

Property Marking:
a deterrent to
domestic burglary?

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CRIME PREVENTION UNIT: PAPER 3
LONDON: HOME OFFICE

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50 Queen Anne's Gate
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First published 1985

Crime Prevention Unit Papers

The Home Office Crime Prevention Unit was formed in 1983 with a view to promoting preventive action against crime. Included in its remit is a particular responsibility for the dissemination of information on crime prevention topics. The present series of occasional papers, while based largely upon research material, has been established primarily for practitioners whose work has a direct bearing on the reduction of crime.

ISBN 0 86252 193 9

Foreword

Responsibility for the prevention of crime cannot be left to the police alone. In relation to domestic burglary, which remains one of the most worrying of offences, there is increasing community involvement in prevention. This is totally right and is encouraged by the police and by the Home Office.

One of the several ways in which the public can help themselves is through the marking of property with the post code - this, together with the house name or number, provides a unique identifier. Whilst research results are available from other countries on the effect of property marking as a deterrent to domestic burglary, this is the first study to be published in the United Kingdom. It demonstrates that the marking of property can, in some circumstances, be a most effective deterrent in protecting the householder from crime.

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*Deputy Under Secretary of State
Home Office, Police Department
June 1985*

Acknowledgements

This project has involved too many people to thank individually but I am particularly grateful to the present Chief Constable of South Wales, Mr David East and to his predecessor, Mr John Woodcock for their support. The initial **idea for the project came** from Chief Inspector Mervyn Bowden, the force Crime **Prevention Officer** of the South Wales Constabulary, and we are grateful to him **and his staff for** their co-operation.

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What is property marking?

Marking property to indicate ownership is not new. The personalised symbols on the bone tools of Palaeolithic man about 25,000 years ago, together with many other examples throughout history, provide evidence of the long established belief that the branding or labelling of property with a personal symbol will in some way protect it from theft or ensure its return should it be lost. In recent years the practice has been given fresh impetus in consequence of two developments - first, within the United Kingdom, the development of the post code - in combination with the house name or number, this provides a unique, and publicly available identifier of the household to which goods belong. And secondly, acceptance by the police that they will routinely examine property recovered for signs of ownership, paying particular attention to the possibility that the article may be post coded.

Building upon these developments many police forces are promoting property marking as a crime preventive device. Although the practice appeals to common sense, there has been little effort within the United Kingdom to marshal firm evidence of its effect on domestic burglary. In this paper some of the recent evidence from North America and Sweden will be reviewed and the results of an evaluation of property marking presented and discussed in terms of effects on crime and police/public relations.

Results of previous research

A nationwide study in the United States of a range of 'operation identification' (O-I) projects was carried out by Heller and his colleagues (1975). He identified several goals in relation to these projects - burglary deterrence (here a distinction was drawn between deterrence on a city-wide basis or only for those participating in the schemes); an increase in the recovery and return of stolen property; an increase in the difficulty of disposing of stolen goods and an increase in the detection of offences or prosecution of offenders.

Heller's conclusions can be summarised as follows:

- (i) participants had significantly lower burglary rates after joining than before (O-I projects in Seattle and St. Louis reported reductions of 33% and 25% respectively);
- (ii) cities with O-I projects did not enjoy city-wide reductions in burglary rates;
- (iii) the presence of markings did not significantly hamper the disposal of stolen property;
- (iv) there was no evidence to suggest an increase in either the apprehension or conviction of burglars;

- (v) there was no evidence that O-I markings appreciably increased either the recovery or return of stolen property.

Heller also identified a range of practical difficulties associated with the initiatives - public participation rates were low, recruitment costs per household were considered high and initiatives were difficult to *maintain*.

The most recent study of operation identification was carried out by the National Council for Crime Prevention in Sweden (*Knutsson, 1984*). This particularly comprehensive project covered a residential area about 20 miles from Stockholm; it contained about 3,500 houses, in the main detached but *including* some terraced property, and a small number of flats. Over a four year period the participation rate in the scheme rose from about 13% to just under 30%. This made evaluation difficult but working on the basis of a number of well argued assumptions the author concluded that the programme had not led to a reduction in burglaries even for those participating in the schemes.

