

Home Office Police Research Group Briefing Note



ARMED ROBBERY: TWO POLICE RESPONSES

Police Research Group - Crime Detection and Prevention Series Paper 78
by Roger Matthews

Summary

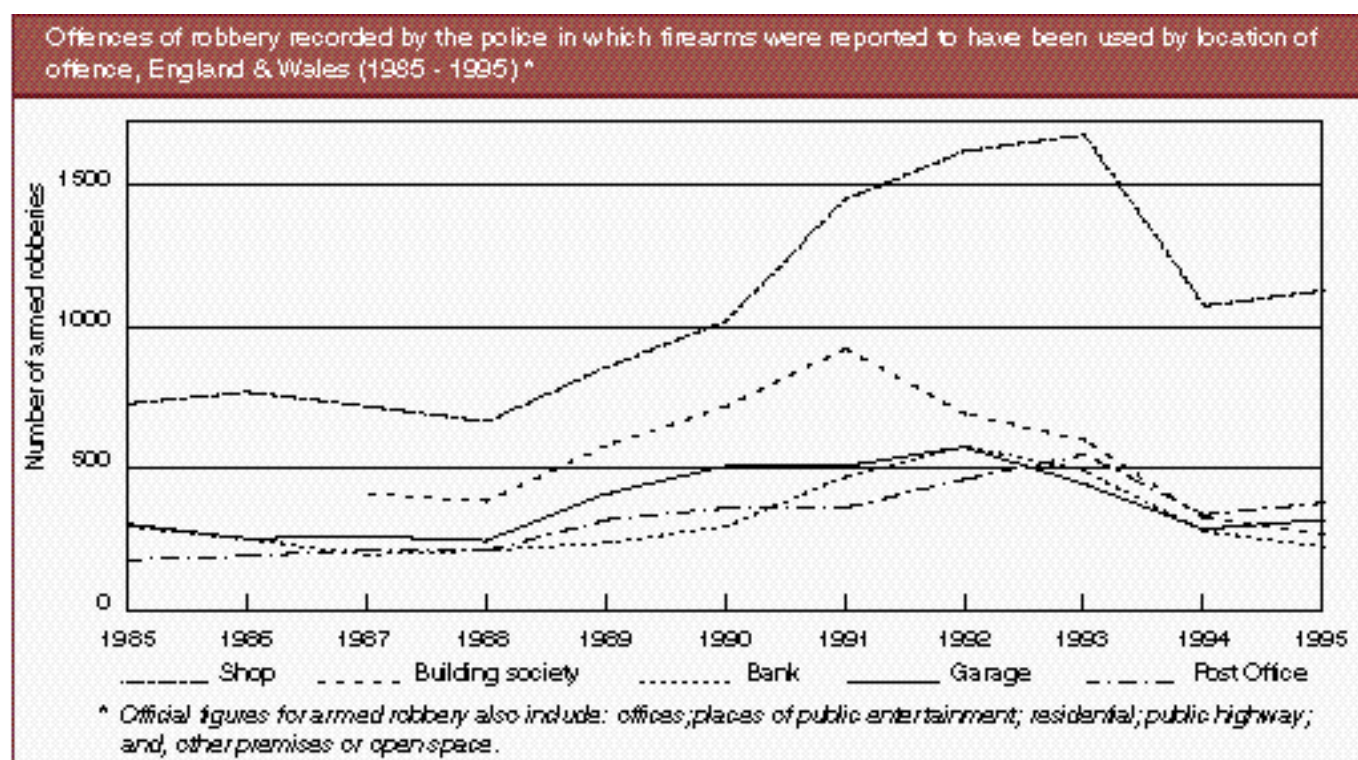
The report summarises what is known about the extent and nature of armed robbery nationally, highlighting the reductions in the number of these crimes in 1994 and 1995. It goes on to examine the policing strategies in two very different forces - the Metropolitan Police and South Yorkshire Police - showing how the police response can be tailored to the particular environment and local circumstances. The value of proactive police work and the use of informants is clearly demonstrated in the Metropolitan Police, while the speed and quality of response to incidents, using local information in interviewing suspects was important in South Yorkshire.

