair on the male human face is a healthy, cleanly, and desirable custom, adding to the dignity, beauty, and intellect of the countenance, and enhancing its moral influence.⁹⁸

The institutes and reading rooms were essentially working-class institutions established to provide adult education amongst workers in the local coalfields, indicating a level of interest in the topic to working-men of North-East England in 1860-1.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, images of such men in this period are too scarce to establish their facial hair preferences with any certainty. However, research suggests that generally ‘the frequency of moustaches before 1880 was low’,

⁹² For example, a lengthy critique attributed to an unnamed ‘a medical correspondent’ in the *Scotsman*, reprinted in the *North and South Shields Gazette* (10 October 1861), a newspaper read in Newcastle.

⁹³ Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 65.

⁹⁴ See Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 58, and 123-139. On the growing popularity of the moustache, see Walton, ‘From Squalid Impropriety’.

⁹⁵ *Newcastle Courant* 27 Jan 1854.

⁹⁶ Reported *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 25 Jan 1860 (2). Held on 24 Jan 1860, it attracted several letters to the newspaper prior to the lecture: see *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 17 Jan 1860 (3), 18 Jan (3), 30 Jan 1860 (3).

⁹⁷ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 28 Jan 1860 (2).

⁹⁸ *Durham Chronicle* 5 Apr 1861 (7).

⁹⁹ On mechanics’ institutes and reading rooms in the mid-Victorian period, see Brendan Duffy, ‘The Progress of Education in the Northern Coalfield Before 1870’, *Northern History*, 55, 2 (2018), 178-205.

worn by less than 10 per cent of men, with the ‘chin beard’ the most popular style amongst plebeian men in the 1860s/70s.¹⁰⁰ Further evidence of facial hair styles at the lower levels of Victorian society was found in Withey’s study of 635 photographs of men admitted to three prisons from 1856-1876: 40% had no facial hair; only 16 wore the moustache alone, seven being in the age group 21-30, the age of most recruits to the Newcastle police.¹⁰¹ Although none of the prisons was in northern England, if it is the case that moustaches were not commonly worn by poor and working-class men, this would indicate that there was something unusual and specific about the Newcastle policemen’s choice in 1861 to wear the moustache.

The ‘moustache alone’ held particular attractions, and shifting meanings, in the nineteenth century. It differs from the beard not least because, ‘the moustache by itself ... is always expressing a definite choice about the display of facial hair’.¹⁰² A properly groomed moustache, Sharon Twickler noted, in effect enabled a man to both have facial hair and to an extent be clean-shaven, demonstrating both masculinity, and, as ‘facial hair tamed’, self-control.¹⁰³ Such qualities would presumably appeal to the men policing Newcastle. However, that the moustache alone was from 1854 an ‘essential marker of the British soldier’, made it an interesting choice for the new police in England.¹⁰⁴ The notion of a police force had met fierce public opposition in London in the early nineteenth century. In part, this antipathy came from a perception that having uniformed officers on the streets was a ‘foreign’ idea, unsuitable for England, as it seemed to imply military control over the civilian population. In devising a uniform for the new force in London, established in 1829, care was taken to avoid a para-military appearance, for example using blue cloth for coats and winter trousers avoided connotations of the red military uniform. Police uniform remained blue thereafter. When the Newcastle force was established in 1836, a uniform based directly upon that of the Metropolitan Force was adopted.¹⁰⁵ While soldiers were required to wear moustaches from 1854, it is likely that Newcastle policemen did not wear moustaches from 1836 until 1861, when they requested permission to do so. The fact that they made this request – and that it was granted - would indicate a change in the perception of the suitability of the moustache for

¹⁰⁰ Withey *Concerning Beards*, 55-78 and 175-186 (177 and 181).

¹⁰¹ Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 175-186.

¹⁰² Neville Parker, ‘The Moustache: A Semiscientific Study’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 4:1 (1970), 49-53.

¹⁰³ Sharon Twickler, ‘Combing Masculine Identity in the Age of the Moustache, 1860–1900’, in Evans and Withey *Framing the Face*, 149-168 (157).