Knutsson also reported on interviews with burglars which indicated that the majority of burglars would take little notice of a sign indicating that property was marked. This is a particularly important finding since it suggests that marking property would not lead to a reduction in burglary rates even for those displaying stickers, and is contrary to the evidence from the United States. However, there were a number of difficulties with this aspect of the study. The sample size was extremely small; it was drawn from a different area (Stockholm itself); the burglars had all been caught and, although it is not made particularly clear in the report of the study, all seemed fairly experienced as burglars. For these reasons it seems advisable to treat the conclusions from this part of the work with some caution.

On balance the research evidence does not provide substantial support for investment in property marking as a deterrent to burglary. At best the North American experience indicates a reduced rate of victimisation for those participating but there has always remained a sufficiently large pool of unprotected homes and as a result overall burglary rates have remained unchanged. Furthermore, it has never been clear from any of the research why the participants should enjoy reduced burglary rates. There is no evidence that goods are more difficult to fence; that burglars are more likely to be arrested; that potential offenders are aware of the signs and symbols associated with participation or that goods are likely to be returned.

The South Wales scheme

Despite these essentially negative conclusions British police forces have recently been launching property marking with enthusiasm. The Metropolitan Police, to take an example, spent £242,000 in 1983/84, and £30,000 in 1984/85 on publicity around the capital recommending the marking of property as a crime preventive device, with a further £90,000 on equipment. It was decided, therefore, that a

'demonstration project'(1) on property marking should be carried out in the United Kingdom. The conditions for the launch of this scheme were to be optimal on the grounds that if there were no reduction in burglary rates under such conditions then there would be little point in pursuing property marking nationwide.

The primary aim of the scheme was to reduce the chances of burglary for those participating. In view of this it is obvious that it is not the marking of the goods which is important but the extent to which it is *advertised* that the goods are marked. It was stressed throughout the project, therefore, that the single most important factor was the window or door sticker which had to be displayed. It was assumed that the sticker would convey not only the message that goods are marked and disposal may be difficult, but also, and in practice more significantly, that the residents in this house are concerned about burglary and that the risks to the potential offender may thereby be increased.

In addition, insofar as property marking might be expected to protect property rather than cash, it was decided to concentrate the evaluation on those burglaries resulting in the loss of markable goods.

Because of the manner in which the scheme was launched, it was expected that there might be an improvement in police/public relations and an attempt was made to assess this as part of the study. Finally, a record was to be kept of goods returned as a consequence of marking, although with little expectation of an impact.

A high take-up rate by residents in the target area was regarded as crucial to the scheme. This was in order to make statistical analysis possible and to reduce the pool of unprotected homes thus, hopefully, limiting the opportunity for the displacement of burglary. Three methods were employed to achieve this - the scheme was launched with as much publicity as possible, door-to-door visits were made by the police or special constables (2), and free marking equipment and door or window stickers were provided for the residents.

To expand upon these three methods. Prior to the launch a letter was sent to all residents by the Chief Constable, alerting them to the impending event (see Appendix 1). The launch itself, on 17 November 1983, was marked by a press conference attended by, amongst others, the Chief Constable and Home Office officials. Local television coverage was also obtained. For the following three days the force crime prevention officers together with the special constables under their direction, visited the houses in the target area. There were ten teams of officers working in the area over Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. A weekend was included to ensure that more people would be at home; the officers

(1) 'Demonstration projects' in crime prevention are used as a means of illustrating the effect of particular initiatives. See Hope and Murphy (1983) for a discussion.

(2) Special constables, who wear uniform similar to that of the police officers themselves, are volunteer members of the public who help the police in certain areas of their work.

also worked during the evenings. In order to ensure some uniformity of approach the force crime prevention officers, who led each team, attended an afternoon seminar some weeks before the launch. At this seminar the aims of the scheme were outlined and any anticipated difficulties resolved. A short training session was also organised for regular beat officers and special constables.

On the visits to homes in the area by the police, the scheme was explained, free equipment provided and help offered in marking goods to any elderly or infirm members of the public. The officers also completed a brief questionnaire (see Appendix 2) on which they recorded the name and approximate age of the person with whom they had spoken, whether or not they agreed to participate in the scheme and whether or not the equipment had been left with the householder. One call-back visit was made if the occupants were not at home on the first visit.

