



Wiltshire Police, formerly known as Wiltshire Constabulary, is the territorial police force responsible for policing the county of Wiltshire (including the Borough of Swindon) in Southwest England.

The force serves 722,000 people over an area of 1,346 square miles (3,490 km²). In terms of officer numbers, it is the second smallest force in the United Kingdom (after the City of London Police).

History

Before the 1830s, policing in Wiltshire was the responsibility of petty and parish constables, who were supervised by magistrates. This was largely ineffective as they were unpaid and untrained, and so independent and private forces such as the Devizes Prosecution Society emerged, and these did not immediately disappear when professional police forces came into being.

The Municipal Corporations Act 1835 standardised the structure and responsibilities of borough councils in England and Wales, including requiring they provide a professional police force. The Act applied both to new boroughs formed on application in large industrial cities, and to 178 already incorporated boroughs, including Salisbury (officially known as New Sarum until 2009). The New Sarum Police was founded in 1836, but was disbanded and reformed only two years later as the Salisbury City Police - the first modern police force to operate in Wiltshire. In the same year, a detachment of London's Metropolitan Police, which had been established in 1829, was called in to control riots.

Social unrest in the 1830s led to the appointment in 1836 of a Royal Commission on policing in the counties, which led to the County Police Act 1839. This established a framework and some government funding for magistrates in a county to form a police force based on London's Metropolitan Police, though there was no requirement for them to do so. In the same year the Act passed, groups of labourers had rioted across Wiltshire over the price of food and the introduction of new farm equipment, starting fires and destroying machinery. As a result, Wiltshire became the first county to use the provisions of the Act to form a county-level police force, with Wiltshire Constabulary being established on Wednesday 13 November 1839 at The Bear Hotel, Devizes, mere hours before the second (Gloucestershire).

Wiltshire Constabulary's first Chief Constable was Captain Samuel Meredith, a distinguished Royal Navy officer. An advertisement was placed to recruit 200 constables who were paid 17/6d a week. In those first years, new constables were simply given their uniform and an instruction booklet and then sent off to work without any training or guidance. Wiltshire Constabulary started operating from January 1840 and had filled almost all its posts by the summer. The Chief Constable spent the first months of his time visiting all the boroughs in Wiltshire, spending almost all his £400 salary on travel. The first ranks were only Constable and Superintendent, but Sergeant, Inspector, Detectives and five classes of Constable were later introduced.

The force did not have a true Criminal Investigation Department until 1936. On 30 June 1857, the Magistrates Committee that oversaw the force expressed interest in forming an investigation department which was founded with three of the 'most intelligent constables'. In 1936, three Detective Constables and a Detective Sergeant were appointed, but it was not until 1939 that an official head of the department was appointed, and a Detective Sergeant was appointed to take charge of new equipment such as that for the Photographic, Printing and Fingerprinting departments. CID remained stagnant in its development until after the war, after which it slowly expanded, and in 1997 it had 170 detectives.

In 1909 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary raised concerns over the lack of a mounted division in the force. As a result, six constables were transferred to the new mounted division, which doubled to 12 the next year. Although the mounted division was not active every day, they were of particular use at the Salisbury Races, ceremonial duties such as escorting judges, and guarding the royal carriage. They were also occasionally loaned to neighbouring forces. The fate of the mounted division is unknown, but it most likely was ended during the introduction of motor vehicles in the 1920s. A Roads Policing Unit was founded on 7 May 1939 at the urging of the Home Secretary.

Notable events for Wiltshire Police include the Rode Hill House murder in 1860, the bomb explosion outside Salisbury Guildhall in September 1884, the Trowbridge Christmas Eve murder in 1925 and escorting Louis Blériot when displaying his famous cross-channel aeroplane.

Salisbury continued to have a separate police force, Salisbury City Police, to the rest of Wiltshire until World War II, when the two were merged. The merger took effect on 1 April 1943 and was initially a temporary measure, but became permanent after the war ended.