¹⁰⁴ Walton, ‘From Squalid Impropriety’, 240.

¹⁰⁵ Watch Committee Minute Book vol 1, 14 Mar 1836, 14 (Tyne & Wear Archives MD.NC/274/1).

England's policemen, even though by 1861, the connection between the moustache alone and the military would be well-established in the public imagination.

Having considered the timing of their request, the next section explores what motivated Newcastle's policemen in 1861 to want to wear the type of facial hair associated at that time almost exclusively with the military.

Motivations for the Request

Lacking memoirs or other personal recollections, we can establish or access the motivations of these policemen best through their actions. The *Newcastle Journal* comment reveals that not all the town's policemen wore the moustache in April 1861. As the moustache was not mandatory, it was evidently not required as part of the uniform and the visual sources analysed above confirm this applied beyond Newcastle. Another indicator that the moustache should not be regarded as an aspect of 'uniform' was that it could not be removed at the end of a working day, setting it apart from the helmet, or other badges of office. To classify something as an aspect of uniform only, rather than a more general fashion or trend, it needs almost to be anachronistic in that society at that time (barristers' wigs, for example). As the moustache was worn not only by policemen, it would not unequivocally announce occupational identity. Therefore, if the moustache could not rightly be considered as part of the uniform of the Newcastle policeman in 1861, it became a matter of choice. In which case, what compelled members of the force to seek permission, and then so many to wear the moustache?

It is in the context of motivations for the request that the word 'fashion' in the title of this article is chosen. Fashion refers not only to clothes.¹⁰⁶ Fashion, 'when related to the body, can be considered as an expression that turns the body into both the form and content of a precise pursuit of identity'.¹⁰⁷ Fashioning a visual identity implies an active process of selecting certain features for display. When choosing to wear the moustache in 1861, Newcastle's policemen

¹⁰⁶ On fashion, facial hair and dress, see Withey and Evans, 'Introduction', 10.

¹⁰⁷ Chiara Battisti and Leif Dahlberg, 'Focus: Law, Fashion and Identities', *Polemos. Journal of Law, Literature and Culture*, 10:1 (April 2016), 1-12. See also, Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher, 'Dress and Identity', *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 10:4 (1992), 1-8.

engaged in ‘self-fashioning’, a process of constructing an identity.¹⁰⁸ It is therefore important to consider what identities the moustaches helped to construct.¹⁰⁹

Individual identity

The uniformed policeman on the beat was described in 1856 as ‘an institution rather than a man’.¹¹⁰ Opportunities for individual self-expression were limited for policemen in the 1850s and 1860s, so it is significant that each exercised choice when deciding to request permission and whether to wear the moustache or not. Self-fashioning governs the passage of an individual from a lack of agency to a recognition of that individual’s power as an agent of change.¹¹¹ Growing a moustache has a direct physical impact on the wearer. They could therefore act as ‘instruments for creating self-knowledge and self-mastery.’¹¹² Such representations of embodied masculinity can reveal working-class men’s relationships with their own bodies.¹¹³ Significantly, at least at the date of the *Newcastle Journal* article, peer pressure did not compel every policeman to follow the majority; nor was wearing a moustache essential to belong to the Newcastle force. This indicates agency in the otherwise tightly controlled existence and mandatory uniform appearance of the Newcastle policemen.

Care must be taken with the notion of ‘agency’, both to avoid a negative and reductionist view, regarding these policemen as one-dimensional characters lacking control over their own lives, and equally, not to overemphasise it; the limits of their individual autonomy are revealed in the fact that they needed permission.¹¹⁴ However, the concept is relevant here: no one forced these men to grow moustaches – it was sufficiently important to them to collectively request permission and then individually to choose whether act upon it. Their actions also indicate a

¹⁰⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁰⁹ Several chapters in *New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair* address its role in the construction of specific identities: see M. Victoria Alonso Cabezas, ‘Beardless Young Men? Facial Hair and the Construction of Masculinity in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Self-Portraits’, 91-108; Morwenna Carr, ‘‘We’ll Imagine, Madam, You Have a Beard’: Beards and Early Female Playwrights’, 189-212; Sharon Twickler, ‘Combing Masculine Identity in the Age of the Moustache, 1860–1900’, 149-168; and Alice White, ‘Whiskers at War: Moustaches, Masculinity and the Military in Twentieth-Century Britain’, 169-187.

