



## TRUNCHEONS, BATONS, STICKS AND TIPSTAVES

The word truncheon is derived from the Old French work 'Tronchon' meaning a short club or cudgel and has been carried by Watchmen, Parish Constables and latterly Police Officers since the Middle Ages. Gradually the truncheon became recognised as not merely a means of defence, but also a symbol of Authority. Eighteenth century truncheons frequently carry a Borough Coat-of-Arms or the Cipher of the reigning monarch. They would often be produced at the time of an arrest as proof of identity.

With the coming of the modern police in 1829, a truncheon some 20 inches (500 mm) long was issued and carried in the tail of the officer's uniform coat. In 1856 truncheons were shortened to about 17 inches (425 mm) and were generally carried in a leather case on the belt. Further changes in uniform gave rise to the close neck tunic style, which was only as long as a modern jacket. In 1887 the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police gave orders that truncheons were to be carried in a modified trouser pocket, so as to make them less conspicuous. Other forces followed suit and this remained the universal practice until the introduction of the modern side handle and telescopic batons in the mid 1990s.

Specialised truncheons were also produced the most common being a longer version of between 21 and 36 inches (525mm and 91mm) issued to Mounted Police. A shortened version of 12 inches (305mm) was available for use by detective officers. Policewomen are not generally issued with truncheons although some carry a version of the detective's truncheon in a shoulder bag. Rosewood, oak, lignum vitae and ash have all been used for making truncheons and normally a leather strap is attached at the grip end to afford a more secure hold.

The use of the truncheon has always been strictly controlled as this extract from a 1908 police manual makes clear: "it must not be resorted to except in extreme cases when all other attempts have failed and a prisoner is likely to escape through the constable having been ill-used or overpowered". Interestingly, in the Manchester Police, truncheons were often referred to as "stuffs".

### Batons

Introduced gradually to UK police forces, the baton in a variety of guises is now standard equipment and replaced the traditional wooden truncheon in Greater Manchester Police in the mid 1990s. There are many versions in use in UK forces.



Greater Manchester Police adopted the PR24X, a telescopic side-handled baton, comprising an aircraft aluminium tube body, from which extends a polycarbonate plastic rod, giving an extended length of 24 inches. Attached to the body is a side handle, also of plastic. The side-handled version is also available in a rigid plastic form. They may be used defensively and offer protection against a club or pickaxe handle in a way that the older wooden truncheon could not. They enable officers under threat to keep a crowd at bay, and can also be used as a lever to wrest a knife from an attacker, or break the grip of someone who has hold of an officer's tunic. In use, however, it sometimes proved cumbersome, was occasionally dropped accidentally on deployment, and was difficult to wear while riding in a vehicle. After due consideration, between 2004 and 2006, Greater Manchester Police began to replace the side-handled baton with a simpler device, called the Autolock. This comprises a three section telescopic metal tube with a leather strap on the grip.

## **Sticks**

Once a familiar sight in town centres, the stick or staff was a walking cane of various designs carried by sergeants and inspectors. The sergeant's version is generally in plain turned wood while the inspector's traditionally had a silver top. A sergeant's staff was used for communication. Tapped on paving stones, the noise of the staff could be heard a mile away and would announce the sergeant's presence or be used to summon assistance. Some staffs are carried today but purely as a symbol of office.

## **Tipstaves**

Developing side by side with the truncheon was the tipstaff. The tipstaff dates from the late Middle Ages. It was never used for defence and generally takes the form of a hollow tube about 150mm long. Sometimes made in wood or ivory in the early days, the later examples are usually in brass or silver. On top of the tipstaff was the crown of the reigning monarch and gradually they became recognised as symbols of authority. The tipstaff could be unscrewed and a warrant or other document placed inside. The warrant could be served simply by tapping the person on the shoulder with the tipstaff. Bow Street Runners normally carried their name and number on a document carried in a tipstaff and later Metropolitan Police constables continued this practice until the first warrant cards were issued in the 1870's. However, senior London officers and some detectives in provincial forces such as Manchester continued to carry tipstaves until they were withdrawn in 1887.