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Metropolitan Police Special Branch

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Welcome from the Head of Special Branch

I was extremely proud to be given the responsibility of commanding Special Branch in November 2003, as I know that I now lead a police Branch with a long and unparalleled **history**. I also head a very large and diverse workforce comprising police officers and staff possessing unique skills and a breadth of experience that may be unequalled elsewhere in the MPS.

Members of Special Branch work to Guidelines set by the Home Office and agreed by ACPO. Even more importantly, we are fully bound by legislation that deeply impacts on our work and to which we are completely accountable. This includes the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, Part III of the Police Act 1997, the Terrorism Act 2000, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Data Protection Act 1998, to name just a few. Additionally, Special Branch officers investigate offences contrary to the Official Secrets Acts and the Representation of the People Acts, as well as offences involving the distribution of race-hate material by extremist organisations. The **National Terrorist Financial Investigation Unit** is staffed mainly by Special Branch personnel and, as its name suggests, has national responsibility for the tracking and seizure of terrorist funds using a variety of appropriate legislation.

Special Branch officers provide **close protection** to the Prime Minister and some other members of the Government as well as to visiting Heads of State and other persons assessed to be at particular risk. We also perform a front-line policing role at Heathrow, Waterloo and other London **ports** using powers afforded under Anti Terrorism legislation. We also support other law enforcement objectives. A substantial number of fully trained staff are also deployed in a variety of **surveillance** operations in support not only of Special Branch, but also of our colleagues in the Anti-Terrorist Branch and our partners in the different intelligence services.

Since 11th September 2001 the challenge faced by Special Branch has changed dramatically and there has been a phenomenal, global rise in the demand for sound, accurate **intelligence** that can be put to use in making critical operational decisions and in preventing further terrorist atrocities. I shall ensure that Special Branch is fully structured and resourced to meet these new challenges, but we cannot expect to protect London without the help of every member of the MPS. It is absolutely vital that everyone fully understands the importance of good intelligence in defeating terrorism and one of the purposes of this Intranet site is to explain what is required and how it should be brought to our attention. Additionally, Special Branch **Borough Liaison** Officers based at a number of locations within the MPS will enjoy my increased support in their efforts to support this two-way flow of intelligence. Critical to the safety of London is

developing and sustaining the trust of all our communities in their police service. I believe that ultimately it is communities that defeat terrorism. I will ensure SO12 develops this area of its business.

In order to meet the challenges ahead the Branch needs people with specific skills a few examples of which are: -

Financial investigation experience, languages, analytical skills, surveillance skills, detective experience, we need people who are interested in world events, are innovative, resourceful and want to be part of a dynamic organisation focussed on delivering quality products.

Our aim is to be internationally recognised as a centre of excellence. If you are someone who can help drive forward our business, we can promise you an exciting and fulfilling career.

SO12 Units and Operations

Special Branch (SO12) is the Metropolitan Police unit concerned with national security. It comprises some 700 police officers and about 150 police staff. SO12 is divided into two Operational Command Units, one essentially concerned with counter-terrorist and counter-extremist operations, and the other providing security at international ports in the MPS area and protection nationwide to public figures and important foreign visitors who do not come under the aegis of SO14 Royalty Protection or SO16 Diplomatic Protection. Please see the summary of current SO12 and SO objectives.

“A” Squad

Close Protection and Security Vetting. Please see the separate “A” Squad section.

“B” Squad

Exercises a national role for the police service in Great Britain in respect of Irish republican terrorism. Its officers and analysts work in partnership with the Security Service to ensure that intelligence is exploited to the maximum to counter terrorist activity. They add the police perspective and provide advice for provincial forces on intelligence where police action may be necessary, and provide a range of assistance, information and resources to other forces for particular operations. During 1996-7 “B” Squad initiated the operations leading to arrests by SO13 Anti-Terrorist Branch of PIRA terrorist units planning to destroy public utilities, which probably would have caused loss of life and would most certainly have had a devastating effect on the capital's trade and commerce. “B” Squad operations have also led to the prevention of further PIRA and dissident (CIRA and RIRA) operations planning bombing targets in central London and to the recovery of firearms and explosives, thus disrupting terrorist activity.

“C” Squad

Domestic extremism, Borough Liaison and prosecution of Official Secrets Acts and election offences. Please see the separate C Squad page and general intelligence requirement.

“D” Squad

Encompasses many of the national functions performed by SO12 on behalf of all the Special Branches in the United Kingdom. These currently include:

- the National Joint Unit, tasked with supervising the implementation of the Terrorism Act and associated legislation;
- the National Terrorist Financial Investigation Unit;
- the National Terrorism and Extremism Liaison Section (NTELS) - formerly the European Liaison Section;

- the National Special Branch Technical Working Group; (NTSBTWG), working to improve and co-ordinate the technical resourcing of SB units nationwide;
- the **National Training Unit**, which oversees the delivery of Centrex-approved training in all areas of SB work in co-operation with the Security Service;

“E” Squad

Please see the separate **E Squad** page for more information and an overview of international terrorism.

“P” Squad

Ports Policing. Please see the separate **P Squad** page.

“S” Squad

Is probably the most diverse of all the SO12 squads in its role and responsibilities and offers a wealth of very interesting opportunities to police officers and staff. It provides a variety of support for covert operations, whether proactive or reactive. These include the **Surveillance Unit**, the Intelligence Collation Section, the Communications Centre, the High-Tech Intelligence and Investigation Unit, the Source Unit and the Prison Liaison Section. SO12 also provides facilities for other UK Special Branches to permit the lawful interception of communications.

SO12 Intelligence Management and Operations Support (IMOS)

Maintains the SO12 records system. Please see the **IMOS** page for more information.

SO12 Personnel Unit

Offer a wealth of information and advice to persons seeking a future career in Special Branch. Please see the substantial **Personnel** section for further details.

For an OCU of this size SO12 naturally has its own Finance and Resources Unit, Management Information Unit and Systems Support Team.

Domestic Extremism

Perhaps one of the less well known parts of Special Branch is “C” Squad, which has responsibility for gathering, developing and analysing intelligence on matters relating to domestic political extremism, dealing with sensitive **prosecutions** and **liaison** with Boroughs and other OCUs throughout the MPS on matters relating to terrorism and extremism generally.