¹¹⁰ Andrew Wynter, ‘The Police and Thieves’, *Quarterly Review*, 1856, vol. XCIX, 160-200, 171.

¹¹¹ Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*, 3-4.

¹¹² Michael Hau, ‘The Normal, the ideal, and the beautiful’, in Michael Sappol and Stephen P Rice (eds.) *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Age of Empire* (Berg, 2010), 149-170, 167.

¹¹³ See Joanne Begiato, ‘Between Poise and Power: Embodied Manliness in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Culture’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), 125-47.

¹¹⁴ For a critique of the concept of agency, see Lynn Thomas, ‘Historicising Agency’, *Gender & History* 28(2) 2016, 324–339.

willingness to encompass the opinions of those of the force who chose not to do so. Their request to wear moustaches was an authentic and active expression of choice (possibly with multiple motivations). Each man deciding whether to join those members of the police force in growing the moustache made a self-aware social declaration, making the moustache a sign of individual identity.

Masculine identity

Haia Shpayer-Makov noted that, ‘The modern police network, formed in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, was conceived as a masculine occupation’, intended to ‘be imbued with and convey distinctly masculine attributes and values.’¹¹⁵ The police uniform itself in 1861 would be normatively male, implicitly conveying masculinity, whether accompanied by a moustache or not. Although, as Withey observed, ‘the nature of facial hair as a component of masculinity and manliness is far from static’, around the mid-nineteenth century, growing and wearing it was a means of expressing masculinity.¹¹⁶ This can be dated reasonably precisely to around 1850, when ‘a changing climate of ideas surrounding male identity and bodily appearance, and in particular a new focus upon the physicality of the male body, saw beards and moustaches return to prominence as key signifiers of masculinity.’¹¹⁷

Facial hair carried associations of manly authority and power, but Newcastle’s policemen chose the type of facial hair associated at that time almost exclusively with the military.¹¹⁸ Often ‘manhood is constructed in relation to other forms of manhood’.¹¹⁹ As martial values were ‘keenly associated with manliness’, associations of the moustache with the military suggest that the policemen sought to draw on contemporary perceptions of the heroic manliness of soldiers to express a particular form of ‘hyper-masculine’ identity.¹²⁰ The reports of the violent

¹¹⁵ Haia Shpayer-Makov, ‘Shedding the uniform and acquiring a new masculine image. The case of the late-Victorian and Edwardian English police detective’, in Barrie and Broomhall, *Police and Masculinities*, 141.

¹¹⁶ Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 7. On Victorian notions of masculinity, see John Tosh, ‘Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: 1800–1914,’ *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005), 330–31.

¹¹⁷ Withey and Evans, ‘Introduction’, 4-5.

¹¹⁸ For an overview of research on the relationship between facial hair and constructions or representations of masculinity, see Withey and Evans, ‘Introduction’.

¹¹⁹ Joanne Bailey, ‘Masculinity and Fatherhood in England c. 1760–1830’, in John Arnold and Sean Brady (eds.) *What Is Masculinity?: Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 173.

¹²⁰ Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain, 1760-1900. Bodies, emotion, and material culture* (Manchester University Press, 2020), 101. This ‘hypermasculinity’ is discussed in several contributions to *Martial Masculinities: Experiencing and Imagining the Military in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (eds.) Anna Maria Barry, Joanne Begiato, Michael Brown (Manchester University Press, 2019). On the male soldier as a

assaults they faced show this would have been important to policemen expected to face often dangerous situations and patrol rough neighbourhoods.¹²¹ As Stephanie Ward noted, ‘Working men shaped their bodies to construct a performance of masculinity within a specific time and place.’¹²² Patrolling a beat in urban mid-nineteenth century Newcastle would require a certain physical presence. Francis Dodsworth argued that ‘For many policemen it was their masculine physicality that gave them the capacity to negotiate the violent and dangerous streets of the Victorian underworld’.¹²³ The nature of their job required and emphasised the need for physicality and masculinity.¹²⁴ Their moustaches stand as evidence of how these policemen asserted (or reasserted) manliness, performing masculinity through the public presentation of their bodies. For the policemen of Newcastle, wearing the moustache was an important and useful sign of identity, expressing masculine physicality.¹²⁵

