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<http://www.bristolcyclingcampaign.org.uk/tbc/2004/spring/inspector.htm>

"The Inspector's Bike"

In the days when Broadbury Road Police Station was a small brick hut in a sea of mud, Hartcliffe, Withywood, Bishopsworth and Bedminster Down were worked from East Street. This was a fair old flog on a bike, up hill all the way from East Street, usually in the teeth of the prevailing South Westerlies, with a wet cape flapping, afraid to get off and pedal in case you got the saddle wet, and you had to spend the rest of the day with a wet backside.

There was a fleet of bikes of sturdy construction and of ample strength and size. They weighed a ton. A great deal of care was taken of them, in the sense that a book was dedicated to recording their every movement. To go out on a bike that had not been "Booked Out" in due form was to qualify for a minor bollicking. Each bike had a large number painted on the rear mudguard in white paint. One went to the cycle shed, selected a suitable mount, returned to the Station Office and yelled out the number of the bike and one's own number.

This vital information was duly recorded by the Station Sergeants acolyte, The Reserve Man, in the "*Bike Book*", one of some fifty or so books kept in the Station recording every recordable activity. Including such gems of English fiction as the "*In and Out Book*", the "*White Coat and Mac Book*", the "*Torch Battery Book*", and more ambitious works such as the "*Prisoners Victualling Book*", and the "*Dog Book*".

Every Sunday morning the sacred rite took place of the Superintendent signing the books. The great man had each book placed in front of him by his acolyte, the Station Sergeant, who obsequiously passed it open, over his left shoulder on to his desk. I rarely participated in the ceremony being regarded as too irresponsible to be a Station Sergeant except after grub on nights at Trinity Road, or on Sunday mornings at East Street, when all the real Station Sergeants were sick or on Annual Leave.

It was on one of these occasions when I suggested to a Superintendent that a new book be inaugurated, recording all the other books and to be entitled "*The Book Book*". The great man mulled this over for a while, he could see an OBE in it, if at this stage he could go down in history as the man who introduced that seminal break through in Police management techniques, "*The Book Book*". Eventually he accurately diagnosed that I was taking the piss and I was sent to St. Annes for two consecutive rosters, and shortly afterwards achieved my lifetimes ambition of being deported to Trinity Road.

In the days now long gone by, at Trinity Road a case of special pens were kept in a leather case for the book ceremony. This was regarded as so holy that the pens were never used by ordinary mortals for any profane purpose. When the potentate had left, the reserve man was allowed to wash the dried ink off them and they were returned to their case and locked in the glass

fronted cupboard in the corner of the inspector's office for another week. One week an upstart reserve man clearly either mentally unstable or of Bolshevik sympathies, deliberately crossed the nib of the red ink pen before putting it away. Nothing could be proved of course, and as he was already at Trinity Road, he could not suffer the usual "A" Division punishment of being sent there. However for many months he worked only on that Gulag of the Bristol Constabulary, "Down the Dings". His only refuge there was the Locomotive Sheds at Barrow Road, where he spent so much time that he contracted terminal train spotting, being found wandering around the Section muttering about 92's, Black 5's and the Filton Banker.

Anyway, back to East Street on a wet Monday Late Turn, bleary eyed from quick change over, with gale force 9 forecast for sea-area Lundy, and storm cone hoisted at Cumberland Basin. Behold the Sergeant for the "Top ground" enter the cycle shed to get his trusty steed for the next 8 hours flog. Being "B" Division men, the East Street Sergeants had devised a cunning plan to mitigate the labours of Hercules, (They were Raleighs actually.) This was that gentleman's agreement whereby the unfortunate Sergeant whose lot it was to cover the "top ground" took the Inspectors bike.

The Inspectors bike was the gem of the fleet. Like the Olympic torch, it never went out. One careful owner since new, low mileage, saddle of a softer, higher quality leather, and better sprung. Above all, *it had a three speed!*

This paragon amongst cycles had fallen into disuse, as by now the Inspectors had a car, more a status symbol than a means of transport, no Inspector was ever seen cycling, except on the way home. Few Policemen, except those of the highest rank possessed a car, although a few young P.C.'s ran to motorbikes, one or two Inspectors and Sergeants had motorbikes and sidecars. Anyway, back to our wet Monday afternoon in the cycle shed at East Street.

Enter stage left, a junior sergeant who starts rummaging among the assorted clapped out ironmongery on display. He is hailed by that powerful potentate The Divisional Cycle Mechanic, who doubles as Superintendent's batman. A real plum job this, awarded only to very senior P.C.'s for prolonged gallantry in the field, or it was rumoured among the disaffected, close family connections on the City Council, or membership of a well known men's social and charitable organization.

"Wass want Sarge?"

"I'm looking for the Inspector's bike, I've got the *****g top ground".

"You'll have to wait a bit for 'ee Sarge. I'm working on 'ee".

Sergeant, in a voice of panic,

"Why? What's wrong with it?"

"Nort wrong with un Sarge, I'm taking the three-speed off. When the Super done the books yesterday he picked up that Sergeants was riding him, and 'ee said the three speed had to come off. Three speeds is Inspectors and above only".

This article was taken from a now defunct *Police* magazine.