

John Kent

The First Black Police Officer: Maryport & Carlisle

Compiled by Lydia Charles, BTPHG

Charting Britain's First Black Police Officer

Much of the information about John Kent's life and times has come from the extensive research undertaken by former Cumbria Police officer Raymond Greenhow, author of the book- *Britain's First Black Policeman*. We are indeed grateful to him in allowing us to use some of his work. We also wish to acknowledge the work of another former police officer, the late Bob Lowther who wrote the book- *140 years of the Carlisle City Police Force*'. It was Bob Lowther who first uncovered the remarkable police career of John Kent, Britain's first black police officer.

The following is a compilation of articles that look at the life and times of John Kent, in particular his police service mainly in Maryport, the Carlisle City Police and the Lancaster & Carlisle Railway Police as well as a spell in Longtown. It also examines the development of National Black Police Association. An assessment of John Kent's career as a railway policeman appears at the end.

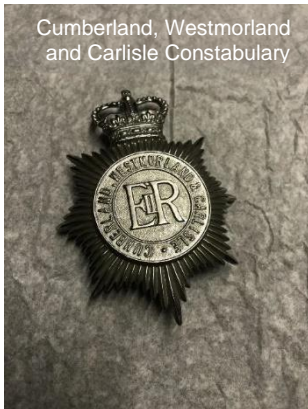
John Kent

John Kent (1805 – 20 July 1886) was a British police constable at Maryport, before he joined Carlisle City Police as a supernumerary constable on 17 August 1837, later being made a substantive constable on 26 October 1837 and is reported to be the first black police officer in Britain. He served seven years in the office of constable at Carlisle before being dismissed from his role in 1844. He then became a Court Bailiff, then a Parish Constable at Longtown, a town some ten miles north of Carlisle. Back in Carlisle a few years later, he was described as 'Railway Police' (1851 Census).

The poignancy of these appointments would not have been lost on Kent, who within the space of one generation was now upholding the law in the very place that his father had been enslaved.

Kent proved himself as an excellent police officer, who was praised by his colleagues for his courage and kindness. Throughout his career, Kent was credited with saving a number of his colleagues from serious assault and he was regularly rewarded financially for his commitment to the job.

The Emergence of the Cumbria Constabulary



The Cumberland and Westmorland Constabulary was formed in 1856. This silver coated badge, from the Lakeland Museum collection, showcases the emblem of the force. It was worn as part of the uniform, signifying the important role its wearer has in Cumbrian society. In 1947 this force absorbed Kendal Borough Police. Less than 20 years later this amalgamated force absorbed Carlisle City Police to form a force broadly the same as today's force called the Cumberland, Westmorland and Carlisle Constabulary. In 1965, it had an establishment of 652 and an actual strength of 617. In 1967 the force name was changed to Cumbria Constabulary. In 1974 the force's boundaries were expanded to include the new non-metropolitan county of Cumbria, in particular Furness and Sedbergh Rural District.

The Home Secretary proposed on 6 February 2006 to merge it with Lancashire Constabulary. These proposals were accepted by both forces on 25 February and the merger would have taken place on 1 April 2007. However, in July 2006, the Cumbria and Lancashire forces decided not to proceed with the merger because the Government could not remedy issues with the differing council tax precepts.

Astley Lloyd Blair (1964)



Citizen 3/8/62 Gloucestershire police Archives URN 1148(1)

It was nearly 130 years after John Kent first joined the police that Astley Lloyd Blair joined the Gloucestershire Constabulary in 1964. It was thought at the time that he was Britain's first black police officer. Two years later, Norwell Roberts became the first black police officer in the Metropolitan Police in 1966.

Black Police Association

The first Black Police Association (BPA) was the Metropolitan Black Police Association, founded in 1994 as a joint initiative between BME police staff within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

This joint initiative raised concerns about the number of black staff who were leaving police forces throughout the UK. A meeting of BME staff from the MPS, known as the Bristol Seminars, led to the formation of a black support network, which formally became the UK's first Black Police Association in September 1994, launched by the MPS Commissioner Sir Paul Condon.

At the launch, Sir Paul Condon said: "I have made it clear where I stand. I see the formation of this Association as the only way forward."

