

A Toast to the late Alexander Morrison

Compiled by Geoff Marston

Alexander Morrison first became part of the North East Community on 1st November 1970, as Chief Constable of Aberdeen City Police, aged 43. He remained in situ through its amalgamation into Grampian Police, until December 1983, having attained the position of HMICS at St Andrew's House Edinburgh, until December 1988, rounding off a Police career of 40 years aged 61.

Early Life

Alex Morrison was born on 28th August 1927, in the crofting village, North Dell, in the district of Ness, Isle of Lewis. He was the fourth of eight children to John and Annie Morrison. John had actually served with the Royal Canadian Navy during WWI and on his return, became a crofter and 'Jack of all building trades' but sadly died in 1941 aged 55, when Alex was just 14. Alex, known locally as 'Sanny', was educated at Cross & Lionel schools and the Nicolson Institute, Stornoway. Having been a Gaelic speaker he failed to attain any 'Highers' to gain University access. He left school and was employed locally, doing various jobs (including weaving) as well as working the family ground with his mother and uncle. This being the family's main source of income. However, he still managed to find time to seek further education.

Aged 19, the war now over, he wished to follow his older siblings into the services. His two brothers Murdo and Norrie, had fought in France and Holland and his sister Nandag, served in India as a Codebreaker, to decipher Japanese military messages. He therefore tried to join the RAF as Air crew, but in view of a temporary lull in recruiting, was advised to hold off. However, he eventually came across a brochure for the Metropolitan Police, and foresaw the many opportunities he would have, should he apply, (in particular the sporting facilities) so finally decided the police was the only way out of a difficult situation and the path to his future.

Metropolitan Police

In January 1948, aged 20, with just his life experience of Lewis and a family loan, he arrived in London. After training, his first beat was in the Jewish area of Whitechapel (E1). This was still in the days of Oswald Mosely's fascist meetings. A man he said, he got to know very well that summer, regularly having to stand between him and the crowd. He emphasized that he had a very commanding presence, and could recall how he baited these people and of course back then, not really knowing what it was all about! It was a long way from home in more ways than one, and there were times he felt overwhelmed by the masses of people. Customs being very different from those of the close-knit community of his earlier years.

From there he went south of the Thames as Sergeant to Woolwich, (SE18) and in 1953, was on crowd control for the Coronation. From there, he returned to Whitechapel as Station Sergeant, and then onto Gray's Inn Road Station, (WC1- closed 1966) as Inspector. His next move was into New Scotland Yard, as Chief Inspector, responsible for complaints and discipline. In his words: "Day to day dealing with the misfortunes of my fellow officers, some senior to me was a most difficult job. I don't think the general public can ever understand the seriousness with which the British Police Service deals with its misconduct."

By 1963, as Chief Inspector aged 36, he attended the very first Senior Command course at Bramshill, Hampshire, and was the youngest officer to have done so. He was later promoted Superintendent and became Deputy Divisional Commander at Brixton, (SW9) having the charge of 800 men. At this time he said Mosley was still active, but now creating problems within the black communities. He remarked that it was in difficult times like these, that public order became a matter of course, through this or that group. It was a balance between *the rights of freedom of speech* with the *right to protection of life and property*, which was a great learning curve.

In his younger days, he had played football for the local Ness FC and achieved his rugby colours playing representative games for the Metropolitan Team, as open side wing forward. However, at this stage in his career, he was advised to stop playing, in view of the possibility of attaining a serious injury during a game.

In 1964, his old High School, the Nicolson Institute in Lewis, had arranged its first away trip to London, in view of this; he was there to meet them. This included his sister Mairi, and due to the hefty expense, had paid her costs so she wouldn't miss out attending. He also doubled up as their guide, and arranged a tour around the sights of the city. The high point was meeting their MP for the Western isles, Malcolm K. McMillan, at the Houses of Parliament, who showed the youngsters around.

The following January, he was on duty for the state funeral of the former Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill. He was taken aback at the solemnity of the thousands of people stock-still and silent in this communal mourning. Which reflected his own village traditions. "Suddenly I

felt so proud, thinking 'back home, we bury everyone like Churchill!"



His last move was to Lambeth (SE1) as Chief Superintendent and his final major involvement before leaving, was again on the public order theme in 1968. A year well marked for the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, which on this occasion in March, turned sour en-route, and finished at the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square with memorable violent consequences.

