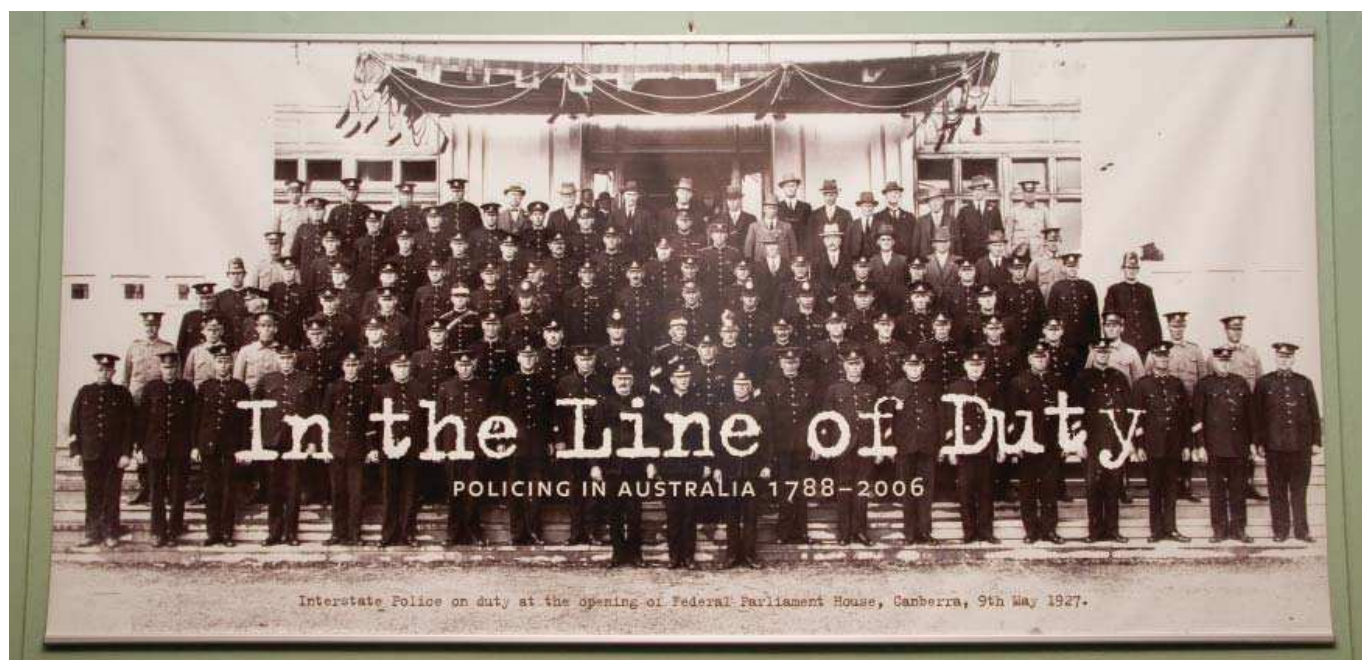


Police history exhibition – a real drawcard



The popular Australian police history exhibition *In the line of Duty* at Old Parliament House officially ended on 30 May, but lives on as a website and is likely to be seen throughout Australia in a travelling format.

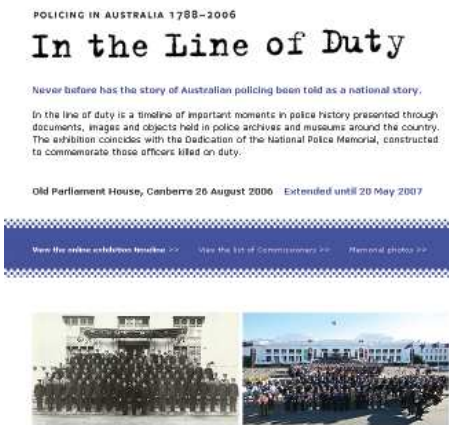
Meryn Gates, the exhibition's curator, outlines the planning, development and execution that went into getting the exhibition off the ground under the guidance of the Recognition and Ceremonial Team, and the Chief of Staff.

***In the Line of Duty* opened to coincide with the dedication of the National Police Memorial on 29 September last year and was only meant to run for five months. However, the Old Parliament House staff were so pleased with the public interest shown, they extended the showing to nine months.**

The website <www.inthelineofduty.com.au> has been very popular too and it will remain on line for all the police history buffs to reference.

Preparations for an exhibition

An exhibition of such size does not happen over night and plans for the exhibition rose out of the committee preparing the dedication of the National Police Memorial. Although some states had published histories of their police forces, no national history of policing in Australia existed.



Since it was launched, more than 15,000 visitors have logged into the *In the Line of Duty* website at <www.inthelineofduty.com.au> which will remain on line for police history buffs and to provide up-to-date details on the future progress of the exhibition.

To rectify this, the process of assembling the exhibition began and the choice of venue seemed obvious. Our key image for multi-jurisdictional policing in Australia was a group photograph of police on duty for the opening of Federal Parliament in Canberra on 9 May, 1927. The building, now known as Old Parliament House, is a major tourist attraction and a museum of Australian political history – a perfect site for showcasing the history of policing in Australia, and Old Parliament House management agreed.