It must be understood at the outset that Special Branch is not a ‘political police force’ and does not investigate organisations purely on the grounds of political belief. Although the potential for groups to subvert or overthrow parliamentary democracy is now considered negligible, there are and have always been, a number of threats to public order and lawful commerce stemming from political violence. It is these threats that are investigated by “C” Squad.

Historical background

The Special Irish Branch was formed to deal with the threat from Irish Republican Terrorism in 1883 and after three years the word ‘Irish’ was dropped from its title. It was expanded to deal with security problems at the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887 and, still later, with foreign anarchists who were regarded as a danger to society. Since then, MPSB has had the responsibility for investigating political threats to public order, gathering intelligence on extremist groups at both ends of the political spectrum, from Fascism to Trotskyism, from Moseley’s black shirts to the Sidney Street anarchists.

Following the Second World War and against a background of Cold War, a nuclear arms race and the rise of communism, the focus of “C” Squad work remained on subversion. “entryism” and political activities aimed at undermining parliamentary democracy and the efficiency of the economy were seen amongst the main threats of the time. Please see the **History** section of this site for more information on most of these topics.

In recent years, disengagement from mainstream party politics has seemed to grow and there has been a rise in groups threatening not only public order but also lawful commerce and business activities, such as extreme Animal Rights and other single-issue groups.

Today’s “C” Squad is best viewed as split into three distinct parts:

Desks

The desks account for the larger part of the Squad and each focuses on a specific threat area. They gather, develop and analyse intelligence within their areas of interest and also produce threat assessments, briefing notes and other intelligence products. The desks cover animal rights matters, environmental extremism / anarchism, the extreme left wing and extreme right wing.

A significant part of their work is to provide accurate public order assessments of events such as marches, demonstrations and other forms of protest activity. These “threat assessments” are derived from the intelligence gathered and analysed by the relevant desk, and are written for three main reasons:

- **To ensure the physical safety of participants, police officers and wider public:** public safety will always be our primary concern, and our assessments help to provide Gold with the intelligence that he or she needs to assess the risks and deal with them appropriately
- **To protect both the rights of the participants and wider public:** achieving this balance remains one of the most difficult tasks in policing. Our assessments help to protect the right of lawful protest, whilst balancing the need for wider public and commercial life to continue
- **To allow for proportionate and cost effective policing arrangements:** as has recently been seen, the cost of policing major public order events can be huge and our assessments can have a major impact on the number of police and other resources deployed to cover an event. Making a judgement on the numbers expected to attend an event is something of an art, and although it has sometimes been popularly characterised as ‘educated crystal-ball gazing’ (!), it is in reality a very skilled task requiring high levels of professional knowledge, experience and judgement.

SO12 “C” Squad is the main interface between the MPS and the National Public Order Intelligence Unit. Because of its responsibility for the policing of the Capital, “C” Squad is naturally one of the main partners of the NPOIU and a number of SO12 staff are seconded there for extended periods.

Prosecutions Unit

The Special Prosecutions Unit deals with a variety of sensitive enquiries, in particular, prosecutions under the Official Secrets Act(s) (OSA) and the Representation of the People Act(s) (RPA). The Metropolitan Police Special Branch was responsible for the prosecution of almost all the infamous Cold war espionage cases and continues to enjoy a degree of national status to this day. The unit has had a variety of recent successes, including the prosecution of the ex-Security Service (MI5) officer David Shayler and a variety of electoral fraud offences under the RPA. It will also investigate offences involving the distribution of racially inflammatory literature and other material where these are committed by organised extremist groups that are already the subject of Special Branch attention.

Borough Liaison Officers

Special Branch Borough Liaison Officers (BLOs) are located throughout the MPD and are roughly aligned with the old Territorial areas 1 – 5, i.e. covering South West, South East, North West, North East and Central London. The BLOs exist to liaise with Boroughs and other OCUs, stimulate the flow of intelligence to and from these units to the relevant Special Branch squads at NSY, and provide advice and intelligence products on all Special Branch matters for our customers and colleagues. Please see the separate section on **Borough Liaison**.

International Extremism

The role of “E” Squad is to acquire, assess and develop intelligence concerning the threat to London from international terrorism and extremism. Extremists are regarded as those who are prepared to actively support or use violence to achieve their aims, whether political or religious. As the political, diplomatic, and financial centre, as well as being an international transport hub, London is the focus of the counter-terrorism effort in the United Kingdom.

Since the attacks on September 11th 2001 the security environment has changed immeasurably in terms of the scale and extent of the terrorist threat faced by the United Kingdom. Subsequent attacks against western targets in Bali, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and more recently Spain have clearly demonstrated the nature of the threat posed by Al Qaeda and affiliated Islamic extremist groups in the form of attacks designed to cause maximum physical, economic, symbolic and psychological damage.

London is home to many diverse communities. Whilst some communities are long established others have arisen in recent years, often as a result of emigration from their home countries that are affected by war, human rights abuses and political instability. Inevitably, many of these political problems have manifested themselves in these communities. Political extremism has also manifested itself amongst established communities such as those from India and Pakistan. Recent investigations have identified that a significant number of Islamic extremists are born in the United Kingdom and have converted to Islam, often whilst in prison for criminal activities. The “shoe bomber” Richard Reid, a UK national of West Indian origin with a long history of criminality, is one such example. It is the role of “E” Squad to investigate individuals and groups who are suspected of engaging in terrorism and other extremist activities and, where criminal activity is suspected, to work with the Anti Terrorist Branch to ensure their arrest and prosecution.

Before September 11th 2001 most international terrorist groups perceived the United Kingdom as a place to raise funds, recruit members and supporters, publish literature and conduct protests in support of their political or religious agendas. Whilst the threat posed by Al Qaeda and affiliated groups is to target directly the United Kingdom, many other groups continue to use it as a base to support terrorist campaigns conducted in their countries. Many international terrorist groups have some representation in London and most of these groups are now proscribed under the Terrorism Act making membership, fundraising and other support activities illegal. In addition, terrorist groups often commit other criminal offences. Turkish extremist groups such as the PKK (now Kongra Gel) and the DHKP-C (Revolutionary Peoples’ Communist Party – Front) have traditionally engaged in threats to extort money from local Turkish and Kurdish businesses and individuals whilst extremists working in support of north African

terrorist groups such as the GIA (Group Islamique Armee) and HAMS (Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group) are known to generate large sums from the use of counterfeit and stolen credit cards and the production of false travel documents. The funds are then sent, usually by courier or other informal banking systems, abroad to finance their terrorist campaigns. Some of these groups also commit offences by engaging in public disorder at demonstrations and entering diplomatic and other high profile premises by force to gain publicity for their causes.