It was whilst at Lambeth, that he achieved the position of Assistant Chief Constable in the newly formed, Staffordshire County and Stoke on Trent Constabulary in May 1968. (Pictured)

There for the next 2½ years, one of his main responsibilities was for 42 miles of the M6 that ran through the County. This of course, was his stepping stone to Aberdeen City Police, replacing Chief Constable William Smith who had become HMICS.

Aberdeen City Police

He arrived at HQ at Lodge Walk in November 1970, as Britain's youngest Chief Constable, with a salary of £4,270. (£48,300 today) The strength of the force at this time was 369 officers and 117 Support Staff. The new HQ at Queen Street, (commenced in 1968) was still undergoing its first stage which was completed by November 1972.

Within months of his settling in period, it was already on the cards from 'The Wheatley Report', (Local Government Reform) the pending factor of regionalisation to Grampian and verified by 1971. From July 1972, the process of structure of amalgamation between the City and the Scottish North East Counties Constabulary had to be forged out. This brought about regular meetings of both Chiefs in an advisory / planning capacity of the new Grampian Police Force.

The other main historical factor since his time in office was of course, North Sea Oil. Initially there were just a handful of rigs but by 1975, there were 30, some up to 300 miles offshore, as well as 3 production platforms. Eventually the Scottish Office finally agreed that Aberdeen City Police, (later Grampian) had the policing responsibility of Rigs and Installation within Scottish Waters of the North Sea, operated from Aberdeen.

Additional prominent matters during his City management were the Children's Panel System in 1971 and the connection to the Police National Computer (PNC) at Hendon in 1974. The enhancement of Crime Prevention, Television publicity, Residential Cadet Courses and evening Civilian Driving courses at £4 for 14 hours instruction! (about £35-40 now) Phase II of the new HQ got underway in November 1973 and the old Lodge walk building of 1895, was demolished.

Other matters regarding personnel, that's worthy of mention, were a review of the manpower situation which in 1971 resulted, an increase of 46 Officers, 10 support staff and 16 Traffic wardens. Then in 1974, Policewomen were integrated with their male colleagues, performing the same duties and working the same shift system.

He was deeply concerned with excessive drinking, which he stated led to tragic consequences of domestic suffering and serious injury. The increase in violence, particularly where there was no provocation, coupled with disorder amongst the youngsters towards one another, and their carrying of offensive weapons. Drunk driving, under-age drinking, malicious mischief and the personal injury of officers had all escalated. Since 1970, there had been six murder enquiries.

It was on 31st July 1974, that Grampian Regional Council appointed Mr Morrison Chief Constable (Designate) of Grampian Police taking responsibility for the ultimate Co-ordination and Operational Plan, which had been presented to and approved by Grampian Regional Council in February.

Grampian Police

He assumed Command on 16th May 1975, with Mr Alexander Graham Lynn, Chief Constable of SNECC as his Deputy. Regionalisation of the two forces caused a slight reduction in area as Nairn had become part of the Highland Region. Staff working there (given the opportunity to remain or transfer) resulted in the loss of 15 officers and 2 support staff to Northern Constabulary. The authorised strength of Grampian at this time should have been 882 officers, but was down to 810; (37 had retired, 18 resigned and 6 transferred) and 260 support staff, being down by 29.

It was a 'new-age force' with updated radio and telephone communications, controlled through the Information Room at HQ, and a direct link to the PNC at Hendon. The second phase of Police HQ was still ongoing, but finally completed and occupied in April 1976, after a total of 7½ years.

He praised the ability of the force in coping that year with the Offshore Europe Exhibition and Inauguration Ceremony for the B.P. Forties Field. The command and control for each event of personnel and resources was well accomplished.

The development of the oil industry and its related activities had primarily caused a vast increase in road traffic. The commuter population in the rural areas, creating a heavy build up of rush hour traffic in and out of the urban areas. Likewise with the heavy commercial traffic, a lack of overnight parking facilities for them and pressure of providing escorts for the many abnormal loads.

From 1st December, the Airport Police Unit took on the security and policing there. In the first seven months Mr Morrison thanked all personnel for the high degree of integration and loyalty towards their new force.