Stylus pens and stickers were provided free of charge by the Post Office; Berol Ltd. provided ultra-violet pens for the invisible marking of property. This sponsorship, together with the use of special constables, enabled the scheme to be launched with minimal costs.

One week following the initial visit all those participating in the scheme were revisited by the police or special constables. A further questionnaire was completed (see Appendix 3) recording which goods were marked, whether any difficulties were encountered (help was offered if necessary), and whether, and if so where, the 'property marked' label had been placed (e.g. front door, back window).

After three months had elapsed a further letter was sent to residents from the Chief Constable (Appendix 4) reinforcing the aims of the scheme and enclosing another window/door sticker. Finally, in order to check on the extent to which interest continued to be maintained a further visit to those participating was carried out on 24 June 1984, approximately six months after the initial launch. A record was made of the number of houses still displaying the sticker and an extract from Crime Prevention News (3), in which the scheme was described (see Appendix 5), was provided for those participating. Further stickers were provided where necessary.

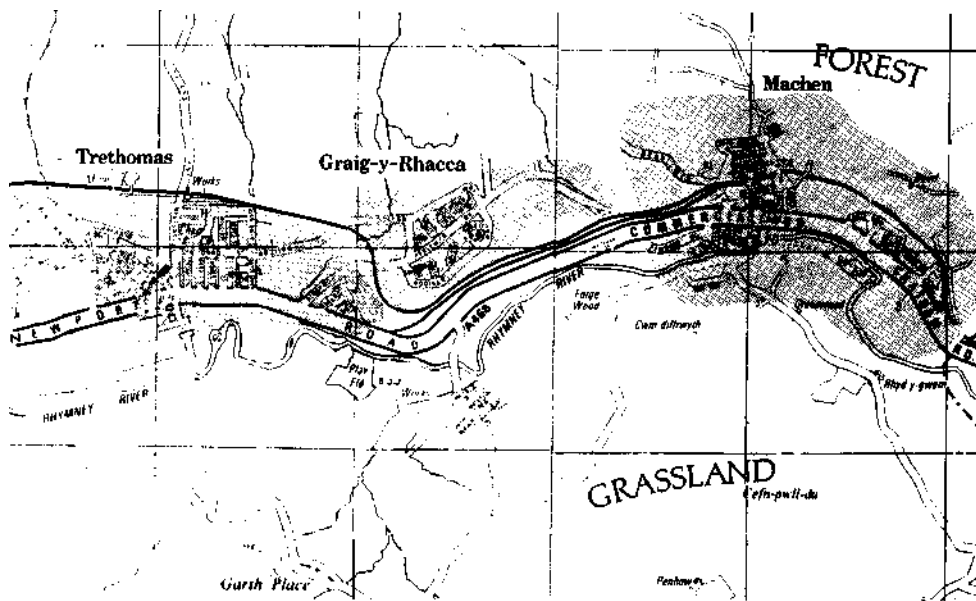
The target area

The area chosen covered a part of the Caerphilly sub-division of the South Wales Constabulary. Three fairly distinct 'villages' were included which covered the floor of a valley. Low lying and largely uninhabited hills defined the area which limited the opportunity for displacement. Burglaries were not uniformly distributed throughout the villages. They were concentrated on a group of local

(3) Crime Prevention News is a bulletin published and distributed by the Home Office which reports on preventive initiatives around the country; it is circulated to police crime prevention officers amongst others. It ran a feature on the property marking scheme in issue CPN2/1984.

authority homes which fell more or less in the middle of the valley. Thus any displacement of burglary from the initially higher risk area would be likely to fall on one of the other two villages within the scheme. A plan of the area is shown below:

Figure 1: A plan of the Area



The three 'villages', Trethomas, Graig-y-Rhacca and Machen can be described loosely as follows:

Trethomas - a mixed area of detached, owner-occupied accommodation together with an area of older 'mining' houses once owned by the coal board but now either local authority owned or owner-occupied. These houses are mainly back-to-back terraced. There are approximately 800 dwellings in this total area.

Graig-y-Rhacca - an area of local authority housing arranged as maisonettes or terraced houses. The estate is rather untidy in places although some houses are well cared for and of good decorative order. There are approximately 700 homes on this estate.