On 12 and 13 October 2006, Boalt Hall, Berkeley, University of California hosted an international, multidisciplinary roundtable on the role of rank-and-file officers in police reform. The roundtable was co-sponsored by the Berkeley Centre for Criminal Justice, the Centre for the Study of Law & Society, and the Regulatory Institutions Network at Australian National University. Included in the list of invited contributors was Superintendent Paul Wilson, Metropolitan Police Service, London, who presented his paper entitled.

"The development and role of a Black Police Association in the wider police modernisation agenda" which serves as a useful insight into the socio-political beginnings of the UK's first black police association. Until 2006, when a former officer of Cumbria Constabulary discovered Kent's employment records, it was thought that Britain's first black police officer was Norwell Roberts, who was an officer with the Metropolitan Police starting in 1966 (however Astley Lloyd Blair joined Gloucestershire Constabulary in 1964). The discovery has been heralded by the UK National Black Police Association as having "huge significance" as well as being "totally unexpected".

National Black Police Association

The National Black Police Association (NBPA) is an interest group of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff of the UK police forces, founded in November 1999, which seeks to improve their working environment, to challenge racial prejudice and to enhance the quality of service to all non-white communities of the United Kingdom.

The Association defines itself as follows:

“The objective of the National Black Police Association (NBPA) is to promote good race relations and equality of opportunity within the police services of the United Kingdom and the wider community”.

National Communication Network

In October 1996, a National Communication Network was formed. This network included BME police staff members throughout the UK, and soon after its formation, members of the network resolved that a national association of BME police staff members should be formed, with the motto: "One voice, strength in unity."

In early 1998, four representatives of the National Communication Network met with Home Secretary Jack Straw. Three representatives from the Metropolitan Police BPA, The chairman, Paul Wilson, Executive members Leroy Logan MBE and Bevan Powell MBE were accompanied by Ravi Chand QPM Chairman of the Bedfordshire Police BPA. It was at this meeting that the Home Secretary volunteered to speak at the Met BPA Annual General Meeting, an offer which was accepted by the chairman, Paul Wilson. From this initial meeting and other meetings between the Home Office and representatives of the National Communications Network, in November 1998, the first interim executive committee of the National Black Police Association was elected to launch the NBPA. The executive committee had 14 executive members from 12 Constabularies.

In October 2009 Charles Crichlow, a Greater Manchester Police Officer, was elected President of the NBPA.

In October 2013 a new Cabinet was elected. Franstine Jones, a Suffolk member of police staff was elected as the NBPA's first female President, with Nick Glynn (Leicestershire) being elected as Vice-President.

John Kent's Family and early life

John Kent was the son of Thomas Kent, a seaman who worked on the estate of a Cumberland colonial civil service worker in the West Indies. Kent's father is believed to have originally arrived at Whitehaven, England, where he worked at Abbey House, Calder Abbey, in the service of the Senhouse family, where he was 'considered a slave'. He was later given his freedom and went to sea. It is unknown the true origin of the Kent name, in John Kent's

eulogy the father was said to have taken his surname from the region of England where his ship may firstly have docked. Thomas Kent married Mary Wilson in 1787 and the couple had nine children, (some dying in childhood) John was the eighth born.

John Kent married a white woman, Mary Bell from Longtown, and settled on 1 Crown Street, Botchergate Street, in Carlisle, first recorded in the 1841 national census. He was described as a "quiet, inoffensive man" as well as a "big powerful man", in his own words between the move from Maryport to Carlisle.

A black figure was a rare sight in that corner of north-west England at the time and even before he joined the police Mr Kent would attract crowds as he worked laying pavements for the city corporation.

His Police Career

John Kent joined Carlisle City Police as a supernumerary constable on 17 August 1837, later being made a substantive constable on 26 October 1837 and is reported to be the first black police officer in Britain. He served seven years in the office of constable at Carlisle. He was known among city residents as "Black Kent" during his service and this nickname was used by adults to scare unruly children.

Kent was credited with several arrests. He provided several accounts in his later years, one of arresting two "coiners". After arresting one suspect, he handcuffed him to the fire grate in his own house. He left an unloaded pistol with his wife, telling her to shoot the prisoner if he tried to escape. Kent then apprehended the second outstanding suspect.