Here are some significant matters that happened during his years as Chief with Grampian:

In 1976, the roof of Headquarters was initially planned as a 'heliport', but later scrapped on the advice of the Civil Aviation Authority due to the many high buildings in the area considered a high risk for landing and take-off. The growth of peak time traffic brought in morning and evening police traffic control points around the city to ease the flow and prevent disruption. Quiet rural roads were also busier and becoming aggressive routes.

The following year he commented that the extensive burden placed on the Courts, caused long delays before cases were tried. This resulted in the victims, witnesses and police officers becoming dismayed and discouraged in the process.

On the sad loss of an on duty officer he wrote: 'There could hardly have been a more spontaneous and loyal response to a public need, than that which was so readily answered, with tragic consequences, by Sergeant Alan Gordon in Market Street, Aberdeen, on 10 August 1977. His death was a grievous loss to the force, and more so to his wife and young family.'

In June 1978, Mr Morrison was awarded the Queens Police Medal. Having been President of the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) from December 1979 until February 1981. and Chairman of their Standing Committee on Crime Prevention, Investigation and Detection and other Association Committees. Additionally a member of the Police Advisory Board for Scotland and sole Police member on 'The Stewart Committee' set up by the government, to study the alternative methods of prosecution in Scotland.

In autumn, he was pleased that the first part of the Edmund Davies Report on Police Pay was speedily implemented and gave increases through the ranks from 29.7% to 45.5%. This improved recruiting figures and enabled the Force to be very close to its authorised establishment of police officers by the end of the year.

The Stolen Vehicle Squad, (based within the Traffic Department) was initiated in 1979, and in November, the Information Room was transferred from the ground to the sixth floor of the HQ building. The Social Club, previously there, was simultaneously re-located at Bucksburn.

At the start of the 1980's, his big worry was the escalation of hard drugs, particularly heroin. Later that year saw the introduction of VASCAR device utilised by the Traffic Department for speed detection. The following year, disclosed an increase of 73% of thefts by OLP's, (Opening of Lock Fast Places) mainly related to forced entry into motor vehicles. The attraction then was the new Citizen Band radios, radio and tape recording equipment. It was that year that he became one of Britain's four representatives of Interpol.

In May 1982 the force began an experiment involving the tape recording of interviews with persons being questioned in relation to crimes. It was done on behalf of the Scottish Office which was to be decided upon in 1983. It also saw the enactment of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act and the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Act, both of which had an effect on the Force. The latter, now enabled British Law to be applied offshore, throughout cross-boundary oil and gas fields in both police and criminal matters.

In his final year with Grampian, major steps were taken by the Force into the technological era, with preparatory work on the computerisation of the Command and Control System. Every relevant syllable recorded in one of this Force's biggest ever murder enquiries (that of Taxi Driver, George Murdoch) was placed on computer for instant recall. Officers had been trained in Major Crime Administration procedures in pursuance of the 'Byford Report' recommendations on the 'Yorkshire Ripper' case.

On 2nd August 1983, Mr Morrison was officially appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland, to succeed Mr. Edward Frizzell, C.B.E., and Q.P.M. due to retire in December.

On 25th October, he took personal charge of the explosion and fire at the Royal Darroch Hotel, Cults, where 6 people were killed and 15 injured. This was the fourth Major Incident that year, following a rail and two air accidents.

After 8½ years in office in Grampian, many changes had taken place in that period, a few of many having been highlighted. Grampian as mentioned, started with 810 Officers and 260 Support staff. On closure of service, his Officers had increased to 937 and Support staff to 272. The Special Constabulary had actually decreased from 465 to 343.

Of a total of 27 murder investigations carried out in Grampian he stressed that on a disappointing note, he was dismayed that there were three still unsolved. These were the Postmistress Dorothy Park at New Pistligo, Research Scientist, Dr Brenda Page and Taxi Driver George Murdoch, both Aberdeen. However, he didn't know of any Chief Constable who had left their job and able to say there was no unfinished business!

Prior to his departure on 5th December, he stated he was "grateful for the continuing support of the Regional Council as Police Authority, particularly through the difficult financial times. Despite economic restraints, every effort will continue to be made to maintain the renowned high standards expected of Grampian Police. The media, particularly local Press and Television, give a balanced presentation of police associated items and I am thankful for their contribution and assistance."

"My thanks are also due to the officials and members of the local Police Federation and Superintendents' Association, who have conducted their affairs so responsibly. Finally, I particularly wish to record my appreciation of the endeavour, efficiency and continued loyalty of all members of the Force and Support Staff."