Machen - an area of largely privately owned accommodation with gardens, garages, etc. Some houses are local authority owned but are less 'estate-like' than those in Graig-y-Rhacca. Some of the outlying houses back onto picturesque woodland. There are approximately 700 houses in this area.

Criteria employed in the evaluation (4)

- a. A dwelling was considered in the target area if it appeared on the electoral register and was part of the sub-division area outlined in Figure 1. A total of 2,234 houses were thus included in the target sample.
- b. A house was considered to have been burgled if it appeared in the police list of 'reported burglaries'.
- c. A household was regarded as in the scheme if, following the second police visit, a 'property marked' sticker was on display on any outside door or window. Otherwise it was regarded as a non-participating household.
- d. The scheme was launched by the Chief Constable on 17 November 1983. Reported burglaries for the 12 month period from 1 November 1982 to 30 October 1983 were recorded as the 'BEFORE' period; from 1 December 1983 to 30 November 1984 as the 'AFTER' period. Data from the month of November 1983 was excluded from the evaluation.

Results

(i) *The take-up rate*

The participation rate for households in the three areas is shown in Table 1. Those excluded from the scheme include households in which there was nobody at home or which were unoccupied at the time of the visit, those who declined to join, and those who, although agreeing to join the scheme, declined to display the sticker.

Table 1: Participation rate by area.

Area	In scheme	Out of scheme	Total	Take-up rate
Trethomas	618	203	821	75%
Graig-y-Rhacca	499	209	708	70%
Machen	497	208	705	70%
TOTAL	1,614	620	2,234	72%

Of the non-participants 185 had joined the scheme, in the sense that they had claimed to mark their property, but had declined to use the window sticker and were thus counted as non-participants. In almost all cases their reluctance was because they felt that they would be more likely to attract a burglar if they did so. Interestingly, the incidence of the non-use of stickers appeared in small clusters in the data - *i.e.* it seemed as though neighbours had discussed whether or not

(4) A note on methodological issues is given in Appendix 6.

to place the stickers in the window and had decided as a group not to do so. Thus there might be a small street or group of houses where the stickers were not displayed but where the response to the scheme was otherwise positive.

Each participant was asked which goods they had marked. Not surprisingly the majority reported marking electrical goods - televisions, videos, radios, music centres and other domestic equipment such as cookers and washing machines. Only 4% marked jewellery which is understandable given the difficulty of doing so and also went some way toward supporting the decision that jewellery should not be considered 'markable' from the point of view of the evaluation. (This is discussed more fully in the section on 'Methodological Issues' in Appendix 6.)

Householders were asked whether they had any difficulty with the marking equipment. Difficulties were expressed in a very few cases with marking clothes or jewellery but in general comments were almost all favourable. It is of course possible that the positive comments resulted from the fact that the pens were provided free of charge - it may have seemed ungracious to complain about the performance of a free gift!

If a property marking scheme is to be launched in an area, it is important to know whether or not the public are familiar with their post code. In the course of the initial police visits participants were asked whether or not they knew the post code; if they did not, the police officers were able to provide it. It transpired that 30% of those who agreed to participate did not know the code. On the local authority housing estate, where burglaries were most common and thus where property marking was most relevant, 40% of householders did not know their post code.

(ii) Burglaries before and after the launch

In the 12 month period before the launch of the scheme there were 128 burglaries reported to the police. In the 12 month period after the launch 74 burglaries were reported - a reduction of 40%. The effect of the scheme on the rate at which homes were victimised sounds rather less dramatic of course. Allowing for the fact that some houses were burgled more than once, the burglary rate before the launch was 5.1 % and after was 3.0%. This reduction was statistically significant.

The burglaries were not uniformly spread across the area. Although the victimisation rates for Machen and Trethomas were similar, that for Graig-y-Rhacca was considerably higher. The figures are given in Table 2 overleaf with Machen and Trethomas data combined.

Table 2: Burglary rates before and after the launch of the scheme by area.

Area	BEFORE		AFTER	
	Number of houses burgled at least once	Rate	Number of houses burgled at least once	rate
Machen and Trethomas	23	1.5%	15	0.98%
Graig-y-Rhacca	92	13.0%	53	7.5%
Total	115	5.1%	68	3.0%

The data in Table 2 show statistically significant reductions in victimisation rate in Machen/Trethomas, Graig-y-Rhacca and the valley as a whole following the launch of the scheme.

