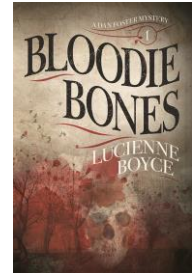


Lucienne Boyce

DAN FOSTER AND THE BOW STREET RUNNERS

Find out about the background to Dan Foster's career as a Bow Street Runner and some of the people he works with in *Bloodie Bones*...



The Bow Street Runners

In 1748 author and political journalist Henry Fielding (1707–1754), was appointed magistrate of Westminster and moved into the now-famous house in Bow Street. London was in the middle of a crime wave and Fielding, determined to restore law and order, set out to revolutionise policing methods. He hand-picked a group of constables to form the first corps of the investigators that came to be known as the Bow Street Runners. Relying heavily on a system of informers, the Runners were on constant duty and available to respond quickly to news of an offence. They were backed up by a formidable intelligence-gathering network centred in Bow Street, where information was collated on suspects, stolen property, dodgy pawnbrokers and disorderly houses.

At his death Henry Fielding was succeeded by his blind brother John (1721–1780), who continued to innovate new police practices. In 1763 he introduced, as a temporary measure, the first horse patrols in the capital. He provided a new court room in Bow Street so that cases were no longer heard in the magistrate's parlour. In 1772 he started the publication *The Weekly or Extraordinary Pursuit* (which was to become *The Police Gazette*) in which he circulated to magistrates and other officers details of crimes and suspects. He extended the system of information-gathering from London to the rest of the country, and the Runners were frequently called on to investigate cases outside the metropolis. He opened up the Bow Street offices to the public so that anyone could attend during office hours.

John Fielding's successors continued to increase the effectiveness of Bow Street. In 1782 an armed street patrol was instigated. It was expanded over the following years, and followed up by the establishment of a night patrol. *The Weekly Hue and Cry*, later *The Public Hue and Cry*, replaced and enlarged upon *The Weekly or Extraordinary Pursuit*.

In 1792 The Middlesex Justices Act extended the Bow Street model throughout the London metropolis (it did not apply to the City of London), which was provided with seven public offices operating on the same lines as Bow Street. The new offices were funded by the Home Department (Home Office), but the Bow Street office continued to receive separate funding in the form of direct annual grants from the Treasury office.

The Bow Street Runners continued to operate until the 1829 Metropolitan Police Act swept away the old system of policing to set up a uniformed police for the metropolis of London (the City of London police force still remains independent). The new and remnants of the old policing systems co-existed for a few more years but by the Police Act of 1839 the Bow Street Runners were finally disbanded. The staff and officers of Bow Street were either redeployed or offered pensions.

The end of the Runners left the metropolitan police without a detective branch until a detective department was set up in 1842. In 1878 a further reorganisation resulted in the formation of the Criminal Investigation Department.

In 1881 the old Bow Street office was closed and the magistrates moved to a new court on the east side of Bow Street. The old building was demolished in 1887.

Sir William Addington, Chief Magistrate (1728–1811)

Sir William Addington was appointed as a magistrate at Bow Street in 1774.

In 1780 he was the defendant in a suit for unlawful imprisonment brought by an attorney called Thomas Ayrton. Finding in favour of the plaintiff, the court criticised Bow Street for publishing details of examinations of prisoners in the newspapers as it was prejudicial to their cases.

Sir William was the subject of another complaint in 1782 when a man arrested for acting as second in a duel accused the Runners of assault. However, in the soul-searching that followed the Gordon Riots in 1780, Addington and the then chief magistrate Sampson Wright were praised for their attempts to control the riots, although the committee was strongly critical of the behaviour of the majority of the Middlesex and Westminster magistrates.

Sir William Addington became chief magistrate in 1793 following the death of Sampson Wright. At the same time a new salaried magistrate, Richard Ford, joined his staff. Ford was a key figure in the government's attempts to suppress the radical societies, and because of his close relationship with the Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland – who provided him with his own office at the Home Department – he was seen as the real leader of Bow Street, and by extension the London magistracy.

In 1799 Sir William introduced badges intended to distinguish between officers and patrolmen. He retired the following year, when Richard Ford succeeded to the title of Chief Magistrate over the head of the next in line for the post, Nicholas Bond.

**John Townsend,
Bow Street
Runner** (1760–
1832)

John Townsend was born in the Middlesex Hospital and educated at a London charity school. According to some accounts, he first worked as a costermonger. Under Sir John Fielding's magistracy, he became a patrolman in 1784 and a Runner in 1785. His work included serving writs for arrests, and he was responsible for the first detachment of prisoners sent to Botany Bay. He was also employed, with other Runners, by institutions such as the Bank of England and the Post Office to provide security services and investigate forgeries and thefts.

Bow Street had been providing protection for the royal family since 1788, and by 1792 John Townsend was one of the officers appointed to safeguard George III and his family. The Runners' royal duties included attendance during levees, keeping order on public occasions such as the king's birthday, accompanying the royal family to the theatre and other public places, and walking alongside the royal coach on state occasions.

Townsend soon became a favourite of the King and the Prince of Wales (George IV), who he accompanied to Brighton, Ascot and other race courses. He became known as something of a dandy and relished hobnobbing with the aristocracy. The role was not only enjoyable but lucrative, for substantial rewards were earned by the Runners for their services to the royal family and other wealthy clients. By 1815 Townsend was almost exclusively employed on royal bodyguard duties.

Townsend was often called upon to arrest radicals, work which he undertook with enthusiasm and some violence. He was a key witness to the 1816 parliamentary committee set up to inquire into the state of policing in the metropolis. He served as a Bow Street officer for over fifty years.