Mr. John Sorrie, Convener of Grampian Region, paid a tremendous tribute to Mr Morrison, stating he had won the respect and admiration of the whole community. He also made special mention of his determined and successful approach to the policing of North Sea Oil Installations, which had won him admiration from far and wide. In his concluding remarks the Convener then placed on record, on behalf of the members of Grampian Regional Council, their thanks to Mr. Morrison for his efforts in the past and wished him well in his new role.



Grampian Farewell - presentation from Alistair Lynn 10th November 1983

HMICS - 1983-1988

On 7th December 1983 Mr Morrison took up this position at St Andrew's House Edinburgh. More pertinent points are referred to below from his time in office.

In the New Years Honours List of 1984, he was awarded the CVO (Commander of the Royal Victorian Order) by the Queen for personal services to the Royal Family. (Photo below)

On police matters, countrywide, he mentioned the severe curtailment of the Police Cadets in the last decade. From 568 down to 54, some forces having discontinued the service. This was due to more pressing financial needs. However, at this time, with the exception of Strathclyde, all forces were near to full strength, lessening the need of cadet intakes.

This was also the year of policing of the miners' strike which extended for almost a year. Mr Morrison wrote: 'It was a disagreeable and difficult time for all operational personnel, especially those doing duty on the picket lines where the possibility of physical injury was often present. Nevertheless, the police knew their legal obligation was clear to uphold the law and maintain the peace and not in any doubt they continued to perform their duty, with credit in the most difficult circumstances.'

A continual problem came to the fore again about court attendance. Considered a waste of valuable resources which reflected on large numbers of officers as well as civilian witnesses spend hours waiting to give evidence and in many cases, dismissed without being called. Much attention from both prosecuting authorities and courts administration has made no significant improvements.

During 1985, in his annual report he gave emphasis to: (1) that all requests for an increase in police or support establishment *is* carefully examined and evaluated in order to determine whether or not the application is justified. (2) That he regularly meets with police authorities and staff associations within forces and that the relationships are very good. (3) A variety of Crime Prevention and Community involvement schemes and projects were adopted by all forces creating a high degree of public involvement. (4) Further emphasis was on the increase of crimes and offences involving firearms. (5) Road accidents where drink was involved.

"The police service has always relied on public co-operation to carry out its many duties, and luckily such assistance has always been forthcoming. The high level of crime, experienced by many communities has caused forces to seek increased public participation in a united effort to tackle the problem. This sensible new crime prevention initiative progressed throughout 1986, and is most encouraging. I firmly believe that this is the most meaningful path to follow in order to lessen the heavy burden of crime which is borne by the community, known as 'Neighbourhood Watch'."

In 1987, he advised it was the Police Authorities and HMICS to oversee that Complaints and Discipline must ensure impartiality whilst investigating instances giving cause for complaints against the police. He was therefore, satisfied that all Scottish Forces maintain a high standard in the processing and investigation of complaints, and that there is sufficient independence in the monitoring and disposal of cases.

There was an increasing workload falling on the police as a result of the high level of crimes and offences being committed. Simultaneously, there is an increased training need to be undertaken as the result of new and complex procedures, introduced as a consequence of new legislation and the introduction of new technology. In view of this, uniformed officers are becoming more involved in the investigation of crimes, usually undertaken by specialist branches. Certain fraud and drug enquiries come readily to mind in this respect. In many areas, scenes of crime work were also passed to the uniformed officer.

The emphasis in his final year of course was Piper Alpha on 6th July and The Lockerbie Air Disaster on 21st December. Now in their 30th anniversary year, both are well known and well documented facts of our history. Closing his detailed account he wrote of them: 'It would be remiss of me not to record in this report how impressed I was by the dedication and professionalism of the police officers involved in dealing with each incident.'

Over the past few years, the drugs and their related crimes had already started to make their mark, and highlighted in Chief Constables' annual reports. Cannabis and amphetamines were still very much in evidence, although cocaine and heroin had made an appearance, police initiatives implemented against its traffickers, had by 1988, managed to restrict its flow. However, no room for complacency, all agencies concerned would have to remain active.

He accentuated the prevention and detection of crime is only part of the day-to-day work of a police force. 'Service to the community is just as important, and the contribution to public tranquillity and reassurance made by the presence of the uniformed constable patrolling his beat, should not be underestimated.'

