

DEVON AND CORNWALL CONSTABULARY

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To: Chief Superintendent R. COOPER
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Tel No: 5200

Ref.:

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Date: 18 January 2010

Subject: DE BRIEF RE MUMMERS DAY - PADSTOW

Sir

With regards the above event, and the recent article in the Western Morning News dated 11th January 2006, and also BBC Spotlight that evening, in relation to a House of Commons motion chaired by Diane ABBOTT, MP, I report as follows.

In essence this lady has, as the article quite rightly states ‘poured petrol on a fire that was dying down’

On the 26th December and 1st January each year local residents of Padstow, meet up and visit all the public houses in the town collecting money for a local good cause. They dress up in costumes, blacken their faces, play music and sing songs. There has been, probably through a misguided comment many, many years ago a reference and connection made to the slave trade. This has been evoked, by the singing of unacceptable words within some songs, the wearing of afro wigs and blackened faces. As such it has raised concerns that it has been racist, or has racist overtones.

Since December 2004, when this incident was heavily policed and the criticism raised, as a result, both SERGEANT ROBIN HOGG, and myself, have gone to extreme lengths, to correct the event, it's name and reputation.

Prior to 2004, the event had cast some doubt over its veracity, its background, and what it was actually celebrating. Problems persisted, with the wearing of afro style wigs, the wording of the songs, blackened faces, and unauthorised street collections.

This was further compounded towards the end of December 2004, when intelligence suggested that a black presenter from Channel 4, was to attend the event on both Boxing Day and New years Day. That person would then ask Police Officers present to stop it immediately, finding it racist, and film the resulting chaos. There were also reports that the British Nationalist Party may attend to give its support, to the participants.

There had been previous ‘bad press’ as far back as 1998 when Bernie GRANT MP complained that the festival was **‘offensive to black people all over the place’**

The Council for Racial Equality, Cornwall Race Equality Council, and the Chair of North Cornwall District Council and Equalities Council, all raised concerns over the event and the profile it had reached.

Section 2 of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 also imposed a legal duty on the Constabulary to ‘promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.’

NOT REVIEWED

I was tasked with ensuring that the event was managed and changes be made.

One of the major problems was that no one person would come forward and accept ownership of organising the event. It is, so I am lead to believe '*something that just happens, people meet up and take part- it's a very spontaneous event*'. Padstow is also a very tight nit community, and despite efforts to break down barriers, they would not name any individual, or agree to any meetings at a mutually agreed venue. The only spokesperson who would say anything about the event was [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. He would only speak in defence of the event and nothing more.

s.40(2)

As a result of non co- operation from the community, a strategy was devised for the event in 2004.

- 1) Every licensee was asked to attend a meeting, and told in no uncertain terms that the any person singing racist songs in their establishments would not be permitted and positive action would result should it be allowed to happen. A letter was also sent to each of those establishments where no representation was made, and to re emphasise the police stance.
- 2) That the event would be policed in a positive manner, that certain requirements had to be met, to prevent those taking place, from committing Public Order offences, afro style wigs, wording of songs, face blackening, and unlawful street collections.
- 3) That the police themselves would film the event, and submit a file to the CPS for a decision on any related offences.
- 4) That should Channel 4 request the event be stopped, they would be told that it was being filmed by the police, persons responsible would be identified and any action deemed necessary, would be subject to CPS advise (to have made any attempt to stop the event once in progress would have caused utter chaos, shown the Constabulary in bad light and created a major public order problem).

As chance would have it, three students who were from Southampton University, on a Media Course, had chosen the event as their final year project, and were in Padstow prior to the actual celebrations, and on the 26th December. One of the students was or mixed race. The local community mistook them as being the representatives from Channel 4, and they were given a difficult time, albeit no offences were committed against them. (copy of their final year DVD on the event enclosed)

Myself and 3 officers were present on the 26th December and Sergeant HOGG and 5 officers from TPT on 1st January 2005. This was an adequate number in my opinion to police the event safely, and account for any problems.

Needless to say the local community took exception to the ' high profile' policing of the event. A freedom of information request soon followed as to the cost implications.

This was given by Headquarters who failed to take account of the correct figures for Bank Holiday rates of pay. Press coverage increased the numbers of police officers present by threefold, with reports of ' riot vans' on every street corner. This raised the

Further more they would accept ownership for events within their Town and assist the police and community in overcoming misconceptions and distrust, and that we would work as partners to achieve common goals. Should they wish to take a stand alone stance, then I would take such action as necessary to achieve my aims.

Whilst the CPS had reached a result of no case to answer in relation to any offences committed by participants in the parade, they also prohibited any future public viewing of film recordings made by the Police. This caused some resentment within the Council, but I was able to show them the recording, and final cut of the media student's project. Not only was this film very well put together, but it also depicted negativity and anger of local residents being filmed. This viewing I think, enlightened and helped prove to the Council the resentment of some of the local community towards change, as well as their attitude towards 'outsiders'. Dialogue with the Council proved very positive, and from this point onwards we were able to move forwards with them as true partners, as opposed to negativity in the past. This has been evidenced by their recent commitment to provide half the funding for ' Obby Oss' day, (£7,500 for 2006) as well as £24,000 for a PCSO.