In 1841, he was policing an election crowd in the city centre when it became violent. As the crowd became more unruly, a police officer was struck on the head by one of the crowd and died. The matter was recorded as a murder and Kent provided evidence of the general riot at Carlisle Assizes (The courts of assize, or assizes were periodic courts held around England and Wales until 1972, when together with the quarter sessions they were abolished by the Courts Act 1971 and replaced by a single permanent Crown Court. The assizes exercised both civil and criminal jurisdiction, though most of their work was on the criminal side. The assizes heard the most serious cases, which were committed to it by the quarter sessions (local county courts held four times per year), while the more minor offences were dealt with summarily by justices of the peace in petty sessions (also known as magistrates' courts).

Police officers being drunk on duty was a common occurrence in the 19th century, as clean drinking water in the city was a rarity. On 6 December 1844, Kent arrived for duty while intoxicated. Owing to new policy, introduced by a new Chief Constable, to severely punish officers drunk on duty, Kent was instructed to attend a watch committee. He was later disciplined, and he was dismissed from the service on 12 December 1844.

We know from the author Ray Greenhow's research that Kent worked in Longtown, (a small town north of Carlisle) as a Parish Constable for two years after his dismissal from Carlisle City Police. We also know that in that role he was actively performing duty as a police officer.

Before 1851 he was back in Carlisle and described as 'Railway Police'. (Discussed at the end of this article.) At the age of 78, he was recorded as being employed as an attendant in the service of the London and North Western Railway Companies, specifically working in the waiting rooms at Citadel station.

John Kent died on 20 July 1886 at his home in Henry Street, Carlisle, and was buried in Carlisle Cemetery. His obituary in the Carlisle Journal announced that "Black Kent is Dead" and the Carlisle Patriot described the passing of Kent as "The Death of a Carlisle Notable". His obituaries tell how he was so well known that a generation of Carlisle children were brought up to fear him.

DEATH OF A LOW HESKET NOTABLE.

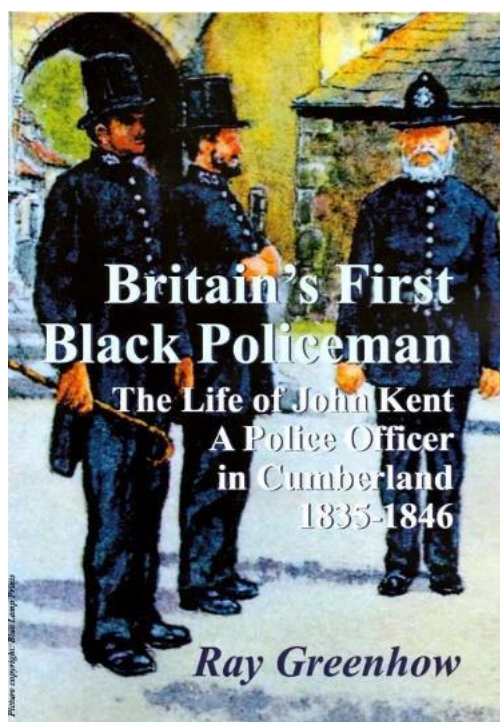
On Thursday there were interred at the Carlisle Cemetery the mortal remains of one of the oldest and best known inhabitants of Carlisle; we refer to John Kent, who had for many years been employed at the Citadel Station. John was popularly known as "Black Kent," he being of negro descent. His father came from the West Indies to this neighbourhood with a Cumberland gentleman, "Nabob Graham," who took up his residence at Rickerby House. Kent is said to have derived his surname from the circumstances that the vessel in which he came to this country landed upon the coast of Kent, and he was named after the county. After marrying a Miss Pickering, of Brampton Hall, he returned to the West Indies, leaving his wife in this country. On arriving back in England he entered the service of Mr. James of Barrock Park, as gardener, and eventually died at High Stand, leaving ten children, five sons and five daughters. His wife died 26 years ago, at the great age of 107. John Kent, the subject of this notice, was born at Low Hesket in 1795, so that at his death he had attained his 91st year. In his early days he attended Hesket school, and then went out as a servant lad. In his prime he was a big, powerful man; and there are those still living who can remember the way in which he used to handle the parlor's beater while engaged in paving the streets of Carlisle sixty years ago. They tell how people would gather round him in crowds to watch the tremendous blows he dealt with the implement. He afterwards became a watchman at Maryport before the modern police force was established; and almost up to the day of his death he delighted to narrate some of his adventures in that capacity. One of his earliest captures was that of two noted coiners. He used to tell how he caught one, and chained him to the bars of the fire grate in his own house. He then placed an empty pistol on the table and told his wife to shoot him if he attempted to escape, while he followed and caught the other. On another occasion he caught a person who had committed a robbery near Wigton by a clever ruse. In order to put the individual of whom he was in pursuit off his guard, Kent feigned drunkenness, and the robber soon found that what he supposed to be a staggering inebriate was really a stalwart guardian of the peace with all his senses about him. Kent was afterwards for nineteen years on the Carlisle police force, and it was said that he and one Joe Haugh were the first two policemen of the present régime. Be that as it may, there are hundreds of Carlisle men far past middle life who have a vivid recollection of the big, black policeman. Hanging upon the walls of his house in Henry Street is an excellent portrait of him in his police uniform, or rather in the uniform of Mayor's sergeant, an office which he held. While Messrs. Joseph Robinson and Co. were constructing the northern end of the Carlisle and Lancaster Railway, Kent was in their employ and was a very confidential servant, to whom Mr. Robinson, the late Mr. James Thompson, of Kirkhouse, and Mr. Mark Thompson entrusted important work. For thirteen years he was employed in the signal-box on the south side of the Citadel Station, and this is still shown on the local railway plans as "Kent's box." The youthful Prince of Wales, passing through Carlisle Station after the publication of Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," seeing a negro in the box, is said to have asked his attendants if that was "Uncle Tom" in his "Cabin." During the last seven or eight years of his life Kent was the attendant at the gentleman's first-class waiting-room at the Citadel Station. His civility and unvarying good humour made him a favourite with everyone, while his strict attention to duty commended him to his employers. He was at work as usual on Friday week, but on Saturday he was ill, and died on Monday afternoon. He married a woman belonging to the Longtown district, but she predeceased him thirteen years ago. He is survived by one son, who is in Australia, and by his sister, Mrs. Lamb, of Low Row, who is now 86 years of age.