In order to determine whether the property marking scheme was relevant to these reductions in burglary rate, comparisons were made between those participating in the scheme and those not participating. The results of these comparisons are shown in Table 3. The Table records incidents of burglary rather than houses burgled - in other words if a house was burgled on more than one occasion it is counted more than once - the figures are not, therefore, strictly comparable to those in Table 2 above.

Table 3: Burglary incidents for participants and non-participants before and after the launch of the scheme.

	Before	After	
Participants	91	35	(probability <0.001)
Non-participants	37	39	(no significant change)

The table shows a reduction in the number of burglary incidents for those participating in the scheme. Whilst there was no reduction for the non-participants there was also no significant increase in incidents -i.e. there was no displacement of burglary from one group to another.

One of the expectations in setting up this scheme was that if it had any effect on burglary rates this would be through its impact on the loss of goods which were markable. It was assumed that a burglar might be deterred from committing an offence by a 'property marked' sign only if he had been 'in the market' for television sets, etc. - i.e. goods which might be marked. The effect on those potential offenders on the look-out for cash was expected to be marginal. In order to investigate these effects the burglary incidents were examined in more detail. Burglaries were divided into those in which 'markable' goods were stolen, those involving the loss of cash from pre-payment fuel meters and 'others' (a list of the kind of goods considered 'markable' is given in Appendix 7).

Approximately 25% of the reported burglaries in the 12 months before the scheme was launched related to the loss of cash from pre-payment fuel meters. These meters are offered by the gas or electricity companies as an alternative to quarterly or monthly billing to those households which experience difficulty in budgeting. Such householders are often on low incomes and prefer the advantages which pre-payment metering can offer. A considerable disadvantage to this system is that large sums of money, perhaps over £100, may accumulate awaiting collection by the fuel companies. The meters thus provide an attractive target to the would-be thief. Pre-payment meters are more common on local authority housing estates such as Graig-y-Rhacca. Because of this the data in Table 4 (below) distinguishes between Graig-y-Rhacca and Machen/Trethomas.

Considering first the Machen/Trethomas area, the data indicate that a significant reduction in the loss of markable goods was achieved for those participating in the scheme; there was effectively no change for the non-participants. There was no change in relation to either loss from meters or other burglaries for either those in or out of the scheme, although it should be noted that the numbers involved are exceedingly small. In Graig-y-Rhacca, where the base burglary rate was higher, there was a significant reduction in the loss of markable goods for those participating ($p < 0.05$) but also a significant reduction in the number of meter breaks for those in the scheme ($p < 0.005$) and the number of 'other' burglaries ($p < 0.025$). There were no significant changes in relation to the victimisation of the non-participants in Graig-y-Rhacca.

Table 4: Type of burglary before and after the introduction of the property marking scheme (5).

TYPE OF BURGLARY		BEFORE	AFTER
Machen/Trethomas			
Markable property	in scheme	10	0
	out of scheme	3	5
Meter breaks	in scheme	2	1
	out of scheme	0	2
Other burglary	in scheme	6	6
	out of scheme	4	2
Graig-y-Rhacca			
Markable property	in scheme	21	11
	out of scheme	12	11
Meter breaks	in scheme	30	9
	out of scheme	8	14
Other burglary	in scheme	20	7
	out of scheme	16	11

(5) The data presented in Table 4 are not comparable with those data in earlier tables because of multiple counting from any one incident - e.g. if a burglary involved both the loss of cash and of goods then it is counted twice.

(iii) The return of stolen goods and the detection of offenders

No goods were returned to the public as a consequence of the operation of the scheme. This is not as disappointing as it may seem, however, because of the goods stolen from participants only two television sets and two hi-fi units were reported as having actually been marked.

Twenty one offences were reported by the police as having been detected following the launch of the scheme but there is no evidence to suggest that the operation of the property marking project played any part in these detections. Certainly no marked goods were recovered from those charged.

(iv) The cost of the initiative

Estimating the financial costs of crime prevention initiatives, with the implication that if they are judged to be too expensive they will be stopped, is a dangerous path down which to travel. It takes no account of the reduction in distress caused to burglary victims or in the reduction in costs to the criminal justice system of processing potential offenders who may have been put off committing offences by the scheme. These savings can be considerable (see, for example, Lipsey, 1984) but there are obvious difficulties in attempting to attach a value to them.