Extremists in these communities may also seek to foster tension with respect to opposing political groups from their countries of origin, which can result in increased tensions and disorder. An important part of Special Branch work is to ensure that individuals and organisations are free to express their political and religious views within the law without interference or intimidation from opposing groups. Whilst the primary focus of "E" Squad is to protect London from the terrorist threat posed by Al Qaeda and affiliated groups, we also work to support local Borough policing needs and the safety of communities by disseminating intelligence and providing accurate and timely threat assessments in respect of public order and individuals and premises considered at risk.

"E" Squad gathers intelligence on terrorism and extremism from a wide variety of sources and agencies, including foreign services. Intelligence provided by Borough and specialist departments within the MPS provides a crucial contribution to this intelligence gathering and the overall assessment of identified terrorist and extremist threats.

Officers will normally be posted to "E" Squad for a period of three years during which they will focus on either the intelligence or operational aspects of Special Branch. In addition to using overt and covert policing techniques to gather intelligence, officers will normally be posted to a "desk" where they assume responsibility for a particular geographical region within the sections, which are divided into North Africa, the Middle East and the Indian sub-Continent. "E" Squad officers will be expected to acquire a specialised political knowledge of their areas of responsibility and a detailed understanding as to how this impacts on the respective communities in London.

National Terrorism and Extremism Liaison Section

Allied to the proliferation of Irish terrorism in the United Kingdom, the 1970s saw a worldwide increase in international terrorist activity by the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, Basque separatists in Spain, the Japanese Red Army and a number of terrorist groups from the Middle East. Many attacks by the last-named were carried out on foreign soil, in the main against individual persons regarded as enemies by the perpetrators. The United Kingdom was no exception and during that period there were numerous bomb attacks and assassinations carried out here by a multitude of different groups, including Palestinians, Armenians, Syrians, Croatians, Iranians and other Arab groups.

This type of activity necessitated the appropriate response by Special Branch, which monitored all such groups to obtain intelligence and information about international terrorists who were likely to encroach onto British soil. To this end the Branch has had, since 1976, a section set up to liaise directly with our European counterparts in the terrorist field in order that information can be more easily exchanged. The formation of the European Liaison Section (ELS) at Special Branch was necessary due to the fact that the International Criminal Police Organisation (ICPO) is precluded by charter from handling intelligence concerning "politically motivated crime". Following its formation the ELS steadily built up an excellent relationship with most of the European Police forces' equivalents of Special Branch.

Home Office Circular 4/1993 nominated the SO12 European Liaison Section (ELS) as the central point of contact between United Kingdom Police Services and their counterparts in Europe in relation to counter-terrorism matters. In 1995 that role was extended to include 'non-sporting' public order matters and racist and xenophobic offences in respect of which there were organisational connections with neighbouring countries. In 2003 the unit was renamed to reflect its national role and a significant increase in coverage in the wake of the events of 9/11 and their aftermath.

The NTELS now also administers and supports the expanded network of Counter-Terrorism and Extremism Liaison Officers (CTLEOs), who are all serving UK police officers based in a number of locations overseas.

Any MPS officer who is conducting an investigation into offences or matters, such as those mentioned above, and who feels that there is a trans-national aspect to the enquiry, is encouraged to make contact with the NTELS via their **SO12 Borough Liaison Officers**.

The NTELS maintains excellent contacts with all 25 European Union (EU) nations as well as Europol. Additionally, enquiries can be made with, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

The National Terrorist Financial Investigation Unit (NTFIU)

The NTFIU is a multi-agency body consisting of financial investigators dedicated to terrorist finance issues. The NTFIU investigates matters relating to terrorist financing in co-operation with other Special Branches, the Security Service and Government departments in furtherance of the ACPO terrorist Finance strategy. The NTFIU undertakes and / or co-ordinates terrorist finance enquiries (on individuals, groups and money flows) either pre or post executive action to develop both intelligence and evidence.

The unit will provide advice and assistance on the use of specific powers available to terrorist finance investigators. It will provide assistance to investigators in operations aimed at interdicting terrorist cash and through the provision of analytical support. The NTFIU provides investigative support to all foreign law enforcement agencies in matters relating to terrorist finance. It also works closely with the Home Office, HM Treasury, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and a range of other Government and international bodies.

Ports Policing

Officers working for “P” Squad are the closest thing we have to a frontier police force in the United Kingdom. They are effectively the only front-line officers within the Branch and their routine duties involve the application of substantial powers granted under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 in the examination of travelling terrorist suspects.

Additionally, Special Branch ports officers will regularly be called on to take action in connection with cases of child abduction and they also respond to requests from other police forces and law enforcement agencies to effect the arrest of persons unlawfully at large or wanted for criminal offences. See the separate [Ports FAQ](#) for more information on the circulation of suspects.

Ports officers contribute significantly to both national security and criminal intelligence-gathering processes and frequently undertake special enquiries at the request of other police units or the intelligence agencies.

Metropolitan Police Special Branch officers and police staff posted to “P” Squad will serve at one of the four terminals at Heathrow Airport, London City Airport, Waterloo Eurostar terminus, the Port of London or at Biggin Hill. P Squad officers also staff the National Ports Office at Heathrow (see below) and take part in the training of ports officers from other Special Branches.

Special Branch ports officers will routinely work closely with their counterparts in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and HM Customs & Excise in pursuit of common objectives.

Ports policing today (April 2004) is a far cry from the traditional image of the Special Branch officer standing behind an Immigration Officer at a static control point and is based very much on intelligence-led, proactive policing principles. We believe that it provides rewarding and challenging work for the right applicant.

National Ports Office

Many members of the MPS who have previously had direct contact with Special Branch will probably have dealt with representatives of the National Ports Office (NPO) at Heathrow Airport.

The NPO acts as a clearing-house for all national circulations of terrorist suspects, wanted persons and other persons of interest. NPO staff can advise callers as to the most appropriate action in any given circumstances and will either arrange circulations of suspects nationally on your behalf or will put you in touch with their counterparts in any particular port if your interest is more specific or specialised.

Much of the NPO's time is taken up in dealing with requests for action following an allegation of child abduction. This is frequently a most complex subject for investigators, although a great deal of advice is available.