Contemporary recognition

Actor and comedian Lenny Henry has become interested in the story of John Kent, researching original documents at the Carlisle branch of Cumbria Archives and featuring in an item presented by Philippa Gregory on the BBC North East edition of 'Inside Out' on 27 February 2017 and the BBC North West edition of the same programme on 6 March 2017. In the programme Lenny revealed that he would like to create a television programme telling Kent's story with himself playing the part of Kent but was having difficulty in getting television companies interested in backing the project. He was seen pouring over documents, Sir Henry said: "What is great about the raw history is the detail. It is the smell and if you can get a whiff or flavour of that you can tell your story."

He added: "I'm totally out of my comfort zone. The things I've written are usually jokes. This is another thing altogether. This is reading historical materials with a view to creating a film and if it works it is going to be fantastic. Carlisle will be right in the middle of it."

A Book 'Britain's First Black Policeman' about John Kent was written by Ray Greenhow.



History Matters

A look into Carlisle's past with history editor
David Ramshaw



On 17 August 1837, John Kent was appointed to the newly

formed Carlisle City Police Force. He was, almost certainly Britain's first black police officer. A black person would have been a rare sight in 1837 so how did this come about?

In the late 18th Century, Thomas Kent, a black African and a victim of the slave trade arrived in England from the Caribbean and landed in Whitehaven. He was a servant at Calder Abbey and after seven or eight years he went to sea before returning to Carlisle where he married a Cumbrian girl. They had ten children, one of whom a son, John Kent, was born at the family home at Low Hesket, Carlisle, sometime between 1795 and 1805. John grew up in the area and married a girl from Longtown.

He died on Monday, 19 July 1886, aged 88, at his home in Henry Street, Carlisle and was interred in Carlisle Cemetery. 'Black Kent is dead,' announced the 'Carlisle Journal.' 'Death of a Carlisle Notable' stated the Carlisle Patriot. 'Yesterday, there were interred at the Carlisle Cemetery the mortal remains of one of the oldest and best known inhabitants of this city, John Kent, popularly known as 'Black Kent,' he being of negro descent.'

'In his prime John Kent was a big powerful man.' Said The Patriot, reporting that at one time he was employed laying pavements in the city and 'Crowds gathered to watch the tremendous blows dealt with his pavior's beater.' So unusual was the sight of any black person in the city at that time, let alone a policeman, that "Black Kent's coming" became a household term used to frighten mischievous children into behaving themselves. 'But the imputation was ill-deserved. 'Black Kent' in the flesh was a quiet, inoffensive man with



John Kent, Britain's first black policeman, second from the left, from a painting by Mark Custerson (hanging at Carleton Hall).

a positive fondness for the children who were brought up to regard him as an ogre.