In addition there are general expectations on the part of the public that the police will provide a service almost irrespective of the cost - the investigation of murder provides an extreme example but a great deal of the more mundane police work has inherent 'social' consequences. It is often easier to overlook these factors than to try to estimate their effect when setting out on cost-benefit exercises.

Despite this caveat, it is clear that there should be some financial monitoring of all police work and crime prevention is no exception. The present initiative cost £8 4 7 in police overtime, £650 in mileage allowance and £470 subsistence - a total of £1, 967. The cost of deploying the special constables, who are unsalaried, was £16 8 in meal allowances and £605 mileage allowance. The total extra cost to the force was thus £2,740.

In the first year of operation there were 54 fewer burglaries than in the previous year. Estimating the cost in police time at about £40 per burglary (6), we have a cash saving of £2,16 0. If there are 15 or more fewer burglaries than before the initiative was launched in the second year of operation (and there are no plans to curtail the experiment) then the scheme will have broken even or be in profit in cash terms.

On balance, bearing in mind the effect on police/public relations described in the next section and the other unquantifiable advantages outlined above, the initiative can fairly be described as 'cost effective'.

(6) These estimates are approximate and based on figures from Burrows (1985, forthcoming, and Crust (1975).

(v) The effect on police/public relations

In the absence of social surveys it is difficult to draw firm conclusions on the effect of this initiative on police/public contacts. Nevertheless, a take-up rate of over 70% must be seen as an achievement and reflects well on the persuasive and positive approach adopted by the police officers involved. The police, in reporting back after the launch of the scheme, spoke of a welcoming reception by the public and the comments which they collected from participating households were almost without exception complimentary.

One of the difficulties in attributing the positive attitude of the public to the launch of the scheme is that the householders in the area may have always felt positive towards the police. And in the privately owned, middle class homes of Machen this may well have been the case. However this was almost certainly not the case in Graig-y-Rhacca where the burglary rate was high and where the police felt that a large number of local offenders lived. There was some anxiety felt by certain of the police officers in going onto the estate on a door-to-door basis and the anticipated reaction from the householders there was one of aggression. It therefore came as a surprise to find that the take-up rate on the council estate was as high as anywhere else in the valley and that the reception from the public was as warm. It is with rather more confidence that the good relations between the police and public might be attributed to the launch of the initiative in this area than in the others.

Discussion

The demonstration project described in this paper was set up in a carefully chosen area. There is difficulty, therefore, in generalising the results of the study to other less ideal areas. But the study can be justified on the grounds that if property marking had not reduced burglary here then it is doubtful whether it could do so anywhere.

The results of this study are different from those of earlier research. There is a need to explain - the high take up rate obtained; the reduced burglary rate for those participating in the scheme and the valley-wide reduction in burglary. Each of these points is discussed in turn below, and this is followed by a consideration of the remaining outstanding issues.

(i) The take-up rate

The take-up rate of this scheme was almost twice as high as that achieved elsewhere. There are three factors of immediate significance. First the considerable advance publicity given to the scheme in the locality, secondly the door-to-door approach by the police and finally the provision of free marking equipment. It is not possible to determine which of these three factors were of greatest significance but the fact that the police were prepared to visit every home

and to follow this up with a further visit one week later must have played an important part in convincing the public of the worth of the exercise.

A more general point in relation to the high take-up rate is that whatever the public were being asked to do in protecting themselves against burglary had to be made as effortless as possible on their part; this was a guiding principle in the design of this scheme. It was helped greatly by the existence of the post code and the efforts by the Post Office to extend its use. In other property marking schemes which have been launched, particularly in the United States, householders have been required to register their personal code with the police or lodge with them a list of items marked with the appropriate marking recorded. This clearly requires far more effort on the part of the individual members of the public. In this respect the existence of a nationally available post code in the United Kingdom is a considerable advantage.