Surveillance Unit.

The Metropolitan Police Special Branch (MPSB) surveillance unit is comprised of three different sections. The main section and the backbone of the unit are the four surveillance teams. Each team is made up of fifteen officers of all ages, experience and length of police service. The surveillance teams work in support of the terrorist investigations and enquiries being carried out by other units within MPSB.

Surveillance

Their main role is to carry out surveillance, both in vehicles and on foot, against persons believed to be involved in some form of terrorist activity, or in any way involved in assisting terrorists. During their time on the teams officers can develop a number of skills. Many are qualified to carry firearms on occasions when there may be a risk to their personal safety from a suspect who may also be carrying or have access to firearms. The majority have been taught advanced driving techniques.

Photography

There is a dedicated photographic section. This comprises four officers whose main role is to provide photographic images of suspects, associates, vehicles, locations and activities connected with the work of the surveillance teams. They work very closely with the teams during the majority of operations. All these officers have received specialist photographic training in the use and capabilities of digital technology, which they use to produce images to an evidential standard.

Operational Support

There is also an operational support section. This is staffed by four officers whose main role is to provide technical support and advice to the teams during operations. They provide video cameras and other technical equipment for use in observation posts; install radio communications between various locations and the operations room; maintain the personal radios supplied to each officer on the surveillance teams and maintain the surveillance unit's vehicle fleet. They also provide the liaison between the surveillance unit and other technical and vehicle sections of the Metropolitan Police Service.

When required, all sections of the surveillance unit are available for deployment 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year on a rota basis.

Special Branch National Training Unit

This unit has a national responsibility for the delivery of initial and continuation training of Special Branch officers. It is currently staffed by SO12 personnel only and is based at New Scotland Yard.

The unit is a Centrex Quality Approved Centre. Courses delivered include initial training for new Special Branch officers and also for Heads of Special Branches and other senior SB officers. It also delivers other specialist skills training courses, as recommended by the National Special Branch Training Working Group, reporting to ACPO TAM, which sponsors the national training curriculum.

The unit additionally conducts mandatory police training as directed by the Training Management Board.

The National Training Unit aims to support development of Special Branch officers throughout Great Britain by providing expertise and support in course design, quality assurance and training needs analysis. Additionally, specialist training is co-ordinated by this unit for overseas partners.

It is also responsible for providing police staff with two half-day training sessions per year, the content of which is proposed by staff members and developed by the training unit staff.

The unit also runs courses such as Presentational Skills and Selection Interviewing, which are open to both police officers and police staff.

Special Branch - The National Joint Unit

The National Joint Unit (NJU), part of SO12 "D" Squad, is staffed by officers from Special Branches throughout the United Kingdom on 16 week attachments. The permanent staff of one Detective Inspector and two Detective Sergeants is provided by SO12. The office operates 24 hours a day throughout the year (except Christmas Day and Boxing Day) and acts as a single point of contact for all matters relating to the operation of the Terrorism Act, 2000 and associated legislation. **All** arrests under the Terrorism Act 2000 must be notified to the National Joint Unit as soon as possible.

A major function of the Unit is to monitor and record, for onward transmission to the Home Office, for statistical purposes, details of all persons examined, detained and arrested under the Terrorism Act, 2000. The Unit also facilitates applications for warrants of further detention through an established link with Bow Street Magistrates Court.

All authorisations under s44 Terrorism Act (stop and search) are passed to the NJU for transmission to the Home Office prior to endorsement by the Home Secretary.

The permanent staff deliver presentations on anti terrorist legislation and procedure to a wide variety of audiences throughout the UK and produce a guide to the Terrorism Act 2000 and associated legislation and a Guide for Custody Officers. Advice on legislation and procedure under the Terrorism Act 2000 is available 24 hrs from the NJU Duty Officer.

SO12 Intelligence Management and Operations Support (IMOS)

IMOS Registration Sections

The responsibility of the IMOS Registration teams is to read, search, précis, collate and disseminate information received from Special Branch officers, both from Metropolitan and County Forces. The sections also receive information from police officers of other forces and from various Government departments and International Agencies.

IMOS staff undertake other duties, such as working with SO12 officers in the Operations Room when an operation is active. At the end of their training (or in the case of new entrants to the MPS) on successful completion of a probationary period, staff are required to train police officers, police staff and attachments to interrogate and interpret the main SO12 database.

All recruits to IMOS should ideally have a basic knowledge of world affairs/events. They would also find it advantageous to possess basic computer skills and to be willing to learn about various pieces of legislation, such as the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act.

Subject Index

The subject index contains details of organisations, firms, terrorist incidents, demonstrations and events to name just a few subject areas. Team members also record non-personal information relating to operations, policy and various enquiries on behalf of SO12, other police forces and government agencies. Other job responsibilities include carrying out telephone or manual searches for officers requiring current information and, occasionally researching information on historical incidents.

Subject index creates and maintains dockets on a variety of subjects and also processes a large amount of loose paperwork. Over the last two years the section has run an intensive weeding, revision and destruction programme in preparation for conversion from a manual to a computerised system.

Nominal Index

The purpose of the Nominal Index is to provide operational support for SO12, the wider MPS and other government departments through the prompt and efficient interrogation of the main SO12 database. All completed work has to be returned within set time limits, which can prove challenging at times.

The Nominal Index function encompasses five key responsibilities.

- To perform searches on the main SO12 database in support of operational requirements. This includes completing enquiries for other County Forces and Metropolitan Police Firearms Enquiry Teams.

- To complete certain categories of searches on behalf of other government departments, some of which have government imposed deadlines for completion.
- To review certain individual records, deciding whether to update or remove them from the database.
- To accurately input and edit new information onto the database.
- To complete telephone searches for S012 ports officers.

Review Section

This section is responsible for the review of all files created in Special Branch: firstly, in accordance with Branch Policy to determine their continuing intelligence or administrative value; secondly, in compliance with the Public Records Acts, which impose a legal requirement on the Branch to make a final decision on files of 25 years and over.

There are three options: -

- Retain files with intelligence value. (25-year files with permission of the Lord Chancellor)
- Transfer files of historic value to the National Archive
- Destroy files with neither of these values

The section also carries out a security and sensitivity review on Branch files transferred to the National Archive before release to public view. It is also responsible for reviewing Branch material held on the files of government departments, security services, foreign government departments and security agencies to ensure that no material is released that is against the interests of National Security or that might cause personal distress to any named person or that might compromise the operational effectiveness of the Branch.