The then Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison opened the exhibition at an evening function concluding events surrounding the Dedication of the National Police Memorial. The exhibition was originally to end in February 2007, but was extended in order that it could be on view for the official 80th anniversary celebrations on 9 May 2007.

In March 2006, I was appointed as guest curator, and immediately convened a national reference group, consisting of police museum staff (where they existed), representatives from police historical societies, police associations and staff of protocol and public relations divisions in every state and territory. In April 2006 the group met for a planning session in Canberra. We visited the venue to view the Strangers Gallery: a corridor gallery, that imposed very specific parameters on what



The *In the Line of Duty* exhibition was opened at Old Parliament House on the evening of 29 September. Pictured at the opening are AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty, Media celebrity Ita Buttrose, and South Australia Police Commissioner Mal Hyde.

we could do – no squad cars, for instance could fit into the space, as much as we would have loved to do that! Without this group I would not have been able to source the quantity of visual and documentary material that is included in the exhibition. It was a revelation to us all to see how the history of the nation was reflected in police business.

Researching the history of policing in Australia

It was my role to develop the overall structure of the exhibition, to brief the reference group on what was needed, and to select the final content of the exhibition. While about 70 per cent of the contents came from police sources, other repositories were also searched: state libraries, state and national archives, and news media provided wonderful material such as documents, artwork and photographs. To complement the graphic panels, more than 80 objects were brought together and put on show, including a rarely seen painting of Australian bushrangers from the National Library of Australia collection, the helmet from Dan Kelly's armour from the Victoria Police Museum, a South Australia Police hat featuring the first Sillitoe tartan band, the List of Evacuees from Cyclone Tracey, a UN blue beret as worn by the AFP during international deployment, a maple pin to commemorate those who served on the



Port Arthur Massacre investigation, and many more.

Once appointed, the exhibition designers, Art Direction Creative, established a streamlined web-based editing system, without which I doubt we would have been able to open the show on time. The system also allowed us to upload the material on to a website.

A hit on the web

Interest in the website has been steadily increasing all year. Currently we are recording more than 100 visitors to the site every day. Saturday is a peak time, and we recently had 1907 hits in a single day. This indicates that people are finding our site and then spending a lot of time searching through the material.

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Visitor interest in the exhibition

Old Parliament House staff reported that people spent an unusual length of time in the exhibition space. Generally, it is estimated by museum curators that visitors usually spend a modest three seconds with each item in an exhibit. But people were spending hours at *In the line of duty*, and many came back for a second visit.

When I was working in the space in March, a member of the public came up to me: "There are some terrific stories here!" he



said, eyes ablaze. Nothing can be more rewarding to a curator than to hear that kind of unsolicited praise.

One of the features of the exhibition was the publication of a limited edition, hand-bound volume reproducing documents from the collection of the National Archives of Australia about policing the official opening of the Federal Parliament House on 9 May, 1927. We had the photograph of police who had been on duty for the event. What we did not know was who these police were. The Federal Capital Territory, as it was then known, was still policed by the NSW Police Force, so most of the 200 officers were from New South Wales. However, research revealed that each state was invited to contribute police. Even more interestingly, some declined. Through these documents, often correspondence about travel allowances or other operational details, we have been able to name many of the police in the photograph.

The 'revolutions' musical ride recreated

As part of the special events' program marking the 80th birthday of Old Parliament House, there was a re-enactment of 'revolutions' performed at the original 1927 opening. The 2007 musical ride featured ceremonial horses of the NSW Police and two members of the AFP Mounted Cadre accompanied by the NSW Police Band.

Police at war

Another terrific story of early joint operations was one brought to our attention by the Western Australia Police Historical Society. In their archives there was a record of police seconded to the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during the Great War 1914–18. The full account tells of the direct request of Prime Minister Joseph Lyons to all Commissioners for detectives to "assist the war effort". These men arrived in Port Said, in the

Middle East, on 20 April 1916, and were, according to the Sydney Sun newspaper on 13 August, 1917, "to identify the criminal element amongst the Australian troops, and ... provide investigative skills to detect and prosecute criminal offences. Amongst their varied duties was the seeking out of spies and detection of acts of espionage." Detective Brennan (Victoria) and Detective Pearce (NSW) remained with the AIF until the end of the war, and were decorated for their efforts. We have established that Detective G V Purdue (WA), one of the contingent sent to Cairo, was also present in Canberra on 9 May, 1927.

Touring nationally for the rest of Australia to experience

Plans are in place now for the exhibition to tour. It would be fitting if it could be seen in every state and territory, so that police, their families, and the general public have the opportunity to see their history told as part of a splendid and proud national story.



On 9 May 2007, to mark the 80th Birthday of (Old) Parliament House in Canberra, two members of the AFP Mounted Cadre joined the NSW Police to recreate a musical ride performed originally by the NSW Mounted Police at the opening of Parliament in Canberra in 1927.

Photos by Greg Primmer