Looking in detail at the take-up rate along the valley, and bearing in mind that the householders are from different social classes and live in remarkably different property, there was a notable similarity in take-up rate in the three 'villages'. It is particularly remarkable that a high participation rate was achieved on the council estate; the area which had the highest rate of burglary. The police were themselves surprised at the positive reception they received in this area because it has a rather 'rough' reputation and, they felt, housed some so-called problem families. Indeed a few police officers were reluctant to include their homes in the door-to-door canvass. In retrospect it is obvious that nobody likes to be the victim of a burglary, not even a burglar; these results should perhaps serve as encouragement to police officers in other areas who may be similarly hesitant.

(ii) Reduced burglary for participants

The observed reduction in victimisation rate (38%) for those participating in the scheme is higher than was reported from the United States and clearly greater than was obtained in Sweden. The reasons for this remain unclear.

Looking in detail at the results obtained, in the lower burglary rate areas of Machen and Trethomas the impact of the scheme was upon the loss of markable goods, which suggests that property marking *per se* was the significant factor. But in the higher rate area of Graig-y-Rhacca there was also a measurable reduction in 'meter break' burglaries and 'other' burglaries. The results here stem, surely, not in marking of the property but in the message to potential burglars that the risk of breaking into this home is greater than that associated with another 'unmarked' home; the residents here, so the message reads, are concerned about burglary and the risk of capture is therefore greater. If this is a correct analysis of the situation, then any 'burglar beware' label would have been equally effective in this part of the experimental area provided that the potential burglar believed that his risks were increased. This present initiative

seems to have been as much an evaluation of the effect of a label saying that property was marked as of the effect of marking property. There is a considerable difference between these two statements which was not fully explored in other studies and which certainly merits further investigation in the future.

The greatest reduction in any category of incidents was in relation to meter breaks in Graig-y-Rhacca. This may seem, on the face of it, an odd result. But there is evidence, both anecdotal and empirical, that many of the reported burglaries involving the loss of cash from pre-payment fuel meters are not 'real' burglaries but result from householders 'doing their own meter'. Estimates of the extent to which this occurs vary considerably but it could be the case that as many as 80% of reported burglaries involving the loss of cash from pre-payment meters are 'own goals' (Hotson, 1979). That being so, the explanation of the drop in meter breaks in Graig-y-Rhacca is more easily explained, not as a real reduction in burglary, but as a reduction in the number of individuals taking cash from their own meter. They were persuaded by the police to join a burglary prevention scheme and subsequently realised that in joining they had unwittingly debarred themselves from claiming to have been burgled.

(iii) Reduced burglary in the whole valley

One of the major differences between the results reported here and those from other studies is that there was no apparent displacement in burglary from participants to non participants. The most plausible explanation for this seems to relate to the exceptionally high take-up rate achieved by the police. Of the approximately 30% 'unprotected' houses a number would perhaps be less likely to be burgled for other reasons, for example, they may have a burglar alarm or be particularly visible from the surrounding area. This would have the effect of reducing the pool of potential targets still further. Although it remains an empirical question to determine at what level of participation displacement ceases to occur, it seems to be that in the case of the present initiative that level was surpassed.

In other studies it has never been so clear that in persuading the public to mark their property the police were at the same time persuading the potential burglars that the scheme would be effective. Bearing in mind the original distribution of burglary throughout the valley it is almost certainly the case that the police, in calling at almost every door as they did, were also calling at the doors of the burglars. It seems plausible that this contributed to the impact of the scheme.

(iv) Outstanding issues

The conclusion that goods were not more likely to be returned is quite compatible with other studies. Nor is this at all a surprising finding. Although it is no doubt

the case that the police recover vast quantities of goods, presumed stolen, in any year, it is also the case that those goods are a very small proportion of the total stolen. In order for property marking to make significant reductions in the 'Aladdin's caves' of the urban police forces, a substantial proportion of the general public would need to mark their goods. It seems most unlikely that this would ever be achieved and it raises the question of the appropriate degree of emphasis to give the practice of marking property on these grounds. Furthermore, there is some evidence, albeit anecdotal, that the public would rather not have returned their worn out television set when the insurance company have paid up for a new one! Unfortunately, it is probably the items of sentimental value, old jewellery and the like, which the public would like to see returned, but which is the most difficult to mark.

