

**AN INITIATIVE TO TACKLE
DISTRACTION BURGLARY
OFFENCES**



Derbyshire Constabulary

We Care



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Ask For

Your Ref.

Our Ref. HQX/DCC/JDT

14th July, 1999

Dear Sir,

Re. The Tilley Award

I refer to the enclosed application in relation to the above.

I am extremely proud of the results Operation Liberal has achieved and I am certain the reason for this is the research and problem solving approach made by the team.

I believe the paper sets out the methodical approach and sound investigative techniques making it worthy of this application and I commend it to you.

Yours faithfully,

D.F. Dovaston
Deputy Chief Constable



ERGS IN PEOPLE

*If we will answer letters within 14 days.
Where this is not possible, an explanation will be given for any delay*

Constabulary Headquarters, Butterley Hall, RIPLEY. Derbyshire. DE5 3RS



Awarded for excellence

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OPERATION LIBERAL

AN INITIATIVE TO TACKLE DISTRACTION BURGLARY

ABSTRACT

Divisional staff identified that professional teams of travelling criminals were committing distraction burglary offences throughout Derbyshire.

These offences were specifically targeting vulnerable, elderly victims stealing mainly cash. Little evidence was being recovered from the crime scenes and no useful identification evidence was developed.

Using the PAT model the victim's features were analysed and a victim profile was compiled. Offence locations were examined for common features, Analysis of methods used to gain entry has proved useful when addressing the prevention strategy in allowing leverage to be applied to specific utility companies asked to support our initiative.

Local investigators uncovered links to a group of domiciled travellers resident in Derby. Due to their area of operation and skilful criminality the assistance of the National Crime Squad (NCS) was sought. It became apparent that this type of offending fell just below the acceptance criteria of NCS operations and the target package was rejected.

A regional consortium was the next option considered as the initial analysis revealed the scale and geographical spread of the offences. The six (now eight) forces with NCIS jointly compiled the Memorandum of Understanding. (See enclosures.)

A review of current practices within Derbyshire identified a number of areas for concern. The written Force policy in respect of these offences was being breached. Further analysis identified areas of best practice and identified the difficulties in researching regional offences using disparate recording systems.

A standardised crime recording system was put in place utilising the facilities of the H.O.L.M.E.S database.

Staffordshire Police on behalf of the consortium agreed to co-ordinate all forensic evidence. A bundle of active travelling offenders fingerprints was compiled to be checked against all recovered crime scene marks.

All forces have enjoyed the benefits of access to both the NAFIS and AFR fingerprint systems. Cambridgeshire Constabulary allowed their unique palm print database to be utilised on behalf of the consortium.

This type of co-operation is thought to be the first time that Forensic evidence has been co-ordinated across Force boundaries for an offence category rather than a series linked to a single offender.

A national media campaign supported by the Home Office, ACPO, Local Government Association is also being devised.

The impact of this initiative has been closely monitored and regularly reviewed. (See enclosures).

Andrew Picken

Detective Constable

Derbyshire Constabulary

13^h July 1999

OPERATION LIBERAL

AN INITIATIVE TO TACKLE DISTRACTION BURGLARY

During late 1997 members of a divisional crime task group with special responsibility for the investigation of dwelling burglaries realised that a major problem was occurring in their territorial area within Derbyshire.

They were being inundated with a series of distraction type burglary offences. These offences, sometimes known as artifice or distraction burglary were identified as targeting mainly elderly victims in the northern area of Derbyshire, around Chesterfield.

A variety of guises and tales were being used but in the main the culprits were purporting to represent the water board. Having gained entry to the premises the victim was being kept busy by being asked to monitor the flow of water, watch taps for change in water colour etc. This allowed the offender(s) to search the premises removing jewellery and cash from the victim. All attempts to identify the offenders failed.

The officers investigating these matters realised the devastating impact of these offences on the victims. Entire life savings were being stolen. The effect of the offences being extremely detrimental to the health and quality of life of those offended against.

Initial work on the problem identified a group of domiciled "travellers" who were known to travel extensively throughout the UK. Over a number of years a major grouping of 'Travellers' had begun to use the Derby area for their winter resting ground. The local police other than minor public order and drink related matters had encountered few problems. There was little criminal intelligence available due to the groups relatively low profile within the area.