On 6 July 1961, Sir Charles Carter Chitham, a retired policeman of the former British India, laid the foundation stone of the new Wiltshire Police county headquarters at Devizes.

Twice in the 1980s, Wiltshire Police officers had to cover for the prison officers of Erlestoke Prison when they went on strike. In 1985, the force was involved in the Battle of the Beanfield, which prevented a convoy of new age travellers, known as the Peace Convoy, from establishing the fourteenth Stonehenge free festival at Stonehenge. The incident led to accusations of a police riot. The police also had to deal with the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp who were protesting against nuclear weapons being kept in Greenham Common, Berkshire. Most significantly the 1980s saw the introduction of the Police National Computer, Command and Control systems and the HOLMES investigation system. Also a national probationary training programme was introduced in all forces for new recruits.

Ports Policing Unit

The Wiltshire Police Ports Unit was established in April 2000. It is responsible for policing all non-designated airfields in Wiltshire, making sure that legislation is followed, particularly the Terrorism Act 2000. It also obtains any intelligence on smuggling and contraband. Ports in Wiltshire include Old Sarum Airfield and Clench Common Airfield.

Air Support Unit

The Air Support Unit was officially created in the spring of 1990, but Wiltshire Police had been renting helicopters since the late 1980s. They experimented with fixed-wing aircraft, a Robinson Beta 22 helicopter and an Aérospatiale Gazelle, but later chose a Bolkow Bo 105 in 1990, which was used for seven years until it was replaced by a McDonnell Douglas MD 902 Explorer. This helicopter was shared with the Great Western Ambulance Service, an arrangement that was seen in only one other area of the country. Besides the pilot, the helicopter carried an observer and a paramedic. The Air Support Unit was based at the headquarters in Devizes, where a hangar was built in 1993.

In 2014, the unit was merged into the National Police Air Service, meaning the force no longer owned or operated its own helicopter. From January 2015, the air ambulance function separated into Wiltshire Air Ambulance, a registered charity which operates its own helicopter; the charity leased the Devizes airbase until it moved to a newly built base near Melksham in June 2018.

Tri-Force Specialist Operations Unit

Between 2013 and 2019, a collaboration with the Avon & Somerset and Gloucestershire forces covered roads policing, firearms and police dogs.

Chief Constables

- 1839–1870 Captain Samuel Meredith RN
- 1870–1908 Captain Robert Sterne RN
- 1908–1943 Colonel Sir Höel Llewellyn
- 1943–1946 W.T. Brooks (acting chief constable)
- 1946–1963 Lt Colonel Harold Golden
- 1963–1979 George Robert Glendinning
- 1979–1983 Kenneth Mayer
- 1983–1988 Donald Smith
- 1988–1997 Walter Girven
- 1997–2004 Dame Elizabeth Neville
- 2004–2007 Martin Richards
- 2008–2012 Brian Moore
- 2012–2013 Patrick Geenty (temporary chief constable)
- 2013–2015 Patrick Geenty
- 2015–2018 Mike Veale
- 2018–present Kier Pritchard

Officers killed in the line of duty

The Police Roll of Honour Trust and Police Memorial Trust list and commemorate all British police officers killed in the line of duty. Since its establishment in 1984, the Police Memorial Trust has erected 50 memorials nationally to some of those officers.

The following officers of Wiltshire Police have died during the course of their duties:

- PC Daniel John Cooper, 2010 (road traffic accident)
- Sergeant Michael Ivor Tucker, 1991 (heart attack during firearms training)
- PC John Lewis Marsh, 1989 (collapsed and died after struggling to arrest a suspect)
- DC Mark Herbert, 1987 (road traffic accident)
- PC Desmond Derrick Kellam, 1979 (attacked by a suspect)
- PC Philip Stephen Russell, 1978 (road traffic accident)
- PC Leonard Alan Harding, 1977 (road traffic accident)
- PC Robert Edward Cray, 1973 (struck by car)
- PC Colin D. R. Hayward, 1968 (road traffic accident)
- PC Cedric A. Hemming, 1968 (struck by car)
- PC Maurice William Foord, 1961 (struck by car)
- Chief Inspector Edmund Richard Norris, 1955 (road traffic accident)
- War Reserve Constable Albert William Newman, 1942 (shot)
- Inspector Albert Enos Mitchell (road traffic accident)
- PC Henry G. Tanner, 1931 (road traffic accident)
- PC Frank Gray, 1929 (road traffic accident)
- Sergeant William Frank Crouch, 1913 (shot)
- Superintendent Frederick Bull, 1892 (fatally injured while riding horse)
- Sergeant Enos Molden, 1892 (shot)
- PC Andrew Albert Reuben Hancock, 1875 (attacked during a disturbance)

Governance

As of 20 August 2021, the Wiltshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is Philip Wilkinson. The police and crime commissioner is scrutinised by the Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel, made up of elected councillors from the local authorities in the police area.

Before the first PCC was elected in 2012, the force was under the local oversight of the Wiltshire Police Authority. The police authority had nine councillor members, who were appointed from Wiltshire Council and

Swindon Borough Council, and eight independent members, one of whom was a justice of the peace. The responsible government department is the Home Office.

Organisation

Wiltshire Police has two divisions – Swindon and Wiltshire – incorporating eight Community Policing Team areas.

	Swindon	Royal Wootton Bassett	Chippenham	Devizes	Salisbury	Amesbury	Trowbridge	Warminster
Hub Stn:	Gablecross South Marston	Royal Wootton Bassett.	Monkton Park. Chippenham.	Devizes.	Bourne Hill. Salisbury.	Amesbury.	Trowbridge.	Warminster.
Covers:	Swindon, Highworth.	Royal Wootton Bassett. Malmesbury. Cricklade. Lyneham.	Chippenham. Corsham. Calne.	Devizes. Marlborough. Pewsey.	Salisbury. Alderbury. Wilton.	Amesbury. Bulford. Durrington. Larkhill. Tidworth. Ludershall. Perham Down.	Bradford on Avon. Melksham. Trowbridge.	Westbury. Warminster. Mere.

Locations

The headquarters of Wiltshire Police is at London Road, Devizes, where it has always been because of its geographical position in the centre of Wiltshire. The operational headquarters are at Melksham for county division and Gablecross, South Marston, for Swindon division. The emergency communications centres for Wiltshire Police are at Devizes and Gablecross. The SNEN non-emergency call centre is at Devizes. Devizes is also the home of the Dog Squad and the training facilities for all new recruits.

There are enquiry offices at Gablecross, Chippenham, Marlborough, Trowbridge, Melksham (south of the town at Hampton Park) and Salisbury. Custody units are at Gablecross and Melksham.

The number of other sites was reduced after a 2017 review by the Police and Crime Commissioner. Swindon division has police posts at North Swindon, West Swindon and Swindon Centre. County division has sites at Cricklade, Royal Wootton Bassett, Calne, Malmesbury, Corsham, Bradford on Avon, Warminster, Tisbury, Mere, Devizes, Amesbury, Tidworth and Pewsey. There is also a police post at Leigh Delamere services on the M4.

In 2021, ten former station buildings were offered for sale, namely Marlborough, Malmesbury, Warminster, Highworth, Westbury, Cricklade, Alderbury, Calne, Pewsey and Wilton.

The facilities at Chippenham (Monkton Park), Corsham (Springfield campus), Salisbury (Bourne Hill) and Tisbury (Nadder Centre) are within Wiltshire Council buildings; the 2017 review stated a goal to increase the use of shared buildings.[19] In late 2019 and early 2020, officers began using Wiltshire Council libraries in Malmesbury, Westbury, Downton and Wilton as "touchdown" points, to increase contact with the public.