Development Opportunities within Special Branch – Police Officers

SO12 Special Branch has a structured career development policy that enables officers to develop skills in various areas and on different squads.

It is normal for an officer to serve at an SO12 Ports unit on a number of occasions during their career.

The Career Development Policy, in conjunction with the Career Development Unit and nominated Career Development Officers on the squads, ensures that officers with a certain amount of time on their particular Squad are consulted as to their views regarding an inter - SO12 move to develop their skills.

There are also a number of training courses that Special Branch officers attend; these include the National Training Event and the National Ports Course, as well as any specialist training that is required to carry out a specific role.

The SO12 Training Unit is a Centrex quality approved centre for the delivery of police training

Please see the **biographies** of a number of current officers elsewhere on this site for an idea of the sort of variety that a career in Special Branch can offer.

Special Branch History – Introduction

All police officers and staff working for the Metropolitan Police Special Branch are very much aware of its long and proud history and that they all have a part to play in the continuance of that tradition. For those of you interested to learn a little more about our past we have included the following summary of some of the highlights of Special Branch work since 1883.

To make this easier to navigate we have split the section into six pages, as follows:

- Part 1 Foundation, Fenians and Anarchists
- Part 2 Suffragettes, First World War, Communism
- Part 3 Fascism, Second World War, Nuclear Power, Spies
- Part 4 1960s Protest, CND, Angry Brigade, IRA, International Terrorism
- Part 5 PIRA, Prevention of Terrorism Act, Racial Conflict
- Part 6 Northern Ireland Agreement, 9/11, the Future
- Part 7 A typical Special Branch CV from the past

Bibliography

The information summarized over the next 6 pages has been gleaned from a variety of sources, both internal and external. Whilst it is possible to list a few of these original documents, the summaries have also drawn on older in-house reports that may themselves have been based on sources that are now unidentifiable. We therefore apologize unreservedly if any of the material below has not been appropriately attributed.

At Scotland Yard	J. Sweeney	Grant	Richards
		1904	
Fifty-two Years a policeman	Sir W. Nott-Bower	1926	
The day they bombed the Yard	R.J. Richards	Police Review	1984
The dynamite war	K.R.M. Short	Gill & MacMillan	
		1979	
The history of the CID	M. Prothero	Herbert	Jenkins
		1931	
The life of Sir Howard Vincent	S.H. Jeyes & F.D. How	George Allen	1912
The rise of Scotland Yard	D.G. Browne	Greenwood Press	
The Scotland Yard files	P. Begg & K. Skinner	Headline,	undated

Special Branch History – Part 1

On the 17th March 1883 a group of four CID and eight uniformed officers was picked by Assistant Commissioner Howard Vincent to be the first members of the Special Irish Branch. The Branch was set up in direct response to the bombing campaign waged against Britain between the 1860s and 1880s by members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, otherwise known as the Fenians. This was an organisation with close connections with Irish-American groups in the USA, particularly in Boston, Massachusetts. It was intended that the officers gather intelligence on Irish Home Rulers and their sympathizers amongst the immigrant communities.

The Fenian activity was clearly designed to force the total withdrawal of Great Britain from Ireland (then under British rule) and to promote the idea of home rule for the Irish people. In 1867 a terrorist attack was carried out at the Clerkenwell House of Detention in London, where a Fenian activist was incarcerated. Using a large amount of dynamite, Fenian terrorists succeeded in completely destroying the building and caused the deaths of 17 innocent civilians. In May 1882, using a carefully laid plan, Fenian terrorists murdered the Secretary to Ireland, Lord Cavendish and his private secretary in Phoenix Park, Dublin. Later that year the campaign was intensified on the mainland UK with attacks being carried out in London, Liverpool and Glasgow.

Chief Inspector Adolphus Williamson commanded the unit, but as he had the further command of the whole CID, Special Branch came to be headed by Inspector John Littlechild. Although SB officers were outwardly indistinguishable from other CID officers, their activities were financed directly from Imperial Funds, not the Scotland Yard budget. When James Monro became Assistant Commissioner and head of the CID, he kept Special Branch effectively separate from the rest of the CID, under his personal control, and saw that it replaced a Home Office section that had been infiltrating Fenian groups. In 1888 the word 'Irish' was dropped from the Branch's title. Administratively it was known as 'Section D'. Colloquially it was 'the Home Office Crime Department, the Special Department', or 'Special Branch'. AC Monro and later AC Bradford kept it in being to keep an eye on anarchists and other left-wing revolutionaries as well as the tiny handful of Indian nationalist students who threatened violence.

During the following 2 years this small group of officers succeeded in gathering sufficient intelligence and evidence to put the majority of the Fenians behind bars but not before, on the 30th May 1884, a massive explosives attack on the CID office at Great Scotland Yard in London took place. Fortunately, this outrage was carried out during the dead of night and no officers were killed or injured.

Following the largely successful investigation and prosecution of the Fenian terrorists, it was seriously considered that the "Special Irish Branch" should be

disbanded. However, information was received in late 1886 from various sources, including other European police forces with whom the Branch had forged links, that a number of Continental anarchists had laid plans to cause disruption during Queen Victoria's Jubilee Celebrations in 1887. Consequently, the Branch was also redirected to countering the subversive activities of Continental anarchists and anti-Czarists. The Branch vetted aliens entering the country and was allowed to station officers at 13 ports outside the Metropolitan Police District on the west and south coasts. It should be borne in mind that that passports and visas were generally not required at that time and there was very little control of aliens.

The Branch gathered intelligence on Lenin and Trotsky's activities while they were in London at the beginning of the century. DC (later Det. Insp.) Herbert Fitch (Special Branch 1905-26), who was fluent in French, German and Russian, hid in a cupboard and also disguised himself as a waiter to listen to their propaganda speeches. The word "Irish" was eventually dropped from the Branch title and, from late 1886, the squad was designated the Special Branch, a title it has retained to date.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries London was a popular and fertile breeding-ground for international extremists, including the founding members of the Russian Communist Party and a diverse range of anarchists, many of whom used to meet in the Club Autome. As a consequence this establishment was frequently raided by members of the Special Branch, supported by uniformed police officers.