Main findings

The extent and nature of armed robbery

In recent years there have been substantial changes in the incidence and nature of armed robbery.

- Between 1988 and 1993 the number of armed robberies in England and Wales rose steadily from 2,688 to 5,918 offences. This was followed by a reduction of nearly a third (31%) in 1994 to 4,104 offences, and a further decrease of 3% in 1995 (3,963).



Note: Up to and including 1985, robberies in building societies were included under banks, offices or other premises. In 1986, all such robberies were included under 'other premises'. From 1987 onwards, building societies are shown separately.

- There is some evidence of a shift in armed robbery targets in the early 1990s and again in 1995 from banks, cash in transit and building societies (band 1 targets) to more vulnerable targets such as shops, garages and off licences (band 2).

The most significant change, however, has been the dramatic decrease in both band 1 and band 2 targets in 1994. Possible reasons for this include:

- the police adopting a proactive strategy towards armed robbery in many areas;
- improved situational crime prevention measures such as better security screens and CCTV;
- professional criminals turning to 'softer' targets where guns were not needed to effect a robbery;
- diversion of criminal activity to the drugs trade.

The police response

The report focuses on two police force areas - the Metropolitan Police District and South Yorkshire - providing an examination of a specialist unit - the Flying Squad - and a non-specialist CID unit in South Yorkshire.

While there are clear differences in the number and types of robberies and offenders in the two locations - with a greater number of professional robbers and offences in London - the research identified a number of issues which had significance in both force areas. These involved the relation between proactive and reactive strategies, systems of communication, and changes in the selection of targets, as well as issues associated with the management and organisation of the different units.

The study was centrally concerned with how armed robberies are detected. While recognising that it is often a

combination of different elements which make an arrest possible, the research identified the single most important factor for each case. The results in the table reveal both commonalities and differences in the two force areas, with the Flying Squad employing a more proactive response, with substantial use of informants. South Yorkshire on the other hand relied more on the speed and quality of response and on using their local knowledge in interviewing suspects.

Principal reasons for arrest and/or detection		
	Metropolitan Police % of cases	South Yorkshire Police % of cases
Caught at or near the scene		
Public initiated	8	2
Police initiated	13	23
Subsequent police investigation		
Video/photo	6	9
Informant	40	17
Forensic	7	2
Surveillance	4	9
Admitted offence while in custody	4	36
Protracted police enquiries (3 months and over)	19	2
Total	% exceeds 100 due to rounding	100

Points for action

In developing their response to armed robbery, this study suggests that forces should:

- examine the pattern and nature of armed robbery locally to consider whether a specialist unit is appropriate and to determine its structure and terms of reference;
- develop systems to improve the flow of information, particularly through the cultivation of informants;
- develop local, regional and national databases of known and suspected robbers which might facilitate the linking of robberies carrying similar 'trade marks';
- extend crime prevention activities, particularly in relation to band 2 targets, to reduce their attractiveness to potential offenders;
- analyse repeat victimisation patterns to help identify vulnerable targets and develop strategic crime prevention measures;
- encourage the further development, deployment and maintenance of good quality video equipment in all commercial premises;
- review the deployment of armed response vehicles and develop methods for increasing speed of response in different localities;
- improve communication and co-ordination between forces and divisions, in sharing information and in the development of investigations.

Other related PRG research papers

- Crime Prevention Unit Paper 9: Preventing Robberies at Sub-Post Offices: An Evaluation of a Security Initiative. (Currently out of print but it is hoped to provide an Acrobat file early 1997)
- Crime Prevention Unit Paper 14: The Prevention of Robbery at Building Society Branches.

*Papers in the Police Research Group Crime Prevention Unit, Crime Detection & Prevention Series, Police Research Series, Special Interest Series and other PRG ad hoc publications are available free of charge from:
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