

Abstract

GRAFFITI

Criminal Damage **or** Wall Art ?

INTRODUCTION

Guernsey is the second largest of the Channel Islands, home to approximately 60,000 residents and some 1,200,000 tourists during an average year.

Image is everything to the Tourist industry and the presence of graffiti is a rarity, due in part to the high density of population and lack of available sites for graffiti artists to indulge in their past-time.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

During April 1998, a large number of privately and commercially owned properties were subject of damage by graffiti 'tags' and logos being sprayed on walls. At this time the recognised P.O.P. concept was not being used in Guernsey although we had identified a recurring problem, and were dealing with it unknowingly in a similar manner.

The incidences of graffiti attacks continued throughout the early part of that year and the ongoing investigation involved Community, CID, and Street Crime Unit, resulting in the arrest of a number of juveniles which co-incided with the cessation of new graffiti attacks.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

In late 1998 Officers from Guernsey attended a P.O.P. Conference/Seminar at Bramshill, and upon returning to Guernsey instigated P.O.P. with one Officer becoming dedicated to the concept, working within the Community Policing Section.

By November 1998, instances of graffiti attacks had once again commenced and at this stage, utilising the P.O.P. concept, we looked at addressing the problem.

We were not at that time conversant with recognised problem solving tools. (SARA and PAT)

Even so we were unconsciously addressing the problem in a manner which suited our organisation. We were scanning statements and information from complainants, obtaining photographs of every known graffiti site, making enquiries with other Forces, schools, Youth clubs, etc.

RESPONSE

1. Eradicate all known graffiti with assistance of home-owners, local businesses, States departments' and agencies.
2. Identify suspects and arrange target observations.
3. Arrest of main suspect for unrelated matter brought to light similar artwork in his bedroom. He denied the offence but as if by co-incidence the graffiti attacks stopped.

IMPACT

Our response caused an immediate cessation in all reported graffiti attacks until May 2000 when two incidents were reported.

The majority of all known graffiti has been eradicated or covered over and we maintain

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Graffiti artists do not amuse householders



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by Nick Mollct

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GRAFFITI

Criminal damage or wall art ?

INTRODUCTION

Guernsey, second largest of the Channel Islands covers approximately 25 square miles, most of which is densely populated. It has a resident population in the region of 60,000, and is visited by approximately 1,200,000 tourists during an average year.

Tourism is one of the Islands main industries and the Tourist Board projects an image of a clean, tidy island with a low crime rate.

The States of Guernsey Police Force is recognised by the Home Office and operates in much the same way as any mainland force, with subtle differences brought about by our historical and geographical links with France.

Graffiti is a rarity in Guernsey, due in parts to the density of population and the lack of available secluded sites for graffiti artists to indulge their past-times.

However, during March 1998 a series of graffiti attacks on walls of houses and business premises began to take place, mainly confined to the St Peter Port parish which is in itself, the mostly densely populated area of the Island.

The graffiti discovered consisted mainly of `tags' which are identifying signatures of graffiti artists and larger logos, some of which covered entire walls of properties.

A number of complaints were received from householders and business premises, although the larger number of `tags' were not reported to us.

By the end of May 1998, six (6) offences had been recorded as crimes and a further 21 instances had been recorded at varying locations.

OBJECTIVES

It was apparent that if this trend continued a very large amount of graffiti would eventually appear and become the norm. This possibility was seen as being detrimental to;

1. the Tourist Industry,
2. individual householders some of whom could not afford to erase the logos and tags,
3. small business whose costs would rise with added expenditure of cleaning buildings,
and
4. the general environment and residents quality of life.

Our objective was clear, either identify and thereby neutralise the problem, or at the very least by some means ensure that the opportunity to cause this type of damage was removed.

SCANNING

Although recognition of P.O.P had gone ahead as a result of our attendance at the Bramshill 'POP 11 seminar in March 1998, problem solving tools (Sara and Pat) were unknowns and were not utilised at that time. However in hindsight, it seems the use of a recognised problem solving tool was being off-set by a limited structured approach to the problem.

By interviewing the victims of the Criminal Damage (graffiti) and obtaining statements of complaint, we were already scanning the problem. All Community officers were instructed to identify any graffiti on their beat areas and to indicate it on a map of the Island, as well as photographing the offending tag or logo.

CID officers and operational shift officers were notified of the Community Sections interest in these types of offences, as was the Force Intelligence Officer and all reported incidents were directed to the Community Section for enquiry and investigation.

It was recognised by all of the officers involved within the Community Section that the graffiti artist(s) would continue until they were caught but because of the erratic nature of the offenders their apprehension would rely on a lot of luck.