The use of the term "travelling criminal" to describe those highlighted in this document is in no way designed to be derogatory to a racial group. In my opinion it best describes the life-style of this particular group of professional criminals who travel to offend.

Two of the investigators decided that the problem in their area merited a co-ordinated approach. They recognised that the parochial nature of policing made this a difficult problem to resolve.

There has been a culture within the police service that travelling criminals are too difficult to deal with. This idea is fostered by the stance maintained on arrest. False names and identities are commonly used to avoid the course of justice.

The professional nature of the travellers offending ensured that if arrested their period of detention would be littered with procedural difficulties. Adolescents would claim to be juveniles and request the assistance of Social Services. Female adolescents knew that, at this time, there was no secure accommodation for girl's aged between 15 and 17 years in Derbyshire. An inability to apply any form of physical restraint by Social Services of those with appalling records of bail breaches ensured that they were able to walk away from their carers, even when remanded into custody by the courts.

A conference was organised and groups of interested persons from within Derbyshire and other affected forces were represented. It rapidly became apparent that the series of offences being suffered in the north of the county were replicated in adjoining forces and divisions.

An assessment of the level of offending was made and it was discovered that Derbyshire residents had suffered 186 offences in the first 6 months of 1998. This was deemed to be unacceptable and a working group, under the operation title of 'LIBERAL' was developed.

The aims of the operation were identified as follows: -

- To prepare an accurate and factual target package enabling the National Crime Squad to accept the Operation LIBERAL suspects as targets.
- To research relevant crimes in Derbyshire to enable effective interrogation of suspects and investigations should the NCS arrest any of the targets.
- To continually update and disseminate intelligence on the targets.

Financial analysis of NCIS disclosures made on the identified subjects proved highly enlightening establishing that as a group they had cash turnover in excess of E2,000,000 in the previous 2 years. None had any obvious means of employment.

On the 22 May 1998 a crime conference facilitated by Detective Superintendent Kelvyn ASHBY occurred involving all members of the Operation LIBERAL team, surrounding forces and representative of both NCIS and the National Crime Squad.

The decision was taken that as all targets were known to reside in Derby, Derbyshire Police would take a lead role in the investigation. It was accepted that the problem of distraction burglary itself was a national one and logistically beyond the capability of the Derbyshire Constabulary acting alone.

Each organisation was tasked to research its own problems with the intention that they would be in a position to interview any arrested suspects. Liaison officers for each force were appointed. A target package was prepared and submitted to the National Crime Squad identifying 7 main suspects, all of whom resided in the Derby area. This package did not meet the acceptance criteria and was rejected.

As part of the initial 'scanning' of the problem it was decided to create a database utilising the HOLMES system. All 1998 Derbyshire bogus official distraction burglaries were examined. Those with more than one solvability factor were re-examined.

A review of force procedures and protocols was undertaken as part of the debrief procedure. It identified the difficulty faced in effectively investigating these offences as: -

- Witnesses are elderly (occasionally confused 1 shocked)
- No witnesses to the actual burglar (often not seen)
- Travelling offenders
- Cash only stolen (identifiable property left at scene)
- The offenders are forensically aware — leaving little trace material
- Lack of actionable/current criminal intelligence

The problem of repeat victimisation was identified, with numerous instances recorded of multiple-victimisation.

It was recommended that a small group of officers maintain the database. It was also identified that any police response would be greatly assisted by the provision of a structured media campaign designed to draw attention to the scale of the problem and publicise the methods used by the offenders. They would also provide information on the typical profile of a travelling offender and give up-to-date advice on crime prevention matters.

The initial work performed in identifying the scale of the problem within Derbyshire had hit a cord with several senior officers within the constabulary. Deputy Chief Constable Don DOVASTON decided that the problem should be looked at again in August 1998.

The enquiry was still called LIBERAL but was now headed by Detective Superintendent Kelvyn ASHBY as Senior Investigating Officer. His deputy was Detective Inspector Pat PARRY.

The earlier analysis of the problem ensured that the 'scanning' stage of problem solving was relatively painless. A considerable database of recorded crime was on the system, allowing a much more refined crime pattern analysis study to be performed. Time and dates of offences, together with favourite ruses or lies were identified. Profiles of victims were composed. Surprisingly the youngest victim is 18 years old. The average age was found to be 81 years.