Joanne Begiato argued that ‘manliness’ was ‘a primary evaluator of masculine identity and behaviour’, which was ‘produced, maintained, and disseminated [in Britain] in the long nineteenth century through men’s bodies, very often working-class ones.’¹²⁶ Significantly, policemen do not feature in Begiato’s otherwise wide-ranging and diverse study of ‘the types of working man most commonly linked with manliness’, which included firemen, miners, soldiers and sailors.¹²⁷ As this article demonstrates, there are indeed good reasons why policemen should be considered separately.

Social identity

fundamental representation of masculinity, see Ann-Dorte Christensen & Morten Kyed, ‘From military to militarizing masculinities’, *NORMA* (2022) 17:1, 1-4.

¹²¹ On physical presence in the construction of police authority through masculinity, see Francis Dodsworth, ‘Masculinity as Governance: police, public service and the embodiment of authority, c. 1700-1850’, in Matthew McCormack (ed.) *Public men: political masculinities in modern Britain*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 33–53.

¹²² Stephanie Ward, ‘Miners’ bodies and masculine identity in Britain, c.1900-1950’, *Cultural and Social History* 18 (3), 443-462 (450). On working-men’s agency in constructing gendered identities, see Begiato, *Manliness*, 3-4.

¹²³ Francis Dodsworth, ‘Men on a mission: masculinity, violence and the self-presentation of policemen in England, c.1870-1914’, in Barrie and Broomhall, *Police and Masculinities*, 123-140, 137.

¹²⁴ On links between police authority and displays of strength or aggression, see Clive Emsley, ‘“The Thump of Wood on a Swede Turnip”: Police violence in nineteenth-century England’, *Criminal Justice History*, 1985, vol. 6, 125-49; and Clive Emsley, *Hard Men - The English and Violence Since 1750* (Hambledon Press, 2005), 135-6.

¹²⁵ As noted above, themes relating to the history of masculinity and ‘manliness’ in the nineteenth century deserve deeper analysis than is possible here.

¹²⁶ Begiato, *Manliness*, 6, 22.

¹²⁷ Begiato, *Manliness*, 168.

By 1861, although the role of the police in enforcing law and order was increasingly clear, it could be difficult for policemen to establish their identities. They occupied an anomalous social position. Exerting authority over men of the 'respectable' classes, who may have been confronted by the possibility of being disciplined by men drawn almost without exception from the unskilled and semi-skilled working class, would require some level of tact or diplomacy. Exercising authority over working-class communities, over men of their own class perhaps reluctant to accept their claims to authority, could require bravery, toughness and physical strength. Also, as codes of behaviour traditionally associated with working-class masculinity included behaviours inappropriate for policemen (such as excessive drinking, womanising or violence), the Newcastle policeman of the mid-nineteenth century had somehow to fashion or construct an identity which was 'masculine' yet was highly disciplined and stood in opposition to those behaviours. Policemen seemed positioned somewhere between the working and the elite or middle classes; heavily regulated, living lives severely circumscribed by their occupation, often facing violence at work, but with more favourable conditions of service than many other workers in Britain. In Emsley's pithy comment, 'All social classes could indulge in the decision to keep the police at arms' length.'¹²⁸

Their facial hair too revealed this liminality. The police also stood somewhere between the 'civilian' man, with freedom to wear whatever facial hair they wanted, and the large groups of men identified by Withey, for whom decisions as to their facial hair were not their own, as certain institutions, including prisons and workhouses, exerted control over their appearance.¹²⁹ Military men too could be ordered to grow or remove facial hair according to regulations, or 'the whim of the commanding officer'.¹³⁰ The ordinary officer of a mid-nineteenth century police force required permission to grow facial hair, but once that permission was granted evidently had choice whether to do so. The *Newcastle Journal* comment reveals that many did so and that the choice they made was telling.