The incidents of graffiti continued and recognition of the fact that a larger number of incidences remained unreported, identified this as a recurring problem which required a substantial input to resolve.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

In attempting to analyse this problem (and bearing in mind the lack of Sara or similar in our organisation) we used basic tools.

A map to pin point the graffiti sites.

Crime reports to identify reported crimes for which we could interview and prepare a prosecution file.

We also identified information sources to assist us ;

The Force Intelligence officer for Intelligence

Schools; Liaison was made with the Head Teachers and subsequently Art Department Heads of all schools in the targeted area in an attempt to identify possible suspects.

CID and Operational officers for on the beat information and observations.

Custody officers for prisoner property checks re: spray paint and cans etc.

All the information was centralised initially onto a computer generated notice board shared between all community officers and secondly .hard copy reports and files were submitted to the Community Inspector for evaluation and inclusion in the enquiry.

ANALYSIS

Analysis in the first instance was being performed by the Community Inspector in conjunction with the Community Sergeant.

Several interesting points came to light as a result;

- 1) Virtually all logos and tags were similar, with the same tags appearing at most locations. (appendix 1a and 1b)
- 2) The graffiti attacks were basically confined to a specific area, stretching from one identified school, east wards into the heart of St Peter Port
- 3) Most graffiti tags were in large felt tip marker whilst most logos were done with a spray can paint.
- 4) The graffiti occurred almost exclusively at night-time, in areas concealed from CCTV or out of sight of main roads or the public
- 5) and only when the weather was fine.

It became apparent that information missing from the analysis revolved around sightings of the people involved.

Although we could identify types of medium used we could not identify where it came from.

Neither could analysis show a definite pattern to the damage.

Where tags and small logos appeared, the artists were using hit and run tactics as their input took only a few seconds.

As the enquiry has progressed it has become increasingly apparent that SARA or PAT, or some other form of proven problem solving tool would have aided our analysis greatly and was most probably the major limiting factor within the analysis.

The enquiry came to a sudden halt in July of 1998 when virtually all incidences of graffiti stopped, probably as a result of our direct involvement in speaking with a number of named suspects. It was not until November 1998 that tags and logos of the same type and style as those earlier in the year began appearing again in similar areas.

It became obvious that a repeat spree was on the way.

By this time the Guernsey Police had put into effect a P.O.P section comprising of one officer attached to the Community Section for a six month trial period.

The Community Inspector was responsible for overseeing the implementation of P.O.P. and successfully obtained a further two officers for the section in April 1999.

As the incidences of graffiti increased, Community and POP sections once again went into information gathering and analysis mode and this time came up with a slightly different result.

RESPONSE

This new wave of graffiti appeared more indiscriminate than previous and as well as walls of properties and businesses, street signs, park benches and toilets had been targeted.

Our records indicate that by the end of May 1999 at least seventy (70) new instances of graffiti had appeared and been identified, of which only nine (9) had been reported to Police.

After consultation with the Crime Prevention Officer, a recognised strategy for dealing with graffiti was put into effect and suggestions from the Urban Street Environment were implemented (see Appendix 2).

It was decided to take a practical stance and obliterate the graffiti.

This did raise the question of whether or not it would be a challenge to the graffiti artist(s) and might increase the incidences of graffiti.

On the other hand we took the decision not to notify any media of our strategy as publicity was seen as a motivating factor for further graffiti.

Our initial response was for the P.O.P officer to call on the owners of vandalised property and request that they paint over the offending tag or logo.

It was recognised that some property owners would not be disposed to do this but would not object to the officer doing it.

(It is interesting to note that there was some reluctance on the part of Force managers to support this part of the initiative.)

This met with a limited response. The people or companies who were not prepared to do so, took this stance for various reasons;

- 1) Some people were not bothered by the offending logo as they could not see it from their home.
- 2) Some residents were elderly and were not in a position to physically get rid of the graffiti.
- 3) Larger logos were deemed too labour intensive for our officers to tackle, and owners of such properties had the financial implications to contend with.

However, as suspected a number of people in this section were more than happy for us to organise the eradication of the graffiti.

It was at this point that the Community Policing / States department co-operation (which is reflected in the Crime Disorder Act 1998) came to the fore.

We initially approached B&Q whose Guernsey operation lies within the affected area. They immediately Made available to us paint and brushes for officers to use in the eradication of the graffiti and, as a result, the P.O.P officer and a group of Community officers systematically went around erasing the majority of the graffiti.