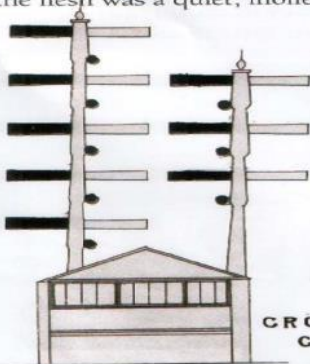
John Kent Britain's first black policeman

Having served the city for many years as a policeman, one of the original 'Bobbies', he entered the service of the London and North Western

Railway Company and in that service he ended his days as an attendant at one of the waiting-rooms at Citadel station'. He was then an old man of 88 years of age [or 91, according to Kent himself].

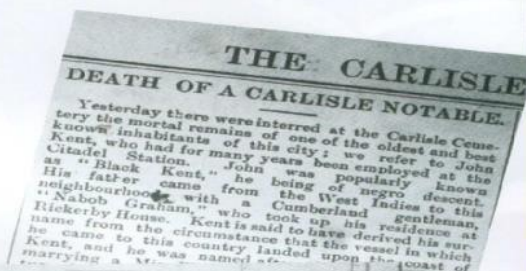
John was proud of his police service and like all policemen he liked to reminisce about his experiences. It appears he had plenty to talk about. One of his earliest arrests, was that of two hotel 'coiners'. He'd tell of how he captured one and chained him to the fire-grate in his own home before placing an empty pistol on the table and telling his wife to shoot the man if he so much as attempted to escape. He then went off and caught the other offender. On another occasion, he arrested a man for a robbery committed near Wigton. In order to put the offender off his guard, he feigned drunkenness, 'but the villain was soon to discover that what he supposed to be a staggering inebriate was in fact a stalwart guardian of the peace with all his senses about him.'

This is only a very brief synopsis of John Kent's story, described in full (5 pages) in 'Watching Over Carlisle' available from <http://www.p3publications.com>



CROWN STREET
CABIN No. 7

Above: The signal box at Citadel Station, known for years afterwards as Kent's cabin. It was here that Edward VII, when a boy, asked 'Is that Uncle Tom's Cabin', on seeing Kent at the window from the Royal train. Right: Death notices from the Journal and the Patriot



"BLACK KENT" is dead. The announcement is one which would have had much more significance forty years ago than it has to-day. Then "Black Kent" was a policeman in the city police force, one of the first appointments...

After he re- in this and the other, nihil.

Maryport honours UK's first black policeman, John Kent

Published: 26 October 2019

IMAGE COPYRIGHT – CUMBRIA POLICE



A plaque was unveiled to commemorate the life of Britain's first black policeman.

The plaque - which is where Maryport's jailhouse used to be.

It was unveiled by MP Sue Hayman.



IMAGE COPYRIGHT - MARYPORT TOWN COUNCIL

Unveiling of Blue Plaque at Maryport celebrating Britain's first black police officer



The plaque is on Back Brow, in Maryport, where the jailhouse used to be. It had previously been thought the first black police officer had joined the Metropolitan Police in the 1960s. However, research by former Cumbria Police officer Ray Greenhow found John Kent served as an officer more than 100 years earlier.

Following the unveiling of the plaque Mr Kent's descendant Ian Bulman, who works on a dairy farm in Carlisle, said he was "pleased and proud".

He added: "I'm proud of where I've come from and I have a lot of admiration of what John and his father went through."

Other people who were at the unveiling included Tola Munro, president of the National Black Police Association, Cumbria's first black High Sheriff Marcia Reid-Fotheringham and Cumbria's first black professional footballer Peter Foley.

Blue plaques commemorate the link between a location and an individual who was regarded as "eminent" in their field.

The National Black Police Association (NBPA) attaches huge significance to the discovery of his career, which it says is totally unexpected.

“The significance is that while we had people of colour joining that far back, it took until 2003 before we had the first black chief constable [Kent’s Mike Fuller],” said David McFarlane, NBPA’s national co-ordinator. PC Kent’s career did not end on the same high note as Detective Sergeant Roberts, who received the Queen’s Police Medal for his 30 years of service.