In 1886, Special Branch members took over from what was then 'A Division' with responsibility for Royalty Protection duties. As well as keeping an eye on Irish Republican extremists. From then on the Branch was kept busy with a multitude of "political" problems caused by various extremist groups, necessitating a shift towards an intelligence gathering role rather than the pro-active role adopted to combat the Fenians.

Special Branch History – Part 2

During the years leading up to the First World War, Special Branch and the rest of the Metropolitan Police Force was kept extremely busy by the activities of Suffragettes, who were campaigning for a right to vote and for women's rights in general. Their many acts of civil disobedience often involved arson and assault as well as attacks on Royalty and government ministers. This relatively small group of women was finally defeated following the discovery of a conspiracy to assassinate the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, by use of a poisoned blow dart.

In the years leading up to the First World War it became apparent that the German Kaiser had built a network of agents engaged in espionage concerning the (mainly naval) strength of the British Armed Forces. The growth of this threat led, in 1909, to the formation of MI5 (the Security Service), which was to be staffed by civilians, but advised by a Special Branch Inspector on secondment. In 1911 the Official Secrets Act was passed by Parliament to afford police the necessary executive powers to prosecute spies, the Security Service being unable to take such action on its own, as its Charter confined its task to simply monitoring subversion within the United Kingdom.

The great fear of espionage during World War 1 restored Special Branch to popular favour, especially as Assistant Commissioner Sir Basil Thomson was deeply concerned about spies and subversives. Special Branch was strengthened and became effectively closer to MI5 than to Scotland Yard. Throughout the war, the Branch was kept busy tracing, interrogating and arresting suspects brought to its attention by the Post Office, which monitored correspondence with known German espionage addresses in Holland.

As an aside, Thomson was horrified when 25 Special Branch men gave moderate support to the Police Strike in 1918, turning up for work but refusing to leave the briefing room on the day of the strike. Thomson saw the Bolshevik threat as at least equalling the threat from the Kaiser and he equated any form of socialism with bloody Bolshevism. In 1919 he ran the Branch experimentally as an entirely separate department with himself as 'Director of Intelligence'. At this period the practice began of sending Special Branch officers obtrusively to Communist Party and left-wing extremist meetings, where they took shorthand notes and where their visible presence often had the desirable effect of restraining the speakers' militant vehemence.

It reverted to being a branch of CID in 1922 and, encouraged by Assistant Commissioner Sir Wyndham Childs, who replaced Thomson, it continued the official policy of rooting out Communist (Bolshevik) subversion.

Special Branch History – Part 3

Despite Lord Trenchard's sensible concern about the equal threat from the right wing in the 1930s, the lack-lustre National Governments of MacDonald and Baldwin were slow to endorse his recommendation that the Fascists' wings should be clipped by banning their uniforms and the impression was allowed to grow that the authorities were more concerned with far left than far right activities. Special Branch, however, was monitoring right-wing extremist activities well before the outbreak of hostilities.

In the early 1930s the "Depression" led, indirectly, to the rise of' fascism in the United Kingdom. Various groups on the right of the political spectrum clearly blamed the economic problems of those days on the substantial Jewish community in the East End of London. By 1936 this right-wing force, under the charismatic leadership- of the former MP, Sir Oswald Moseley, had achieved considerable numerical strength and public support, was well-organised and quickly became a serious threat to public order. Many full-scale attacks were made upon the Jews, who themselves began to organise to meet "force with force" and were supported to a great extent by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), whose membership at that time had increased significantly to meet the threat of fascism.

It was the task of Special Branch to provide intelligence about the activities of both sides during those troubled days. Information gathered and collated by the Branch, allied to increased uniformed police powers under the 1936 Public Order Act, enabled the Metropolitan Force to bring the situation under control by the end of 1938. The advent of the Second World War effectively caused the final demise of strong, organised Fascism in the United Kingdom, although small groups on the right still continue to cause public order problems in certain communities to this date.

During the Second World War the activities of Special Branch were directed once more towards counter-espionage, this time acting in the modern role as the executive arm of MI5. Branch officers, depleted by enlistment of about one third of their number into the Armed Services, were heavily engaged in enquiries into the activities of pro-Nazi elements and were responsible for numerous interrogations leading to the internment of so-called "Fifth Columnists".

The Branch's contribution to World War II was considerably reduced by MI5's determination to have its own powers of search and arrest this time. To that end, DCI Leonard Burt, DI Reg Spooner, DS Jim Skardon and two other CID officers were seconded to the Security Service for the duration, retaining their attestation. At the end of the war, Skardon remained with MI5 and became the notable

interrogator who obtained confessions from Klaus Fuchs, the atom bomb spy, while Burt was posted to command of Special Branch.

Following the defeat of Germany a number of SB officers served as intelligence officers in that country, dealing with the de-nazification process, and the Branch was also engaged in the interview procedures dealing with a very large number of refugees from Eastern Europe, in particular from Poland and the Baltic States, fleeing from the advance of Soviet rule.

The postwar years were initially much taken up with Cold War concerns and Special Branch (and MI5) came under some suspicion of keeping unnecessary tabs on left-wing Labour MPs. The Portland spies (Harry Houghton and Ethel Gee, Konon Molody posing as Gordon Lonsdale, and Morris and Lena Cohen, posing as Peter and Helen Kroger) were acquiring and passing naval secrets to the USSR. They, like George Blake and John Vassall, were actually detected by the Military Intelligence Services, but Special Branch's police powers of search and arrest were needed to finally bring them to justice.

Special Branch History – Part 4

The beginning of the 1960s witnessed the growth of a very large anti-nuclear protest movement in the United Kingdom under the auspices of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Although the movement was largely pacifist in nature, severe public order difficulties arose for uniformed police due to the sheer numbers involved (upwards of 100,000 persons on the famous Aldermaston to London marches) and the activities of a relatively small, but extremely militant wing, the Committee of 100. The task of Special Branch during this period was, once more, to gather sufficient intelligence to enable uniformed police to properly police CND events, a responsibility made less easy by the fact that the CND was ostensibly non-subversive. This responsibility, in the purely public order field, as will be seen later, has increased enormously during the past 5 years.

Although the CND declined towards the middle 1960s, the Branch was faced with an equally demanding task in 1966 when the popular anti-Vietnam War movement, the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), began to attract widespread support. By 1968 this campaign had reached its zenith and although numerically less strong than the CND, the majority of support emanated from known subversive and extremist groups making the VSC a particularly militant body.