In relation to road signs which are the property of the Traffic Committee (which is a States Department), they were approached and arrangements were made for them to clear all graffiti from identified signs - this was done within a week of asking them to do so.

Approaches were also made to the States of Guernsey Housing Authority as numerous tags and logos had appeared on property belonging to them. Once again their assistance was immediate and

within 24 hours of reporting an incident of graffiti on any of their properties, their staff had been directed to attend and the graffiti had been obliterated.

The Parish Constables were notified of damage to various buildings which come under their remit and they too entered into the spirit of the task and organised the cleaning of any offending graffiti.

The project appeared to be reasonably successful with a limited amount of new graffiti appearing, until on 10th June a direct challenge appeared, spray painted onto a garage door at a prominent location. The challenge was directed at the Police and suggested that we would not be able to catch or stop the person doing the graffiti. By this time the suspects had been narrowed down considerably and P.O.P/Community officers had organised an observation point after painting over the challenging graffiti, almost certain in the knowledge that the artist would rise to the challenge.

As so often happens, a Community officer was directed to attend the home address of one of the main suspects in relation to a totally unrelated incident and whilst there, discovered art work almost identical to that being used by the graffiti artist. The enquiry progressed, involving the arrest and interview of the suspect and although no Court proceedings were able to be taken, from that date onwards until the middle of May this year, 2000, no further graffiti attacks have been reported or seen by either the public or patrolling officers.

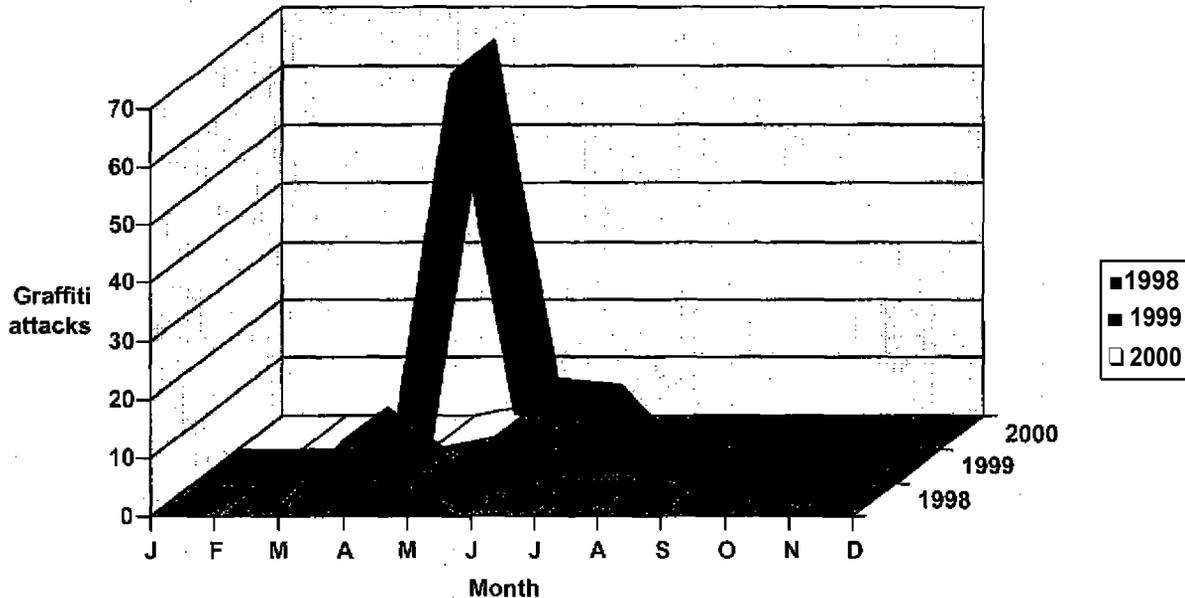
ASSESSMENT

We had originally looked at either arresting the graffiti artists or else preventing the offences from being committed, and it appears that we may have done just that, even though we have been unable to prosecute the person believed to be responsible.

From information gleaned via the FIO we can show that between July 1999 and May 2000 no reported instances of graffiti have been reported, nor have patrolling officers discovered new tags or logos.

The graph below gives a rough indication of the number of known I reported incidents of graffiti over a two and a half year period, with very identifiable target months.

**Known instances of Graffiti attacks
1998 -2000**



FUTURE PERFECT?

Definitely not.

It is probable that we will experience similar problems in the future, but as long as we are mindful of the lessons learnt in this project, we should be in a position to put into place an almost immediate and structured response.

This will involve the use of SARA in its recognised form in conjunction with a Problem Analysis Triangle.