He was satisfied the Service had shown a genuine commitment to seeking and introducing new technology and methods with a view to improving its overall efficiency and effectiveness. 'It is not inward looking in this respect and is ever ready to seek expert advice. Computers are having an increasing influence on all aspects of police work and proving to be of inestimable value, particularly for major enquiries.'

The extension of tape-recording of interviews has progressed well and in time, the advantages of the new technology will outweigh the undoubted resource implications.

During the annual inspections of forces he met formally and discussed relevant issues with members of Police Authorities, Chief Constables and representatives of the Staff Associations. Without exception, he found the relationship on all sides to be very good. The demands on the police service in Scotland show no signs of diminishing, but he was confident that, on the basis of past performance, the Service would rise to the challenge and fulfil its obligations to the community.

During his five year term with the Inspectorate, we see a slight increase in police numbers, at the start of 1984, there were 13,208 where all forces were near full strength, apart from Strathclyde. In 1988, they had risen to 13,518. Again all forces were near their authorised figures except Strathclyde, who were still operating at approximately 200 below. With regards to crime figures, in 1984 at 474,913 there had been a notable decrease by 1988 to 469,986.

Into Retirement

Alexander Morrison retired from his term of office at the Inspectorate in December 1988 and was succeeded by Robert S Sim Esq., CBE, QPM on 1 January 1989. He remained resident in Edinburgh with his wife Mary, whom he had married in October 1961 at Inverness. She had been his childhood sweetheart, Mary MacKay from the village of Lionel, where he first went to school. They had two sons, Iain and Donald who both found careers in IT. In 2005, a thought always paramount in his mind came to fruition, when they re-settled at Knockaird in Lewis.

Described as a quiet, modest and benevolent man, who savoured the time with his extended family. He was renowned as a religious person who promoted the gospel through his life and latterly as an elder at the Free Church of Scotland in Cross. In 2015, he moved to the Dun Eisdan Care Home, in Stornoway, and aged 90, died there on 8th July 2018.



1984 at Buckingham Palace after receiving his CVO.

**Through his eyes!
(Some quotes he left behind)**

On his Metropolitan days.

"In 1980: After 20 years in London, I saw things with metropolitan eyes and thought nothing happened in the provinces. But I was astonished and thrilled at how well equipped the force was with electric typewriters and so on. There's a terrible danger that if you stay in one position and one locality, you'll become a creature of that environment and tend to insist that the old order shall prevail. I'm a great believer in cross fertilisation, new ideas, and new phenomena."

Aberdeen City Police Interview in December 1970.

"I would like to see our police stations made into much more attractive places. Many of them depress me tremendously and I am sure they depress the public too."

"Of course we have our black sheep in the police force and always will have. When we fail, we are extremely distressed, but what matters is that we reveal our failures and prosecute. Society should not chastise us too much for the ones who fall by the wayside."

From his Grampian days.

In 1980, asked if his ambition was to get Sir David McNee's job at New Scotland Yard?

"I am so grateful for what I am and what I've got. I do not think I have the right to ask for anything outside the door of my own office. Being at the top of the modern Police Headquarters in Aberdeen, Queen Street, and having a spectacular birds-eye view above St Andrews Cathedral, the Arts Centre and the Salvation Army Citadel to the beach and the sea, it is the sort of office any chief executive would covet."

In 1983 On the Bail Act "I believe that parents were the best police officers, the best social workers and the best school teachers. I regret to say parents seemed to be opting out of their responsibilities and expect other people to fill the gaps. The Act allows offenders greater freedom and was designed to restrict the number of young 'criminals' being put into prison awaiting trial. In practice, I have my doubts about this."

"There is a strange paradox in society. A whole lot of public organisations criticise the number of imprisonments, especially amongst young offenders. Then they all wonder why their homes are broken into. So what is the cure? You go around in circles. It is almost as though society has got to tolerate a higher rate of criminality in order to keep them out of prison."

Prior to leaving Grampian he was asked by reporter Brian Wilson: "So what are the big worries facing Scotland's Chief Inspector of Constabulary at the present time?" Alex Morrison says: "Public trust and confidence is being strained by the house-breakings in the big cities. People are not able to live in their own houses without that strange feeling that they are next on the break-in list. It has reached the level where it is undermining public confidence."

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