The *Newcastle Journal* refers to their wearing only moustaches in April 1861, making their preference for the moustache alone, the facial hair most associated with martial masculinities. Begiato's observation that, 'the martial man's appeal was frequently represented through his

¹²⁸ Clive Emsley, *A Short History of Police and Policing* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 124.

¹²⁹ Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 187.

¹³⁰ John H. Rumsby, 'Of No Small Importance. A Social History of the Cavalry Moustache', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* (2018) 96 (386), 152-168 (166).

body, perfectly attired in regulation uniform, headgear, shoes, weapons and equipment, and manifested in his size, gait and posture', can apply equally in all respects to the mid-nineteenth century policeman.¹³¹ Through their choice of moustache - accompanied by their uniform, required to be worn both on and off duty - these policemen would look more like soldiers than like the populations they policed. Here we see how they saw or imagined themselves. In 1861, policemen in Newcastle actively sought to visually distance themselves from the communities they policed, aligning more towards a military appearance through their choice of facial hair. This deliberate choice indicates a desire to construct and visually express a specific identity, a visible representation of the difficult position in which Newcastle's policemen found themselves in 1861, as working men occupying a unique and challenging position in society.

Collective identity

The Newcastle Journal comment 'Taken as a whole, they are as fine a body of officers as any town in the kingdom can produce', raises the notion of a group identity, and the possible role the moustaches played.¹³² A decision to ask for and act upon the permission to grow a moustache can be seen as a collective activity. Susan Broomhall and David Barrie noted 'the interdependence of lower-ranking officers' as a critical factor in encouraging overt and physical performance of masculinity, 'at least for their own internal audience'; trust in colleagues was important to the job, and could be forged in 'hyper-masculine contexts ... which ... enabled the development of a shared identity.'¹³³ If 'fashion and identity are ways to adhere to a group', the moustache visibly declared a 'fraternal fellowship', an identification or comradeship with the other members of the force who similarly chose to wear the moustache.¹³⁴ This suggests the policemen being or becoming aware of being part of something 'beyond' their individual identity, making the moustache an example of a visual material culture that was intended to foster a corporate identity among members of the force.¹³⁵ As one of the 'internal models of masculinity shared and practiced among policemen', it could both encourage and demonstrate their integration into, and commitment to, the force.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Begiato, *Manliness*, 103.

¹³² On facial hair in both individual and group identities, see Twickler, 'Combing Masculine Identity', and White, 'Whiskers at War'.

¹³³ Broomhall and Barrie, 'Introduction', 13.

¹³⁴ Battisti and Dahlberg, 'Law, Fashion and Identities', 7.

¹³⁵ For other examples, see Begiato, *Manliness*, 169-202.

¹³⁶ Broomhall and Barrie, 'Introduction', 8.

Through their choices these policemen made their facial hair significant. Deciding to seek permission, and subsequently to act upon it, contributed to forming a ‘collective identity’, an ‘imagined community’. As such, the moustaches referred to in the *Newcastle Journal* offer a rare window into the social relations these men had with each other, especially important as working-class men are underrepresented in the record.¹³⁷ Such a group action seems to challenge the traditional view of policing in the mid-nineteenth century as ‘a poorly disciplined group of men, viewing policing as a stopgap occupation, having little sense of identity and little commitment to the job’.¹³⁸ Rather, it offers evidence of the development of ‘an ethos and spirit de corps of their own’.¹³⁹ The moustaches of the Newcastle police express collective or group identity, as well as individual, masculine and social identity.

