

Before the introduction of the modern Police Force in 1841, the law was enforced as best they could by local constables like Twm Pwcar of Bridgend.

Twm Pwcar

The Research Library at Park Street, Bridgend houses a veritable treasure trove of information for the local historian, none more so than a complete collection of past editions of the weekly Glamorgan Gazette newspaper from 1866 onwards. It was there that my old friend and fellow Time Trekker, John Lyons, found the story of Twm Pwcar contained in an anonymous letter to that paper in 1905.



Lower Nolton Street with the former Police Station in the distance. Twm's station stood on the site of the shop displaying the "To Let" sign in the foreground.

Twm lived at Bridgend in the early part of the 19th century and before the introduction of the modern Police Force to this area in 1841. At this time the town had its own Police Force, and a Police Station which stood at or near the former premises of the Halifax Building Society on Nolton Street. This was manned by a resident Special Constable named Thomas Lewis who lived on the premises. *"It was a two-storied cottage with a Welsh tile slate roof, and had a flight of stone steps to the entrance",* recalls the writer. Lewis the writer describes as *"a strong, robust man of medium height, with a rough, weather-beaten countenance. A mole on one side of his nose, on which he sometimes rubbed some blue coloured ointment, gave him a weird and uncanny appearance"*. Instead of an orthodox constable's truncheon, Lewis used a short poker which he carried in a specially adapted trousers pocket, and this earned him the nickname "Twm Pwcar" ("Tom the Poker").



“Sports Sales” the former site of Y Garreg Public House.

The town of Bridgend has changed considerably over the years, and if you look up above the frontage of the “*Sport Sales*” shop in Queen Street, you will see what is obviously the window of a former chapel. It was in fact the original Hope Chapel which only moved to its present site in 1906. Before this, and in the days of Twm Pwcar, there was a public house a public house on this spot. Officially named *The Crown Inn*, it was known to all and sundry simply as “*Y Garreg*” (“The Stone”) because right in front of it, and actually in the roadway itself, there was a standing stone. This has long since been removed, but it was apparently similar in size and shape to another such monument that stood in the fields on the opposite side of the river, and is now preserved outside the Bridgend Recreation Centre. Just how old these monuments from our past are is anyone’s guess, as is their purpose. My own gut feeling is that they are probably intended to mark the lower end of the important ford across the river at this point that existed until the old bridge (from which the town takes its name) was built in the early part of the 15th century.

Twm carried out his duties around the town for many years until one day a mentally deranged man climbed onto the stone pillar outside *Y Garreg* and began haranguing the passers-by. Soon quite a crowd had gathered which in turn soon attracted Twm to the scene. On his arrival he promptly ordered the man to come down, which the latter flatly refused to do. Being a large and powerful fellow he also successfully resisted Twm’s attempts to remove him from his perch by force. Returning to the Police Station to collect his poker, Twm returned and laid about the fellow with it until he had succeeded dislodging him from the stone. The latter nevertheless continued to struggle until Twm used his poker to knock him senseless with a blow to the head.

This was just too much for one bystander, who remonstrated with the Constable for using such a dangerous weapon in this manner, whereupon Twm turned on him and in the altercation that followed went to use his weapon on this man as well. Neatly disarming him with one hand, the fellow dealt the constable such a blow with the fist of the other that Twm ended up sprawling in the mud. Vowing he would summon him in court, Twm stormed off back to his station empty handed.

The case was heard in the Police Court in the old Town Hall which predated the one we all remember which stood on the site of the present Post Office. This older one was erected where the cenotaph now stands in Dunraven Place. In his defence the accused man duly produced Twm's poker which he had taken from him in the struggle. Not only did the Magistrates dismiss the case, Twm was either censured or dismissed from office for using such a dangerous and illegal weapon in the course of his duty. Not long afterwards a John Loosemore was appointed as the new Town Constable, and in 1841 became one of the batch of newly enrolled Police Officers that comprised the newly formed Glamorgan Constabulary.

The disgraced Twm was initially appointed as the Town Crier, but was replaced by a Benjamin Gronow who in turn was replaced not long afterwards when he got into an altercation with a customer at The Ship Hotel and used his bell to knock his opponent senseless! Twm meanwhile had been appointed as the keeper of the town's common pound in which stray animals were impounded. He lived in a thatched cottage alongside it for the rest of his life but the nick-name "Twm Pwcar" stuck with him to the end of his days!



The Sunnyside standing stone, companion to the one that once stood in Queen Street.