The original LIBERAL had highlighted the national nature of the problem and had identified, the offenders' ability to travel hundreds of miles in one day to commit crime. It also became apparent that the criminals were aware of the parochial nature of policing and would operate in several force areas in one day to avoid the chance of capture. (Evidence supportive of this fact has been provided anecdotally by several offenders interviewed in recent months).

Research carried out into the commission of 186 offences reported within Derbyshire between January - June 1998 revealed 6 had been detected. Similar problems were encountered during a telephone poll of surrounding forces invited to carry out a similar review. As these crimes do not form part of the key policing objectives some forces were unable to provide any figures at all regarding this type of offending.

A written force policy was in operation, clearly setting out the investigative protocols.

Analysis revealed: -

- Over 20% received no CID visit
- Over 20% did not receive a visit from Scenes of Crime Officers
- Over 20% did not benefit from a house to house canvass
- + Only 1 out of the 186 offences examined resulted in a CD fit being produced
- Half of the offences used the water board method to gain entry
- Property stolen was found to be cash in 63% of all cases. The largest single sum stolen, was £5,000.
- Over 20% of victims clearly described that the offender(s) spoke with a discernible, Irish accent.

(At a review 6 months later all the above failings had been reduced to less than 5% and the amount of CD Fits had enjoyed a 20 fold increase).

A number of forces outside Derbyshire, together with the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service were invited to attend a conference at Derbyshire Force Headquarters facilitated by Detective Superintendent ASHBY.

A regional tasking group was considered and this led to a firm commitment from 6 forces, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire & Staffordshire, to provide staff and facilities to engage in a regional consortium designed to tackle the problem of distraction burglary.

This resulted in the compilation of the document known as the Memorandum of Understanding. All forces signed up to the document and agreed to adhere to its principles. (*See enclosures*)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

To use the combined resources of the NCIS, the NCS and six (now eight) constituent forces to investigate distraction burglary offences with a view to reducing the incidence and increasing detection's.

The above to be achieved by: -

- Amalgamating crime recording and intelligence systems in order to identify series of offences and offenders
- Compiling 'Best Practice' on the method of investigation of distraction offences, obtaining 'Best Evidence' and intelligence
- Targeting offenders
- Using static/physical observations and mobile surveillance
- Making the best use of informants
- Carrying out co-ordinated arrests and seizing the assets of offenders

The success of the operation will be measured by the following:

- The level of offences committed across the constituent forces
- The level of detected offences across the constituent forces and offences detected elsewhere by the 'LIBERAL' team
- The arrests made by the 'LIBERAL' team

The nature of the problem was the pattern of offending against one of the most vulnerable sections of the community. The team were being faced daily with instances of the entire life savings of victims being stolen. Often household insurance policies failed to cover the sum stolen. The debilitating nature of these offences was again seen on regular occasions, when the victims were so stressed and shocked after the crime that they required medical treatment.

It is felt that there have been several occasions when victims of these offences have died prematurely following the distress and anguish caused by their abuse.

The research revealed a high incidence of repeat victimisation. Anecdotal evidence from offenders indicated that there is a trade within the criminal community for information identifying possible elderly/confused targets.

The LIBERAL team, with excellent support from senior management of the constabulary, accepted the supposition provided by staff at the lowest investigative level that, albeit difficult, these types of offences merited further concentrated police action.

The victims were in the main elderly, vulnerable and defenceless. The methods used by the offenders preyed on this vulnerability and the failing sensory faculties of the victims. This type' of offence falls squarely into Home Office and local objectives regarding dwelling house burglary. The potential for serious loss or harm to the victims was also a major factor in this decision.

In my opinion, it is to the great credit of the Derbyshire Constabulary that the problem and all subsequent efforts to address it have risen from the rank and file investigators tasked with dealing with domestic burglary. They have provided information from the 'bottom up'. This has been addressed by middle management and then driven to the point reached now.

I have attempted to illustrate the ongoing problem-solving model involved in a complex enquiry of this sort by providing a chronology of the investigation so far. (See enclosures)

The overall ownership of the enquiry remains with the Senior Investigating Officer, Detective Superintendent Kelvyn ASHBY. However, it is a feature of the team ethic encouraged that all members of the staff are enthusiastic and well motivated. Each person, including support staff, has been able to offer ideas and input into the strategic planning involved. Each investigator is tasked with developing identified target packages in order to ensure effective investigation or arrest. The interrogation of the substantial databases enables a regional perspective to the offending patterns used by the targets. The co-ordinated approach of the forensic staff ensures that any good work of the scene examiners is fully maximised-to its potential.