Professional identity

Significantly, this collective identity was based around shared membership of a police force. What linked the policemen in Newcastle was their job; in the collective act of seeking permission and wearing the moustache they themselves connected their facial hair to their office, making the moustaches a powerful expression of their occupational or professional identity. This was important, at a time when a nascent ‘professional consciousness’, was starting to take hold in these early forces. The ‘new police’ had to indicate their status as law enforcement professionals to maintain and exert authority in the community they policed. A highly visible and readily identifiable means of achieving this was to adopt specific and noticeable clothing, and the professionalisation of law enforcement had led to a recognisable form of uniformed policing intended to be visible on the street.¹⁴⁰ Dress can make non-verbal statements about age, gender, social class, occupation, etc., and, ‘because it may be seen in social encounters before conversation can be initiated, has a certain priority over discourse in the establishing of identity’.¹⁴¹ In this way, uniforms, equipment and other aspects of ‘dress’ could be used as ‘visual shorthand’, as ‘signs’ through which the status and values of the new police could be made public.¹⁴² Moustaches, as part of ‘dress’ - ‘modifications ... and/or

¹³⁷ Begiato’s *Manliness* is an important step in addressing this.

¹³⁸ Taylor, *New Police*, 44.

¹³⁹ Taylor, *New Police*, 127.

¹⁴⁰ Emsley, *Great British Bobby*, 40.

¹⁴¹ Roach-Higgins and Eicher, ‘Dress and Identity’, 5.

¹⁴² On uniform as an indicator of ‘special status’, see Gary Watt, *Dress, Law and Naked Truth. A Cultural Study of Fashion and Form* (Bloomsbury, 2013), 110.

supplements to the body’ - can function as ‘media for communication.’¹⁴³ For these policemen, wearing the moustache could be one means for his body to bear and make visible his professional identity.¹⁴⁴

An important point about moustaches is their immediate visibility. There is an ‘active or operative quality’ to professional clothing and appearance that contributes to the ritual of the performance of law.¹⁴⁵ Performance can include non-verbal communication at the level of ‘the presentation of self in everyday life’.¹⁴⁶ By appearing in Newcastle, wearing the moustache, and their uniform, the policemen may have created or encouraged an association between their facial hair and their professional law enforcement authority. We cannot know what style(s) of moustache they chose to wear, and so whether this visual identity would have been seen as specific to policemen or if the same or similar moustaches would have been seen in the town on men in other uniformed but non-military occupations, members of local fire brigades for example. However, wearing moustaches in combination with their recognisable uniform was a visual act that would not only communicate but, in effect, actively perform their professional law enforcement authority as well as performing their identity as men and as members of a police force. The decisions to ask for permission and then to wear moustaches, can be read as not only contributing to forming a collective and professional identity but also to performing that identity, daily, both on and off duty.

Questions of Reception and Consumption

The moustaches of the Newcastle policemen had a role in not only constructing identity or identities, but in their visibility acted to ‘publicise’ it. As Withey notes, facial hair was a ‘public and powerful means of self-fashioning.’¹⁴⁷ That they had not been permitted to wear moustaches or beards prior to 1861 would surely affect how their doing so was received. What would the Newcastle public understand by first seeing no policemen on duty with facial hair, and then – in a matter of weeks – seeing almost all (but significantly, not all) - policemen appearing similarly adorned? The public response to this visibly obvious change would be important for the force overall.

¹⁴³ Roach-Higgins and Eicher, ‘Dress and Identity’, 1. On facial hair as a component of dress, see Withey and Evans, ‘Introduction’, 10 note 2; 4.

¹⁴⁴ For further examples, see Begiato, *Manliness*, 41.

¹⁴⁵ Watt, *Dress, Law*, 80.

¹⁴⁶ Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (PAJ Publications, 1986), 77.

¹⁴⁷ Withey, *Concerning Beards*, 176.