In the 1851 census, John is stated as working on the railway and his obituary in the Carlisle Patriot on 23 July 1886 wrote “During the last seven or eight years of his life Kent was the attendant at the gentlemen’s first class waiting room at the station, where his civility and unvarying good humour made him a favourite with everyone.” John died on 19 July 1886 at his home in Carlisle and was interred at Carlisle Cemetery where his unmarked grave remains.



1

Parish of <i>Bolton</i>		Division of <i>Carlisle</i>		City of <i>Carlisle</i>		Town of		Village of	
No. of House	Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House	Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where Born	Whether Blind, Deaf, or Lame
					Male Inhabitants				
1	1. Brown Street	John Kent	Head of Family	Mar	44		Railway Police	Carlisle, Cumberland	
		Mary	Wife	Mar	42			Carlisle	
		James	Son	M	7		Butcher & Dressmaker	"	
		Mary	Do	M	7		Machine Work	"	
		Elizabeth Beetham	Cousin	M	14		"	"	
2	2. Old Market Place	James Patterson	Head	Mar	56		Ag. Labor	Carlisle, Cumberland	
		Robert	Son	M	21		Servant	"	
		William	Son	M	11		Black	"	
		James	Son	M	14		Factory Work	"	
		Elizabeth	Daughter	M	12		"	"	
		Mary	Daughter	M	10		Scholar	"	
		Joseph	Son	M	7		"	"	
3	3. New Market Place	William Armstrong	Head	Mar	44		Railway Police	Carlisle	
		James	Son	Mar	25		"	Carlisle, Cumberland	
		Robert	Son	M	17		Engine Fireman	"	
		Michael	Son	M	12		Scholar	"	
		Mary	Daughter	M	9		Scholar	"	
		Sarah	Daughter	M	6		Scholar	"	
Total					8	11			
House	1	5	U	1	1	1	1	1	

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Susan Dench, Head of Archies

There is one woman whose history of researching the life of John Kent goes back a long way. Until her retirement, Susan Dench was Head of Archives at the Carlisle Archive Centre and her interest in the history of black people in Cumberland began back in the 1990s.



Susan explained: “It’s a bit of a difficult subject, black history and in the 90s people were still a bit sensitive about it.”

She continued: “I have found since I have done it though, that people are really quite interested and I still go out and give talks about black history and about the Kent family; particularly if it’s October, Black History Month. People are always interested and the first thing they say is ‘I didn’t know anything about this at all’.”

Read More: <https://cumbriaguide.co.uk/carlisles-john-kent-was-uks-first-black-policeman/>

The Kent Family, Living Descendants

BBC Cumbria Story



When we're looking for the living descendants of African slaves, it's easy to assume they will be black. But one white Cumbrian farmer was amazed to find that he's descended from a former slave.

Ian Bulman's family has farmed just outside Carlisle for generations and has discovered that one of his ancestors was a slave.

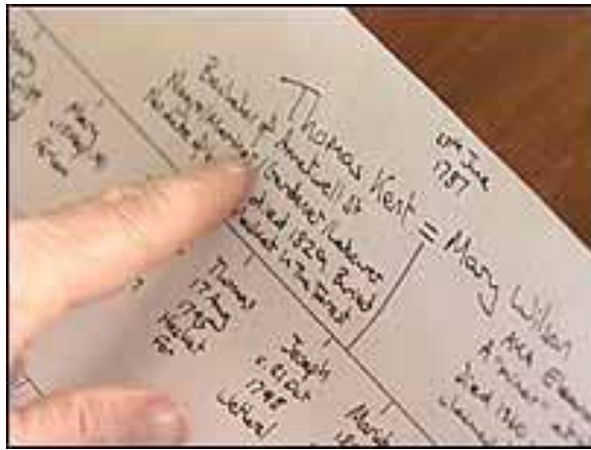
Thomas Kent was brought to this country by a ship's captain in the late 18th Century. His story went on record when later his wife appeared in court seeking relief, which was reported in a local newspaper.

When he came to Cumbria he was employed by a family in the west of the county. He married and had children and was eventually buried in a churchyard in North Cumbria.

Ian was contacted by the makers of an Open University programme about the region's links to the slave trade.