The meeting in September facilitated further meetings between the Chief Executive of North Cornwall District Council, [REDACTED], members of Padstow Town Council, and a representative of the Christmas Festival. The participants agreed to change, including the name to 'Mummers' day, no afro style wigs, and no racist wording in any songs. The blackening of faces was an issue that could not be resolved, especially if they had consented to the agreed changes requested. The changes made brought them in line with similar events around the Country, and elsewhere world-wide, where the practice of blacking up ones face, was not construed as racist.

s.40(2)

SERGEANT HARVEY and myself policed the Boxing Day event this year on 26th December 2005. It was peaceful and friendly, and passed without any incident, or comment. Constable SPIRES the NBM for Padstow attended the event on New Years day 2006, again without problems. The whole atmosphere this year was a complete change to last, with a marked openness and friendship towards the police. The only issue still not addressed was the street collection for the local church fund, which was not licensed. This is for a local community project and I do not have concerns over it. It is also a matter to be enforced by NCDC not ourselves.

Local media coverage was managed by myself, which showed the event in a positive light, with acknowledgements to the local community for changes made, this came via [REDACTED] so it appeared that the necessary authorities had been involved, without any repercussions to any individuals or the council within Padstow.

s.40(2)

Unfortunately Diane ABBOTTS MP comments have now raised the profile of the event again, at a time when so much hard work behind the scenes has gone into making this an acceptable as possible.

Having seen and heard her presentation on BBC Spotlight, it is evident that there are still some misconceptions about the event, what it actually represents and its true meaning over the Christmas/Festive period.

There is still a continual connection to slaves landing on the harbour at Padstow. Being allowed on the deck of the slave ship that docked there to celebrate this

Christmas. It is established that no slave ship ever docked at Padstow, the harbour and estuary are far too shallow. It is also unlikely that any slaves in the hold of a ship would have been allowed on deck, and even if they had, it's unlikely the captive men, women and children on board would have been in any condition to sing and dance. They would have outnumbered the crew by 2:1 and probably taken it over! It is this connection to the celebration of the slave trade that is still causing resentment and hatred for the event, as evidenced by her outburst/speech and Commons motion. Her cause was further assisted by BBC Spotlights interview of local residents on the 11th January, one of whom made reference to the slaves dancing on the harbour. This was also one local's view on the Media students DVD.

In order to eradicate this misconception, and factual inaccuracy we need to educate the community of Padstow. I have made contact with the Town Clerk, in order that the 'Mummers Day' can be correctly explained to the residents in the Parish Magazine. This is to be distributed at the end of January.

Basically 'Mummers' or 'Mummery' (known as 'Guisers' or 'Guizards' in Scotland) can be dated as far back as 400BC, an ancient mans dream of getting outside his customary life. It would appear to stem from the Roman Saturnalia, from which so many of our Christmas usages are derived. Slaves sported robes from their masters, and the patricians, wearing fantastic costumes, roamed the streets with their slaves. Age and rank were forgotten for the fiesta and all persons were free for the day. There was a musical background for the capers of the multitude with song and ballads befitting the joyous occasion.

The term mummer is synonymous with masker, and is derived from the Danish, mumme or Dutch, momme. People would dress up and wear masks, references are made to blackening faces with burnt corks, coal dust, soot or mud. It prevails over the Christmas season.

There are number of trains of thought over what 'mumming' represents

- 1) that locals would blacken their faces to disguise themselves and sing and dance in payment for food or money
- 2) that over the festive period one would dress up and blacken faces to cast out the spirits of the old year, and welcome in the new, with good luck and fortitude for oneself and crops. By blackening the face the cast out spirits could not identify anyone with which to attach themselves. A pagan ritual at the end of the old year and at the start of the new year.

Sometime over hundreds of years the two may have combined themselves into one event?

Whatever, the practice has nothing to do with slavery, the slave trade or black people. I can only assume that a child once asked a parent or someone once asked why the Padstownians celebrated this festival in the manner in which they did, and came up with the ridiculous story of a slave ship docked in the harbour, with slaves dancing on board. Although probably a rip of a yarn at the time, it has since come back to haunt us!

The traditional Philadelphia Mummers' New Year's Day pagent has continued for over a century and becomes more and more colourful and spectacular each succeeding year.

The Town Clerk has been emailed the necessary information on these events, and will place an article within the Parish Magazine, in order that the local community can be educated over why the art of mummery is practised over the festive period. This should I hope remove any misconception of any connection with the slave trade.

I would also suggest that we forward this to the Home Office in order that Diane ABBOTT MP can be updated, probably through Dan ROGERSON MP. This way we can ensure that the correct interpretation of the event is publicised. After so much hard work by us, partner agencies, the local community and Padstow Town Council, to correct this event, it would be a tragedy if such thoughts and perceptions were allowed to continue.