Despite fairly accurate intelligence about the intentions of the VSC, a serious outbreak of violence took place during a demonstration outside the United States Embassy in Grosvenor Square in 1968, which was ultimately brought under control by police but not before many officers and demonstrators were injured. It became apparent at that time that we were witnessing a marked shift towards more violent street protest in the United Kingdom, but, on the credit side, many valuable lessons were learned by uniformed police and Special Branch alike and led to better training and a more streamlined system of intelligence gathering in relation to public order.

Bombing returned to the United Kingdom at the end of the 1960s with the anarchist Angry Brigade, who represented the logical, violent extremes of a disaffected British youth that had witnessed the heady days of left-wing protest during the decade. The Angry Brigade investigations led to the creation of the Bomb Squad, the forerunner of the Anti Terrorist Branch.

To return to the Irish scene, 1968 saw the emergence in Northern Ireland of a civil rights campaign designed to bring pressure upon the Northern Ireland Government for more just treatment of the Catholic minority population of the Province. The activities of the IRA had, for a number of years since the Second World War, been confined largely to sporadic border raids and attempts to acquire arms. Little activity had taken place on the mainland United Kingdom and

the only attack of real significance took place in 1955, when IRA terrorists raided an Army ordnance store at Aborfield, Berkshire. However, most of the participants were captured by police and in 1962 the IRA Council called off all further attacks along the border with Northern Ireland and arrived at a state of (temporary) ceasefire.

The failure of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Campaign to achieve any real advances led, by 1970, to a complete breakdown of law and order in the Province and the NI Government was forced to call in the British Army to restore peace. The arrival of troops was firstly greeted with enthusiasm by the Catholic population, but this soon proved to be a lull before the storm. The only means seen by Republican activists to defend the Catholic population against the British Army was through the IRA and, in 1970, a violent urban guerrilla campaign started in earnest and continued almost unabated to the end of the century.

However, in late 1969 there were signs of a growing dissatisfaction within the IRA about which path they should follow and by late 1970 the organisation had split into two distinctly separate wings, the Official IRA (OIRA) and the more militant and nationalistic Provisional IRA (PIRA). The OIRA carried out only one attack on the mainland United Kingdom in February 1972 when a bomb was planted at the Officers' Mess at the Army Barracks in Aldershot, Hampshire, causing a number of deaths, including that of a Catholic Padre. This atrocity led, in May 1972, to the OIRA declaring a total ceasefire, reserving the right to "defensive military action", which remains to this day.

From 1973 to, 1998, Irish terrorism was once again the major concern for the Branch, although the activities of foreign extremists and terrorists in London continued to attract its attention. The 1970s saw a worldwide increase in international terrorist activity by the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, Basque separatists in Spain, the Japanese Red Army and a number of terrorist groups from the Middle East. Many attacks by the last-named have been carried out on foreign soil, in the main against individual persons regarded as enemies by the perpetrators. The United Kingdom has been no exception and during the 1970s and 1980s there were numerous bomb attacks and assassinations carried out here by a multitude of different groups, including Palestinians, Armenians, Syrians, Croatians, Iranians and other Arab groups.

Special Branch History – Part 5

As opposed to the Official IRA (OIRA) declaration of a total ceasefire in 1972, the Provisionals continued a bloody campaign in Northern Ireland, on the mainland and on the Continent for nearly 30 years, causing hundreds of deaths and injuries to police, servicemen and civilians alike.

A further group on the Irish scene, The Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), emerged in the mid 1970s and, like the PIRA, waged a continuing battle both in Northern Ireland and the mainland United Kingdom since 1975. The INLA was formed from disaffected members of the OIRA and was more Marxist orientated than the nationalist PIRA.

Although smaller in size than the PIRA, the INLA carried out some spectacular attacks, including the murder of Airey Neave, MP, a popular war hero and outspoken critic of Irish republicanism. For two decades it remained the responsibility of Metropolitan Police Special Branch to gather and collate intelligence about Irish terrorists and their political supporters on a national basis. To this end the Branch enjoyed a close relationship with its counterpart in the Royal Ulster Constabulary (now the Police Service of Northern Ireland) and also with the Irish Republic's An Garda Síochána Special Branch. Close liaison was naturally maintained between the Branch and the investigatory arm of the Metropolitan Police in the terrorist field, the Anti-Terrorist Branch (SO13).

One very important aspect of Special Branch work, especially in the area of gathering intelligence about terrorist activity, has for many years been the coverage of points of entry to the United Kingdom. As stated earlier in **Part 1**, Special Branch officers first covered South East ports in 1886 and this coverage was extended during the next 82 years to almost every sea- and airport in the United Kingdom. However, by 1968 it was apparent that the Metropolitan Special Branch was no longer able to staff all the ports and, therefore, this responsibility was gradually assumed by the relevant provincial Police Forces. At this time the National Ports Scheme was introduced and today the Metropolitan Special Branch continues to have responsibility for the administration of the Scheme subject to the directions of the National Co-ordinator for Ports Policing, an ACPO officer based at the Home Office. By 1976 Provincial Forces had fully taken over their own ports and during the 1970s most police forces in the United Kingdom had evolved their own Special Branches.

In 1974 Parliament, in response to a sustained PIRA campaign in the mainland United Kingdom, passed the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, which gave wide powers to police in combating Irish terrorism. The Act, with certain amendments and refinements, remained in force until the passing of the Terrorism Act in 2000. The legislation proved to be a valuable weapon in the fight against the PIRA and INLA. The use of the POT Act by Port officers was very

effective, both for intelligence gathering purposes and for the detention of suspected terrorists

The work of the Branch is necessarily varied and due priority must be given to whatever problem is relevant at the time, without losing sight of overall objectives. In addition to the terrorist threat, the last two decades of the 20th century also saw a marked increase in the potential for violent (but not necessarily terrorist) protest. During that time we were faced with an ever-increasing clash between the left and right wing groups in the political extremist spectrum.

This was exacerbated by other problems of racial tension within the urban city areas. In 1981 a spontaneous riot occurred in the Brixton area of London, lasting nearly two days and causing serious injuries and widespread damage to property. The Brixton riot was quickly mirrored in other areas of London and spread, during the summer months of 1981, to other cities throughout the United Kingdom. Surprisingly, the disorders stopped almost as quickly as they had started, but the threat of further such outbreaks is never far away. It is, of course, a primary objective of police to maintain public tranquillity and this meant that the Special Branch had now widened its intelligence-gathering role into areas that were not specifically subversive or extremist. Although this placed a much greater workload upon the Branch, it was accepted that, under the Branch Terms of Reference, i.e. "to provide the Commissioner with sufficient and accurate intelligence to enable police to maintain public order", it was a task that was readily accepted.

