

# History Matters

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



In October 1885 Netherby near Longtown, the home of the Graham family, was the scene of a robbery which led to the murder of a Carlisle police constable. The criminals concerned were known as the Rudge, Martin and Baker gang.

At 8.15pm, a housemaid passing Lady Graham's bedroom door noticed that it was closed and found it to be locked. She knew it had been left unlocked and reported the matter. Sir Frederick discovered that his home had been burgled, by the bedroom's open window and its door secured from the inside. Valuable jewellery had been stolen. It was likely that the offenders had been disturbed by the housemaid, so the police at Longtown were

informed and details were telegraphed to nearby police stations, including Carlisle. Some three hours later, Sergeant John Roche and Constable Jacob Johnstone intercepted four men on the Scotland Road at Kingstown. Both officers were shot by the men, Johnstone sustaining serious injuries. The assailants made off towards the city. PC16 Christopher Fortune was on the Denton Holme beat and

Inspector Roche (wounded)

about 2.30am, next morning he was sent to Dalston Road level-crossing in case the fleeing felons had escaped via the 'goods' line which circled the centre of Carlisle. The gate-keeper said he had seen three men going towards Denton Holme a few minutes earlier. Very bravely

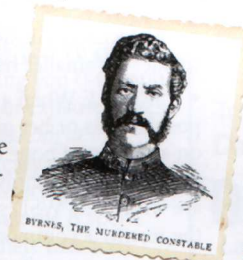


CONSTABLE FORTUNE (severely beaten)

PC Fortune, went alone after the men. At Rome Street he saw three men and caught up with them near Bog Road road-bridge. He called out "Hello chaps, what's up here at this time of the morning?" He got a good look at their faces

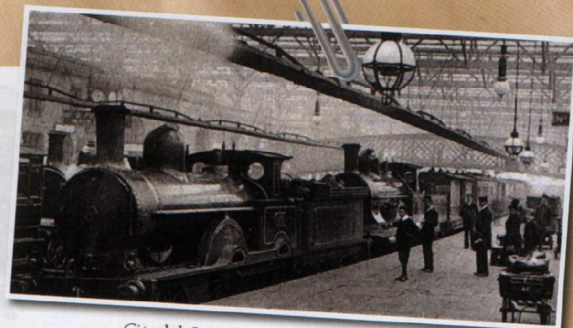
before a fourth man struck him over the head. He sustained a savage kicking and was left for dead. On regaining consciousness he crawled to the signal box at Rome Street, where the signalman, Thomas Evans, first heard and then saw the officer. He thought that PC Fortune had been struck by a train, so badly was he injured. Eventually PC Fortune made his way back to the police station in West Walls (no ambulances in those days). The criminals were not seen again until the following evening at Plump-ton railway station, asking about trains to London. Told there were none till

next morning, they went into the village. The village policeman, Constable Byrnes, was advised by messenger, that the three men, were at the station. When he arrived, the men had left, so he returned to the village. Meanwhile, the suspects were seen going into the Pack Horse Inn. As they left, at about half past



BYRNES, THE MURDERED CONSTABLE

eight, Constable Byrnes challenged them and was callously shot through the head and thrown over a roadside wall into a field. He was found about an hour later and taken into the Inn, but died at lam next morning.



Citadel Station as it would be when Baker was nearly lynched

That day the guard on a freight train travelling south saw three men climb into a wagon as he was leaving Penrith. He kept them under observation, whilst dropping messages from his moving train. The train stopped at Tebay just as a telegraph signal was received in response to his messages. Gaddes quickly got several railway workers and searched the train. On finding them a revolver was drawn but railwaymen, armed with make-shift weapons, struck down two of the gang,



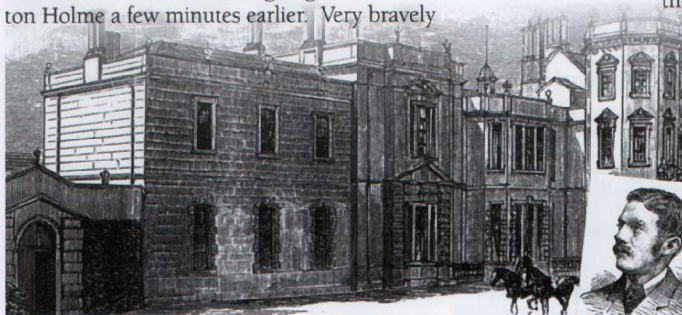
Constable Johnstone (severely wounded)

lashing them to posts until the police arrived to take them back to Carlisle. Baker escaped and clambered back on board but he was arrested at Lancaster. He was returned to Carlisle where a large excited crowd had gathered. As the police dragged Baker along the platform, the crowd surged forward with the intention of lynching him. The police had to draw their batons and beat off the crowd.

At Cumberland Assizes, the prisoners were charged with the murder of Constable Byrnes and with attempting to murder Sgt. Roche and Constable Johnstone at Kingstown and Constable Fortune in Carlisle. They pleaded 'not guilty' but Constable Fortune positively identified all three as the men who had attacked him. Outlining the circumstances of PC Fortune's case, counsel said, "He was fearfully beaten by an iron instrument and thrown down an embankment ... a pistol shot would have roused the neighbourhood." All three were found guilty and sentenced to death. Judge Day told them,

"You have no hope of a pardon ... not at the hands of man."

This is only a brief synopsis of the story. Read it in full in 'Watching Over Carlisle, the history of Carlisle City Police Force', available from [www.p3publications.com](http://www.p3publications.com)



Netherby Hall with inset of Geddes, the goods guard



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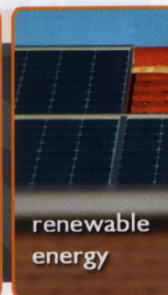
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