One of the first LIBERAL arrests in Derbyshire followed a single fingerprint identification on a man already in prison. He was arrested and interviewed but was uncooperative. The background research had revealed so many similarities that he was charged with 7 separate distraction burglaries using evidence of similar facts, He subsequently pleaded guilty to all matters receiving **4½ years imprisonment.**

The revealing of multiple offences and unveiling of many false identities have ensured that persuasive arguments are made to the courts enabling successful remand applications. This practice has had an overall effect on the number of offences committed.

The Clerks to the Courts and Senior officials within the Crown Prosecution Service in the consortium area have been made aware of and are assisting Operation LIBERAL. They are aware of its covert nature until August 1999.

The LIBERAL ethic has been found in the mutual assistance provided between different force financial investigation units. It is also a matter of pride that surveillance capacity has been provided across the consortium at a moments notice by usually rival teams. There are numerous examples of surveillance teams from one force operating within another area.

It has been suggested that enthusiasm for the task provides a reservoir of good will to be tapped. Although difficult to quantify scientifically there is a general feeling of being involved in a worthwhile enterprise that is having a genuine impact and effect on the level of offending against some of the most vulnerable persons in society.

As an operational detective I have previously been tasked to investigate these types of offences as part of my usual duties. Having ensured that all investigative steps possible have been undertaken I have reluctantly re-prioritised and moved onto other enquiries. The LIBERAL team is allowed the time and facilities to thoroughly and professionally investigate incidents, taking a regional approach, which better mirrors that of the offenders.

I use the term incidents rather than crimes as it has been discovered that on several occasions the best evidence is obtained from elderly victims who have rebuffed an offender's approach. These incidents were historically never made the subject of a formal crime report but are recorded elsewhere as a suspicious incident. Systems have been devised where daily trawls of the respective Command & Control computers reveal these reports to Police. Evidence obtained is often of greater evidential benefit due to the clarity of thought of the potential victim. A review of the amount of recorded crime during the initial stages of the operation revealed an increase in reports. This is felt to be that officers were being encouraged to adopt a more ethical approach to crime recording and the crime figures reflected this.

Each office or communication room within a consortium force is tasked with notifying the Operation LIBERAL Incident Room of the existence of a crime or suspicious incident. These are then plotted on a white board. This simple, yet effective system ensures a regional perspective on a daily basis allowing immediate analysis of a developing crime

Within Derbyshire a 'drop down' system has been placed on the Command & Control system which provides a task list which must be completed fully prior to closing an incident. This has assisted in standardising the initial response.

The Operation LIBERAL Incident Room is able to offer any member of the consortium a number of research facilities. We have currently on the HOLMES database: -

- 2629 Messages
- 4033 Other documents
- 7878 Nominal entries
- 3152 Vehicles & allied intelligence items

This level of information provides an excellent analytical tool being instrumental in providing links to offences committed across great geographical areas.

Within the incident room staff have devised a variety of databases which offer practical assistance to any investigating officer. They provide facilities to research known telephone numbers and addresses. The HOLMES database was found to be labour intensive when dealing with vehicle sightings so a separate parallel system was devised to observe the transient nature of our targets movements by monitoring known vehicles. A full-time civilian analyst has adapted this system to allow the information to be displayed graphically using i2 software. The practical benefits of this regional system are immense.

Since its inception in April some 7880 separate entries regarding vehicle sightings have been collated. Patrol officers are regularly tasked to monitor the movement of suspect vehicles. The results are then fed into the system.

This system was discussed at a National meeting. It now has information fed into it by all our consortium forces and 7 other forces outside it. This provides a snapshot picture of all travelling criminals vehicles on a geographical band across the UK, from Wales to Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire.

The same analyst responsible for this innovation has undertaken to produce an album of known and active travelling distraction burglars. He, together with a Nottinghamshire colleague, has compiled a CD ROM, which includes its own operating system (designed to be bobby proof). The CD ROM can be loaded into a laptop computer and taken into

any area where identification may become an issue. This innovation has considerable benefit to all operational staff.

It also contains all CD Fit impressions obtained thus far. Research is being undertaken to identify if software exists that would automatically select a known photograph from the album due to its similarity to points obtained in the CD Fit. This is an ongoing project.