Former sites

Wiltshire Police's headquarters used to be on Bath Road in Devizes, formerly the Wiltshire Militia Stores; it was acquired in 1879 by Wiltshire Police as their headquarter, and nearby was a row of houses where senior officers lived. The building has since been demolished. Wiltshire Police remained at this site for 85 years until the early 1960s when the organization required a larger headquarters and the new building was commissioned on the London Road site, which was opened in 1964.

The station at Highworth closed in 2018 and the station (with adjoining house) at Wroughton was sold at around the same time. Stations at Alderbury, Westbury and Wilton had closed by March 2020.

Notable operations

Swindon Town Football Club on County Road attracts continuous police attention as the club has been known for hooliganism since the 1970s. Swindon Town has imposed banning orders on those supporters who cause disruption, criminal damage or are violent when attending games. There were 29 banning orders in place in 2006, which was an increase from a total of 11 in 2005. The increase resulted in a reduction of arrests at games, with 22 people being arrested attending games in 2005–06 compared to 39 arrests in 2004–05. Of the 22 arrests in 2005–06, 11 were for public disorder, 5 for violent disorder and the rest were made up of offences relating to missile throwing, racist chanting, pitch invasion, alcohol-related offences and one incident of being in possession of an offensive weapon. 33 Swindon fans were banned from travelling to the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

Hungerford massacre, 1987

Wiltshire Police responded to a fatal shooting in Savernake Forest on 19 August 1987, which escalated to a further 15 killings in the neighbouring police area (Thames Valley Police) and came to be called the Hungerford massacre.

Royal Wootton Bassett, 2007–2010

Between 2007 and 2011 the Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett was host to the repatriations of fallen service men and women who died in Afghanistan and Iraq. The bodies were brought through the town from RAF Lyneham on their way to the John Radcliffe Hospital at Oxford. Wiltshire Police were responsible for policing the crowds and any special events. Officers from Wootton Bassett station received a special award at the Jane's Police Awards for their contribution to policing the repatriations. Police were again praised for policing the 'Ride of Respect' in March 2010, the operation included planning, marshalling and policing the crowd and 22,000 participants.

Salisbury and Amesbury poisonings, 2018

Wiltshire Police took part in Operation Fairline – the multi-agency response to the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March 2018 at Salisbury – and Operation Fortis, which followed further poisonings in June at Amesbury. They received mutual support from 40 other forces, involving 1,200 officers. By June 2018 the cost of the first incident was estimated at £7.5 million, and in November total costs were projected to be £10.8m.

Performance

Wiltshire is one of the safest counties in the UK, with the 6th lowest crime rate per 1000 people in England. Recorded crime dropped by 7%, or 2,706 crimes, between April 2009 and March 2010. Wiltshire Police's detection rate is 6% higher than average, at 28%.

Wiltshire Police also have a favourable public image with the 2nd best in the UK for the public perceptions that police are dealing with anti-social behaviour effectively, and 3rd best in the UK for the public perceptions that police are dealing with drunk and disorderly behaviour effectively.

Drink driving in Wiltshire was highlighted as a problem in the National Summer 2010 Drink Drive Campaign that saw 2.87% of 3377 positive for drink driving in June 2010. However this is a drop of 3.53% from 2009.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

A report from March 2010 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary marked Wiltshire Police as 1 out of 10 forces that were graded as being 'excellent' and improving on reducing crime, 'fair' at protecting citizens from serious harm, and 'fair' for confidence and satisfaction. Wiltshire was also 1 of 13 forces classed as 'good' for local policing, and 1 of 13 forces that received no 'poor' grade in any category.

Independent Police Complaints Commission

In the year 2007/8 complaints and allegations recorded slightly decreased from the previous year. Wiltshire Police has one of the lowest rates for 'incivility' allegations at 11%, but one of the highest for 'oppressive conduct or harassment' at 15% and 'breach of PACE Code C' at 9%.

In the same 2007/8 period, Wiltshire Police received 234 complaints and 460 allegations. Wiltshire has an above-average 358 allegations per 100 officers, spread across five categories. Wiltshire Police are 1% or 0% lower on allegations except for 'incivility, impoliteness and intolerance', for which they receive 10% less allegations than the national average.