Special Branch History – Part 6

Until the 1990s the existence of Special Branch (like the Military Intelligence services) was rarely given official acknowledgement and its administrative details and telephone numbers were not printed in reference books available to the public. Whilst there is now much more active discussion of its role and responsibilities, there are still very sound operational reasons why many SO12 officers should not be publicly identified.

Sir Robert Mark found the Special Branch to be entirely unblemished by the corruption and corner cutting that disgraced some of their colleagues. It is perhaps noteworthy that much of his own early police experience was with Manchester Constabulary Special Branch, and of his successors, Sir Kenneth Newman spent a short period with the Palestine Police Special Branch, and Sir Peter Imbert was a Metropolitan Special Branch officer for 15 years. Many other provincial Chief Constables have served with the Metropolitan Police Special Branch, which has proved a fertile nursery for the excellence leading to command.

In 1991 the Security OCU of Special Branch was one of the first major detective branches in New Scotland Yard to come under the command of a female senior officer, although it was not until November 2003 that the first-ever female Head of Special Branch was appointed.

In 1992, the Government handed the lead responsibility for nationwide counter-terrorist intelligence gathering over to the Security Service. Since then Special Branch has worked in close partnership with the Service by continuing to gather and exploit intelligence in London, as well as providing support for other police forces in Great Britain.

During the 1990s the Governments of Prime Ministers John Major and Tony Blair each made strenuous efforts to secure lasting peace in Northern Ireland following the signing of the Northern Ireland Agreement between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic the previous decade. The peace process was never going to be easy and substantial concessions were made all round to achieve this objective. Whilst PIRA remained under effective control in the interests of securing gains for Sinn Fein, many men of violence moved away to establish their own factions, known as the Real IRA (RIRA) and the Continuity IRA (CIRA). Numerous terrorist outrages on the mainland planned by these groups were frustrated by the combined efforts of Special Branch, the Security Service and the Anti-Terrorist Branch. This uneasy situation continues to this day. Please see our up-to-date [overview of Irish terrorism](#).

There is no need to describe here what happened in New York on the 11th September 2001. These and subsequent atrocities by Al Qaeda and its associated groups have inevitably changed the face of anti-terrorist policing in

the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Like all of its counterparts in the intelligence community, Special Branch now faces the very real and ever-present challenge of trying to detect and prevent efforts to inflict mass death and destruction on the British population. This will necessitate the skilful use of every covert tool in its armoury and draw on the combined skills, intelligence and experience of its diverse workforce. Please see the current [overview of international terrorism](#).

As on many occasions in the past, the Branch will need to adapt and modify its structures and policies to meet these new challenges and we shall try to describe some of these changes on this web site in the future.

For those of you who simply cannot get enough history, please see the [curriculum vitae](#) of a former Special Branch officer who served with great distinction between 1934 and 1960.

History of Special Branch: – a “typical” CV

Potential recruits to Special Branch frequently ask the **Personnel Unit** what kind of career they can expect during their service. Well, it isn't always easy to answer this question because:

- a) We can't always tell in advance what kind of path your development might take;
- b) We can't always predict what will happen to the world in the future;
- c) We can't always talk openly about some of the work you might undertake;

To give you some idea of the kind of variety that can be encountered in a “typical” Special Branch career, albeit in a historical context, what follows is a summary of the curriculum vitae of a former officer, whom we shall only refer to as “John”, in order to save any embarrassment to friends and family. Please be assured that John actually existed and served with the MPS between 1929 and 1960, of which the last 26 years were spent with Special Branch.

Despite the obvious historical dimension, the postings described could equally be translated to any other period, perhaps even to the future. It all really depends on what the future holds... Whatever happens, you can be sure that Special Branch officers will definitely play a most significant part in the thick of it.

We hope you enjoy reading about John and the contribution he made to Special Branch.

“...A record of employment in public service since 1929 with copies of documents which support the claim that subject constantly performed his duties during long, irregular and unsocial hours in highly responsible posts involving almost daily unpaid overtime; separation from wife and family often under arduous conditions which can, even by comparison with the high standards of employment in the Police and Civil Service, be regarded as being outside the normal calls of duty.”

1929	Joined Metropolitan Police and posted to “C” Division
1932	Appointed Aid to CID
1934	Joined Special Branch as DC following competitive examination
1936	Promoted to DS
1946	Promoted to DS 1st Class

At various times and for extended periods during his service John was involved in the close protection of the following individuals:

- Lord Baldwin (Prime Minister)
- Lord Salisbury (Secretary of State for the Colonies)
- Lord Avon (Sir Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary)

- Sir Winston Churchill (as Prime Minister and after retirement)
- Prime Minister of Afghanistan
- HM King Haakon and HM King Olaf of Norway
- John Foster Dulles (US Secretary of State)
- Richard Nixon (US Vice-President)
- HRH the Duke and Duchess of Windsor
- TSH Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco

John was no stranger to SB ports work and in his time he served at Southampton, the Port of London and Fishguard, all of which then fell under the control of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch.

John also records that he was an “official police shorthand writer”, a skill that he used frequently to record the speeches of, amongst others, Sir Oswald Moseley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, and Harry Pollitt, who headed the Communist Party of Great Britain for 20 years. It is worth bearing in mind that shorthand was still viewed as a desirable skill in Special Branch recruitment campaigns during the 1980s.

His other duties and postings included “naturalisation and special enquiries”, which are further explained as the interrogation of refugees from the Continent at Stanmore Displaced Persons Camp in 1942. These led to a number of prosecutions under the Official Secrets Act and Defence Regulations.

He also participated in enquiries following racial unrest in Notting Hill and contributed to the prevention of further disturbances.

Following his retirement from the Metropolitan Police Force, John joined the Immigration and Nationality Division of the Home Office. Several years later he moved to the Ministry of Defence, where he conducted Positive Vetting enquiries into candidates for sensitive Government posts. He continued to carry out this work (eventually on a part-time basis) until the age of 69, when he started a new career at a local school.

To get a flavour of the sort of postings currently undertaken by SO12 officers, please see the [biographies](#) elsewhere on this site.

