

CRIME PREVENTION MATTERS

Doing something about crime

You only have to witness the almost cult fitness programmes to prevent ill health in our society, to realise that for most people, prevention is better than cure. There is nothing different about crime and its equally unwanted effects on our way of life. For too long, people have accepted high crime levels as something that just have to be lived with. In recent years however, thinking has changed: we don't have to accept crime and we can do something about it.

In 1829 the first Metropolitan Police Order stated: *'It should be understood, at the outset, that the principle objective to be attained is the prevention of crime.'* This was further reiterated by Sir Richard Mayne when he wrote 'The first duty of a Constable is always to prevent the commission of a crime.'

So much for the philosophy, but what has happened in practice as police forces have been established across the whole country in the last two centuries? In the inter-war years, very little thought was given to crime prevention. The first Senior Officer to realise the value of a public relations policy was undoubtedly Captain W.J. Hutchinson CBE, then Chief Constable of Brighton. In March 1949, an exhibition of crime prevention was staged in Brighton which was followed by a similar effort at Birkenhead late in the same year. Before this there had been localised campaigns including a notable one in Sussex in 1943 when 'posters, limericks, film flashes, tableaux' and other means were used in an effort to educate the public.

The only nationally organised crime prevention event was held in 1950. The idea came in a report from Scotland Yard that in Sweden, insurance companies collaborated with the police to maintain a permanent crime prevention advisory bureau. Insurance companies in this country donated £2,500 towards an exhibition on crime prevention. It was hoped that these campaigns could continue from year to year, but due to the need for economy in public expenditure, this did not prove possible. In the early 1950s the City of

London, Shropshire and a few other Forces began to take an active interest in crime prevention methods and such was their impact on the police service that in June 1954 a Working Group on Crime Prevention Methods was set up.

However, throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the police's efforts to develop crime prevention were hampered, not because of a lack of will, but rather as a result of the public's prime expectation on them to maintain the Queen's Peace. Despite these problems it was recognised in the early 1960s that there was a need for formal training in crime prevention and this resulted in the setting up of the Home Office Crime Prevention Centre back in 1963 at Stafford.

It was the first of its kind and was immediately successful. Its reputation spread fast and wide, so much so that in 1971 a member of staff was asked to go to Louisville, Kentucky, to help start the first crime prevention centre in the United States; indeed, a member of that Institute's directing staff is currently being hosted at the Centre, and a very strong liaison with the American counterpart continues to this day.

In one respect the Centre became a victim of its own success. The founding formula worked so well that there was little incentive to change it more than marginally; the courses continued to concentrate largely on the physical security aspects of crime prevention - 'locks, bolts and bars'. When Philip Veater, now Chief Superintendent and Deputy Director of the Centre, was sent on a refresher course in 1981, he found the syllabus had hardly changed since 1970, when he had first attended on the standard course. Meanwhile, Louisville was progressing rapidly, introducing Neighbourhood Watch and such new concepts as environmental design long before its counterpart in the UK. Perhaps this is why a certain government minister, not realising the extent of the changes that were taking place referred to crime prevention as 'worthy but dull'. Hopefully, he wouldn't say that now.

Crime prevention is now seen not only as worthy but as vital as an alternative to the fortress society. The world of crime prevention is changing;

for example, five years ago an 'Architectural Liaison Officer' would have been laughed off the premises. Designing crime prevention measures into new and existing buildings, defensible space, real and symbolic barriers, are an attempt to apply research to practice. Teaching methods, too, have changed dramatically. Students used to sit in rigid rows reminiscent of the schoolroom and only crime prevention officers were considered capable of lecturing, regardless of whether or not they had any training experience. Now the Centre is pulling in experienced trainers, whose specialisation isn't necessarily in this area, but are able to offer complimentary skills and the classes themselves are far more participatory and interactive than they used to be. The Centre insists on a scientific, problem-solving approach: identify the problem, match a solution to it, intervene by introducing the solutions, monitor the effect over a long period and evaluate it at the end.

Members of directing staff are seconded from police forces all over the country and are responsible not only for training of crime prevention officers at the Centre but also for taking the philosophy of crime prevention to Detective Training Schools, the Police Staff College and other agencies involved in preventive management of crime. In addition to the courses arranged within the Centre (such as the standard and the refresher courses, both for 22 students and lasting four weeks and one week respectively) and the occasional two to five day residential seminars held at the Centre to cater for specialist subjects, the Centre has arranged courses for those in banking, building societies, the security industry, commerce, architecture, the insurance industry and police trainers. On top of all this the Centre is committed to developing a comprehensive database of initiatives, whether undertaken by the police or other agencies. Recognition of best practice is the first step toward doing something about crime.

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