Of the 460, 26% were investigated, 43% came to a resolution and 31% were withdrawn, dispensed with or discontinued. Of the 26% allegations investigated in 2007/8, 91% were unsubstantiated, 2% higher than the national average.

Chief Constable Patrick Geenty, along with two other officers, are presently under IPCC investigation for alleged mishandling of child sexual abuse complaints.

Controversy

In 1985, Wiltshire Police prevented a vehicle convoy of several hundred new age travellers from setting up at the 11th Stonehenge Free Festival at Stonehenge in Wiltshire, after site custodians English Heritage were granted an exclusion zone of 4 miles (6.4 km) around the stones. A violent exchange between the travellers and police in riot gear took place over several hours. Eight police officers and 16 travellers were taken to hospital with minor injuries. One traveller suffered from a fractured skull. As much of the action took place in a field containing a bean crop, the events became known as the Battle of the Beanfield.

A sergeant in the Wiltshire Police was subsequently found guilty of having caused actual bodily harm to a traveller. Members of the convoy sued Wiltshire Police for wrongful arrest, assault and criminal damage as a result of the damage to themselves and their property. David Brudenell-Bruce, Earl of Cardigan who had witnessed the events, gave evidence against the police. After four months of hearings, 21 of the travellers were successful in their case and were awarded £24,000 in damages.

Investigation into Edward Heath

In 2017 the force faced public criticism for its £1.5M investigation alleged sexual abuse by deceased prime minister Edward Heath.

Proposed merger

In 2006, the Home Office announced plans to reduce the number of police forces in the UK from 42 to 24 in an attempt to save money. The plans were abandoned later that year due to lack of funding for the mergers, but the idea has resurfaced many times. The proposal would see Wiltshire Police merge with Gloucestershire Constabulary, Devon and Cornwall Police, Avon and Somerset Constabulary and Dorset Police.

In 2010, the plans were publicly criticised by all the involved forces, stating that it would lead to poor quality service and a reduction in local policing.[53]

In the media

Wiltshire Police officers are often featured on the Bravo police-reality programmes Brit Cops: Zero Tolerance and Brit Cops: Frontline Crime; the show usually follows officers in Salisbury or Swindon. The show is often repeated on Virgin 1. Wiltshire Police officers based at Salisbury station are featured in Nights Cops, a shadowing documentary following officers who work nights shifts in city centres. The Motorcycle Policing unit was featured on Channel 5's Emergency Bikers in Series 2 where they escorted a Hercules from Wootton Bassett towards Somerset.

Wiltshire Police headquarters was used as a police building for an opening shot in the 1992 version of Agatha Christie's The A.B.C. Murders, for which all cars and signs were removed.

Since 2017, Wiltshire Police have participated in Channel 4's 999: What's your Emergency? which follows frontline officers and staff in the 999 control room.

Wiltshire Police Cadets

Wiltshire Police has a police cadet scheme since 2014. Cadets wear black trousers, dark brown fleeces, white shirts, red ties and black hats (bowlers for girls) with a red band and red cadet epaulettes. Previously there was a cadet scheme until August 1980 when it was closed, along with many other similar schemes in the UK. The cadets at that time wore uniforms the same as constables, except with a blue-banded peaked cap and 'Cadet' on their epaulettes.

The scheme gave rise to many of the force's constables. For instance, the current Chief Inspector of Swindon Operations, Mike Jones, was in the last ever cadet unit in the Wiltshire Police. There has been discussion to roll out a police cadet scheme based on the example of the North Wales Police, but due to economic circumstances it seems unlikely that such a scheme would be re-introduced.

In 2014 The first cadets scheme was started in Swindon: since then it has expanded to Trowbridge, Salisbury and Chippenham sectors. The purpose of the scheme is presented as a way of engaging with young people and gaining a resource for minor policing matters. However, the scheme does not envisage direct police officer recruitment from the cadets, as had been the case in the 1980s.