

Celebrating 100 years of women in the Met Police

How female officers made history on the streets of London.

This year marks a century of women being allowed to serve as officers in public in the Metropolitan Police Service, more commonly referred to as the Met. The Met is the biggest police force in the UK. Its officers work across London, investigating crimes, enforcing the

law and keeping people safe. Its leader, Cressida Dick – officially known as the Commissioner – is the first woman ever to take on the top job, and is leading a campaign to bring more women into the Met. So what has changed in the past 100 years?

The history of the Met

Until the 1800s, London didn't have a formal police service. Instead, volunteer constables patrolled the streets, sometimes supported by the armed forces. In 1748, a writer named Henry Fielding decided to do something about it. He created a detective force, known as the Bow Street Runners. In 1829, London

finally got its own police force to tackle rising crime in the city. To begin with there were 895 constables, 88 sergeants, 20 inspectors and eight superintendents. A year later there were 3,000 men in total. All officers had to be male, at least 1.7 metres tall, physically fit and under the age of 35.



The Bow Street Runners, in 1820.

The first women

Around 90 years after the Met's formation, in 1918, it was decided that women could join as officers as part of an experiment. Lucy D'Orsi, the deputy assistant commissioner for special operations at the Met, explained to *The Week Junior*, "The experiment was a success. Women officers were first seen in public in 1919." They were paid very little, and didn't have the same powers as male constables. In 1922, women were almost banned, but Nancy Astor – the first woman to become a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons – made sure they were kept on. In 1923, women were allowed to make arrests, and after 1946 married women could join the force.



The earliest policewomen.

An officer chases swimmers in Hyde Park.



KEEP UP WITH THE NEWS
Police officers in the Met have their own newspaper, called *The Job*, which they can get for free.



Officers on police bikes.



Members of the Metropolitan Women's Patrols, 1919.



An officer in 1965 demonstrates new walkie-talkies.

Centenary celebrations



Police staff come together.

In celebration of the centenary (100th anniversary) of female police officers on London's streets, there are lots of events being held. The Met is also running a campaign to increase the number of women it hires, with the hopes of one day having an even split of male and female officers. Currently, women make up 27% of the Met. Commissioner Dick explained, "I want to use this celebration to appeal to all women to consider having a career in the Met. Being a police officer is a challenging job, but it is extremely rewarding, and you get to make a difference. There is no better time to be a woman in the Met." The centenary ends with a service at Westminster Abbey in London in May, to commemorate the appearance of a group of female officers in uniform for the first time.

DID YOU KNOW?
Edith Smith made history as the first female officer with the power of arrest in 1915 in Grantham, Lincolnshire.

Meet the Met's history makers

Sislin Fay Allen

In 1968, Sislin Fay Allen became the UK's first black policewoman. She says her first day was interesting. "People were curious to see a black woman there in uniform, walking up and down. But I had no problem at all, not even from the public. I didn't set out to make history, I just wanted a change of direction."



Karen Giles

For 42 years, Karen Giles has served as a police officer. Her commitment to the Met makes her the longest-serving female constable in the city. She says, "I have always felt very proud to be a police officer. Your colleagues become like family – looking after each other is just what you do." Giles's daughter has also joined the force.



Cressida Dick

Cressida Dick joined the police in 1983, patrolling London's West End. She has risen through the ranks, and has made history several times as the first woman to be appointed to certain senior roles. She was responsible for keeping visitors safe during the London 2012 Olympics, and in February 2017 became Commissioner of the Met.