By 1861, policemen would be associated with values of the justice system, such as rule-based justice and legitimate authority. Image-making and image management were fundamental to how the nineteenth-century police force operated, evident for example in the mandatory uniform. There may have been concerns that embellishing or altering the uniform appearance of the town's 'new police' by adding facial hair might have impacted upon the dignity of their official role, or jeopardise how the public perceived them, but these were clearly overcome when permission to grow and wear the moustache was granted. The interface between a police force and the public is an important part of visual culture; the significance of visual imagery in the communication of ideas about justice and its institutions should not be underestimated. Dressing implies the implicit presence of an 'other' and - important in the context of the police establishing or consolidating and communicating their role as legitimate legal authority in the town -

meanings that a person attributes to various outward characteristics of dress are based on his/her socialization within a particular cultural context as well as on the improvisations the person exercises when applying learned meanings of dress within specific social situations.¹⁴⁸

In Newcastle, in April 1861, moustaches on the town's police were a new development. Meanings conveyed by dress are socially constructed, but any relationship between legal authority in Newcastle and facial hair had yet to be established, leaving the moustaches of the policemen open to interpretation. Any such association could not be clear-cut: the newspaper stated that within one month of being granted permission to grow the moustache, nearly every member of the Newcastle force had done so. This could express personal preference, or physical inability, but what was the impact on the few who did not grow and wear moustaches once permission was granted? Did it carry within it possible consequences for non-compliance or non-acceptance of that behaviour? Would members of the public make any distinction between members of the force wearing moustaches, and others who did not? Did a policeman without a moustache risk criticism or not being recognised or accepted as part of the collective professional identity expressed through the wearing of the moustache? This raises questions of cultural negotiations of identity and difference, and of consumption and reception, which are

¹⁴⁸ Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 'Dress and Identity', 1.

impossible to establish with any certainty, beyond the existence of the newspaper article that started this research.

Conclusion

At the formation of the early forces in the 1830s, care was taken to avoid the ‘new police’ having an appearance with overtly para-military connotations. By 1861, the moustaches of the Newcastle policemen reveal a significant shift had occurred. Wearing uniforms and the facial hair most associated with the British army, these policemen would appear more like soldiers than like the populations they policed. That they requested permission to make this change is compelling evidence of how the men saw themselves, and of how they wanted to be seen. That similar moves were made by ‘ordinary’ policemen in towns and cities across the country would make the policemen of Newcastle aware of being part of something beyond their own force. In wearing the moustache, they could express this sense of belonging to their local force and to a larger, nationwide phenomenon, evidence of the development of a police culture with a positive and specifically fashioned self-image.

We cannot know how the people of Newcastle reacted to the moustaches on their policemen in 1861, but the evidence of *The Newcastle Journal* article indicates concern for their welfare, a pride in their professional appearance, and approval of their moustaches. Equally, we cannot know what prompted the men of the force to ask for permission to grow and wear the moustache (and beard) then, but it should not be overlooked that they made a choice to do so. In asking for permission and wearing the moustache, the Newcastle policemen acted as agents of their own self-fashioning. In effect, this allows an insight into the world of the ‘ordinary’ policemen in Newcastle, exercising an agency possibly unexpected at that time. As such, we are afforded an opportunity to hear a voice often excluded from historical narratives.

Exploring the decision of these policemen to wear the moustache reveals the extent to which such seemingly personal choices are interconnected with wider social and cultural forces. It has been shown that the moustaches of the policemen of Newcastle in 1861 are capable of multiple meanings and interpretations. They appear to be both personal choice and collective expression. Consciously wearing a recognisably similar attribute such as the moustache can be seen as part of creating a professional identity, or the adoption of such an identity, or – perhaps most interestingly - a combination of both creation (or construction) and adoption. Each

iteration, each policeman who chose to wear the moustache, acted to reinforce this as a 'code' for the specific professional identity embodied in and shared by these men, also signifying his acceptance of that identity for himself. The choice of an individual policeman to cultivate a moustache therefore can be seen as representing his membership of the police force i.e., a group identity, both collective and professional. Further, wearing the moustache acted to perform that professional identity to those beyond the force. As such, it could act as a visual representation of his authority and status to the people of Newcastle. Therefore, their moustaches had a role in constructing and performing a social, collective and professional identity for individual members of the police force in Newcastle in 1861.