A local archivist had traced forward from Thomas via John's sister Sarah and found that Ian was descended from Thomas and Sarah and was still living in Cumbria.

Ian was surprised and very interested by this revelation. There's no sign now of his black ancestry, but he is horrified at the thought of what Thomas must have gone through as a slave.



The Kent family tree

Here is the family tree with Thomas and his wife at the top. Interestingly at one-point Thomas lived on Annetwell Street in Carlisle which is where BBC Cumbria is now based. Thomas is buried in a churchyard only a few miles from Ian's house. There's no gravestone to mark the place, Thomas would have had a pauper's burial.

Prior to the Black History Month project, there was no record of the important role that John Kent played in the history of Cumbria within our collection. Through carrying out our research, we are now able to honour the significant place John Kent holds in both local and national history.

Credits: Margaret Martindale

Was John Kent a Railway Policeman?

Before joining Carlisle City Police in 1837 John Kent was described as a police constable at Maryport, a small village and harbour on the coast some thirty miles from Carlisle. There was no recognisable police force there at that time, but Kent was one of two constables employed by the town and the port. Ray Greenhow has discovered evidence showing that he was indeed an active police officer, arresting miscreants during both the daytime and the night. One man was arrested for indecently running down a street naked.

We know that John Kent joined the Carlisle City Police as Supernumerary Constable in August 1837. The 1841 census shows him living at 1 Crown Street, Botchergate Street. [Carlisle]. He was clearly good at his job and was well respected. Yet on 6 December 1844 he was found to be drunk on duty and six days later he was dismissed from the force.

The author Ray Greenhow's research next finds Kent employed in Longtown, (a small town north of Carlisle) as a Parish Constable for two years after his dismissal from Carlisle City Police. There too, he was actively performing duty as a police officer.

For 13 years he was afterwards employed at a signal box on the south side of Citadel Station, Carlisle, from when the construction at the northern end of the Carlisle – Lancaster Railway had been completed. (Penrith Observer obituary 27 July 1894.) Construction of that part of the railway took place between 1844 and 1846 when the line was opened. So Kent's railway service probably commenced in 1847 when the trains had begun running.

The 1851 census records his occupation as 'Railway Police' and that he was living at same address in Carlisle as he was in the 1841 census. (Yet we know that he was working in Longtown in between times and that his wife and children were also there. There is no obvious answer to this.) The 1851 census also records a William Armstrong on the same census page but at a different address. He is also described as 'Railway Police'. The fact that these census entries are 'railway police' not 'railway policeman' as is often the case, may or may not be significant. Kent was employed at a signalman's cabin near Carlisle Station so it could indicate that signalmen came under the railway police or indeed they were the railway police.

We know that in the mid-19th century some railway policemen were performing the role of railway signalmen. This is not as unusual or as strange as it may seem. One of the main responsibilities of the police has always been, and remains, the preservation of life and property. In the mid-1840s, the advent of the railways was barely twenty years old. Still in its infancy, accidents were common-place, and it was a priority to prevent such incidents in order to preserve life and property. It seems likely that here the two roles were intertwined. (A comparison might be made with the early days of the motor car when the local police were responsible for controlling traffic.) Not that all railway policemen were also signalmen-they were not. As one illustration, two railway policemen travelled to Ireland in 1855 to arrest a man for larceny of gold.

In another quote from the Penrith Observer obituary of 1894, it is stated that Kent "...was for 19 years on the Carlisle police force"

(Taking his seven years in the Carlisle City Police before his dismissal and adding his thirteen years as a signalman brings it to twenty years. Depending on actual dates this could mean nineteen years in reality.) So, as the voice of the community, the Penrith Observer

seems to imply that John Kent was a railway policeman while performing the role of a signalman.

To answer the question of was John Kent a railway policeman?

In today's world, we may not consider him to have been a police officer if he was a railway signalman. Yet in the context of the age and society in which he lived where railway policemen were responsible for the safety of trains and their passengers, then yes, he was. Did he have other police duties as well? A question we do not know the answer to but recognising the character of the man, I suspect that he did.

Viv Head (British Transport Police History Group) 2021

Principle Sources

Greenhow, Raymond- Author: *Britain's First Black Policeman*

Carlisle Archive Centre

Census Records

Gloucestershire Police Archives

Margaret Martindale

Penrith Observer newspaper (1894)

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