

Delegate report on the second International Police Museums' Conference 2008

Royal New Zealand Police College Wellington, NZ

19th – 23rd February 2008

In 2006, the NZ Police Museum team chose the museum's centenary to host the second International Police Museum's Conference. The aim of the conference was to create tangible advances, such as networking, to support professional development for police and other museums, both in New Zealand and abroad.

The museum was also given approval to host the conference at the Royal New Zealand College, where they were able to use the college's accommodation and conference facilities.

With funding and the venue in place, the next task was to locate and contact as many police museums as possible; a challenging task with no network or association of police museums. The NZ team used embassies, Interpol and international police liaison officers to assist them in their quest.

I heard about the conference after making initial contact with Kamaya Yates, the museum manager in January 2007. I decided if I could secure funding I would attend, as it was a fantastic opportunity to represent the UK and GMP whilst providing an invaluable platform upon which our museum could develop and nurture future partnerships, building on the contacts made. I was fortunate to obtain funding from the North West Federation and the Police Historical Society, which helped me to afford the remaining amount. Unfortunately some museums expressed a desire to attend but were not given the necessary financial support or didn't know where to look for financial help.

The aim for the conference was relatively modest in that Kamaya and her team hoped to have more delegates attend the conference than the first one, held in Hungary, and in this they succeeded.

There were 25 delegates from 10 countries, including keynote speakers and the NZ museum team.

The conference theme was 'Strategic Engagement.' In order to advance as a Police Museum we all share the same view – we must align our museums with the goals of our police forces in order to promote long-term sustainability. We must ensure we are representative of policing today as well as policing in the past and that we remain relevant and consistent to our mission statements:

'The purpose of the GMP Museum & Archives is to use its collections and resources to inspire, educate and enlighten as wide a range of the public as possible, with regards to both the historical development of the police service in Greater Manchester and also the current roles and responsibilities of GMP.'

The conference attendance proved that the theme was a relevant and pertinent. It was interesting for example, to discover the diverse range of management and ownership of the museums. GMP sits in a similar structure to the museums in NZ and Victoria, Australia. As Ross McNeill (Assistant Director for Corporate Communications for Victoria Police) said:

'The directional, management and structural comparative analysis was a rare opportunity and we discovered a closeness between some areas that was unexpected, particularly GMP.'

The conference programme included a discussion to ascertain whether there would be support for the establishment of an International Police Museum Association. As New Zealand has one national police force, the benefits of an international association are obvious, but also for force museums such as GMP where it is easy to get isolated and disengaged from the museum world.

Conclusion:

I think the organisers will agree that the results of the conference were worth the hard labour. Everyone involved benefited in some way from the conference and the opportunity it provided for networking and sharing best practice, which will assist us all with our professional development.

There were many suggestions of innovative ways to strategically engage with stakeholders/ core audiences. Thinking laterally to ensure relevancy with a youth audience was demonstrated by the Royal Malaysian Police Museum.

Laurie Baty's (senior director of museum programmes) experience of the creation of the National Law Enforcement Museum in Washington DC demonstrates that if you can identify and fulfil a need in your community, you can find momentum and funds to support a new project.

Lisa Jones (Curator of the Queensland Police Museum) stressed the importance of object significance in strategic engagement for museums. The establishment of object significance with the right people in charge of acquisition ensures the collection is valued and reflects our organisations.

It was decided that an International Police Museum Association would be a valuable asset, the difficulties faced by Kamaya and her team in contacting museums for the conference highlighted the need for such an association.

On a personal level I achieved all the learning outcomes I set out to, the conference provided me with an opportunity to meet professionals from the same field, from across the globe, with similar mindsets and goals. Staying in the college also enabled me to gain first-hand experience of the daily lives of the police recruits and training.

I raised the awareness of GMP and the work of the museum, shared event, activity, education, outreach, conservation ideas etc.

Since I've been back I feel like I've been non-stop....with the help of a student from Manchester University we've started to re-catalogue the International uniform we have and we aim to establish object significance within our collections. This in turn is helping us to re-interpret our International Gallery, which is exhibiting a new temporary display celebrating Commonwealth Day 08 and highlighting the police uniform we have from across the Commonwealth. The contacts I made during the conference enabled us to use their support in creating this display, notably with NZ,

Australia and Canada and America, who we have been working with in loaning out a Peeler photograph for use in the new Law Enforcement Museum.

Conference Feedback:

'Its stimulating and thought provoking, educative aspect; learning of new techniques and discovering via sharing with international colleagues that many issues/ problems are generic to all; participation – everyone got involved'

'Broad range of topics and attendees; time off to engage with other museums/ activities'

'The chance to meet other people and the fact that people travelled from across the globe – a huge achievement'

'Excellent opportunity to network with colleagues who have same collections and associated issues such as staff, money and resources; sharing of knowledge'
'The free flow of information and knowledge across the delegates – the conference allowed and encouraged this to happen'

'The ability to discuss issues held in common with a group of peers; meeting, debating, sharing approaches, learning about overseas developments, tackling differences of philosophy, and building understandings'

'The opportunity to network with many different types of police museums, learn what they were doing, how they approached their subject matter, defined their audience etc. I think developing an association is a wonderful idea and this conference provided the opportunity to put that idea into motion. From there, it will make it easier to open up a discussion about international standards, artefact description standards etc. On the event side, I thought the welcoming ceremony was wonderful and the centenary dinner very enjoyable. It was great to see the senior support for the NZ Police Museum'

'The opportunity that the conference provided to engage with relevant personnel from other police museums, which gave valuable insights into global development trends in the management of police museums. The presentations given by keynote speakers and delegates were useful and interesting'

'We can make contact and communicate with the experts from the world who are working in the same field'

'The participative characteristic of 2008 conference was a key differentiator from operating/ working in our individual 'silos.' We connected face-to-face and found so many similarities and collaborative potential. It is imperative we keep the momentum going – in today's global environment, it'd be really sad if we couldn't'