The use of financial investigation in this field has been of great value to the operation providing focus and impetus for particular targets. It is hoped that the effects of these investigations will be revealed by the seizing of £177,000 identified as the assets of a 19-year-old, unemployed, youth based in Derby. He was recently sentenced to 4½ years imprisonment for 12 offences of distraction burglary in 3 consortium areas. Close liaison with other agencies provided us with evidence of an attempt to lie about his age to defeat the confiscation provisions. Our joint approach prevented this.

The National Crime Intelligence Service has allocated a single officer to the enquiry who has assisted in opening channels of communication with other countries and Police areas.

It was soon identified that there was a considerable pool of good will towards our efforts from officers at patrol level, both CID and uniform, In order to capitalise on this it was decided to promote the facilities available for operational officers. To this end we produced a publication called the Distraction Times. It aims to be a chatty, informal document designed to promote best practice. It identifies current targets and in the section known as 'Teaching Grandma to Suck Eggs' provides practical information regarding searches etc. It has been very well received.

Within Derbyshire a website has been developed for use on the Force Intranet Computer System. It is accessible by all members of the force.

Rather than just relying on written policies and protocols which can be ignored by busy operational staff we have obtained the permission of all Divisional Commanders within Derbyshire to provide all Local Intelligence Officers (LIO) across the Force with a 2 day attachment to the incident room.

A program has been devised with instruction given on all our facilities and databases. Each LIO is then tasked to cascade this information to the staff within his or her section.

Each is allowed access to a wealth of research material, which is being held in the incident room. Each completes a feedback questionnaire on completion of the attachment. These have so far been very positive. Additionally input from these officers has provided new material for inclusion in the LIBERAL package.

A policy has recently been introduced to utilise the L.I.O's within Derbyshire in an effort to reduce, or prevent repeat victimisation. Each LIO on receipt of a distraction burglary report is responsible for tasking a local officer with taking on the role of victim liaison. The tasked officer will be required to visit the victim, give appropriate and practical guidance; using relatives if necessary to prevent further offences. This tasking method was devised as it was felt that the LIO would be best able to identify the most suitable officer within their section for this sensitive role.

A further innovation being researched is a document detailing basic crime protection advice, which includes photographs of all known identification cards and a contact number for those Utilities using a password system. It will include a picture of a man and a woman detailing the areas of the body that the Police will need to know to describe the person involved. It will include a colour swatch so that standardised descriptions of colours will be possible. The document will be delivered by Neighbourhood Watch Groups, Age Concern, Meals on Wheels etc. It will be available in doctor's surgeries and hospital waiting rooms.

The release of this document is planned to coincide with the proposed National Media Campaign. This strategy had been considered at the outset of the enquiry but it was felt that to maximise the impact on the intended targets a covert approach would be beneficial.

The idea of a National Crime Prevention Campaign required support from a range of organisations. The multi-agency nature of the proposal required funding and support at the highest level. A successful approach was made to the ACPO Crime Committee who were supportive of the idea and set up a working group to prepare a long term plan.

A copy of the initial action plan is attached. This aspect of the problem is still being addressed.

A review of all English and Welsh Forces has been undertaken investigating different forces' response to the problem of distraction burglary. A number of forces were unable

to provide any assessment of crime figures, as they were incapable of identifying this specific type of burglary from within the overall statistics.

It is difficult to assess the overall costs of the operation. Derbyshire as the lead force in the consortium have perhaps invested the greatest time and effort over the longest period of time. The costs to the Derbyshire Constabulary, excluding wages, are assessed at £17,000 over 8 months. The Courts awarded a vehicle seized during an investigation to the Derbyshire Police Authority to be used for Policing purposes. This vehicles addition to the fleet is estimated to have saved the Constabulary twelve thousand pounds.

The detection rate within Derbyshire has increased from 4% in October 1998 to 31% in June 1999.

The number of reported offences has dropped to 16 in June 1999 from a level last year of 31.

It is a matter of pride that to date there have been NO distraction burglaries within Derbyshire as a whole during the first 13 days in July 1999.

The consortium rate has improved to 14% from 5% 12 months ago.

Please see attached performance indicators and graphs in the enclosures.

I am unable to provide copies of various material produced to assist and educate staff in a more effective approach to investigating distraction burglary because the material contains sensitive information that identifies particular individuals. All of the persons detailed are awaiting trial. Data Protection Act provisions apply.

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