Practical implications

There are a number of practical points which may be drawn from the experience in South Wales and which it is worth summarising for those police officers who may have an interest in launching property marking schemes. Some, arguably, go beyond the data which were described within the present report; these are put forward rather more tentatively -

- a. Police forces taking a 'broad brush' approach to the launch of property marking schemes by advertising through the media should perhaps consider including in the advertisements information on how to find out about the post code if householders do not already know it.
- b. Areas with high crime rates, including burglary, may welcome the launch of crime prevention initiatives even if the areas have a reputation for poor relations with the police.
- c. The easier it is for the public to participate in crime prevention schemes the more likely they will be to do so.
- d. It is probably as important to tell the burglars about the scheme as it is to tell the general public. It may be worth giving some thought to how this can be achieved.
- e. The evidence suggests that the use of a window or door label, indicating marked property, is effective in reducing burglary; the public can be reassured, therefore, that any anxieties that the stickers *increase* the chances of victimisation are unfounded.

Although this experimental scheme has proved remarkably successful in its main aim of reducing burglary, a note of caution is perhaps appropriate for those who might wish to launch property marking schemes with renewed enthusiasm nationwide. This initiative was set up as a demonstration project in a carefully controlled and selected rural area. It was comparatively isolated and as such it

was possible to ensure that the potential burglars were as informed about the project as were the rest of the community. This is a highly **significant factor** and is unlikely to be possible to the same extent elsewhere. Nevertheless, the study confirms that property marking may be of value and this should serve to reinforce the efforts of the police in extending its use and in incorporating it as part of, for example, neighbourhood watch initiatives as indeed many forces already do.

Appendix 1

TEXT OF A LETTER FROM CHIEF CONSTABLE TO ALL RESIDENTS

The Need for a Property Protection Project

One of the most serious and perplexing crime problems we as individuals face today, is that of burglary of our homes. This problem is recognised by your local police.

In an effort to reduce this crime, the area in which you live has been selected for a project which involves the marking of property with your post code. This code is unique to your home and so can be used by the police to identify your property. The scheme will involve you in no expense as the marking equipment will be provided by the South Wales Police.

Shortly, a uniformed police officer will call at your home to explain the scheme and to answer any questions which you may have. He will show you his warrant card for identification.

I do hope that you will be able to give this officer a few moments of your time, as it is only with the co-operation of persons such as yourself that, together, we can reduce the incidence of burglary and the theft of valuable property, within our community.

David A. East
Chief Constable

Appendix 2

PROPERTY PROTECTION PROJECT: SOUTH WALES CONSTABULARY

FIRST CONTACT FORM FOR COMPLETION IN RELATION TO ALL TARGET HOUSES

date and time officer

Address (If no reply, note for return visit)

Name of person interviewed

Position in household (e.g. father, lodger)

Apparent age

Did he/she know the post code? Yes/No

ACTION TAKEN

1. Refused co-operation immediately
2. Scheme explained but refused co-operation
3. Agreed to participate, pen and instructions left

Requested further crime prevention advice Yes/No
(If yes, inform Divisional CPO)

INFORMATION REQUIRED

1. Have you been burgled in the last 12 months? Yes/No
2. What was stolen?
3. Did you tell the police? Yes/No

Appendix 3

PROPERTY PROTECTION PROJECT: SOUTH WALES CONSTABULARY

QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED ON RETURN TO PARTICIPATING HOUSES

Date and time

Officer

Address (If necessary, note for return visit)

Name of person interviewed

If not the same person as on the initial visit, who was it?

1. Did you mark your goods?

(a) Yes - which goods did you mark?

(b) No -why didn't you mark your goods?

Can the difficulties be resolved now?

(i) Yes - mark the goods and answer 1(a).

(ii) No - can they be resolved later? Yes - leave the pen and call back
No - on to question 2.

2. Do you have any goods which you would like to have marked but didn't?

(a) Yes - what were they?
why could you not mark them?

(b) No

3. Did you have any difficulties with the pen?

(a) Yes - what were they?

Pen returned

Pen lost

(b) No

Pen retained
by householder
(please tick
appropriate box)

4. Did you lend your pen to anyone living in this locality? Yes/No

5. Is the sticker on the front door? Yes/No

If not, why not?

6. Is the sticker on the back door? Yes/No

If not, why not?

7. Is the sticker anywhere else, e.g. on windows? Yes/No

If yes, where?

8. Do you have any comments on the property marking scheme?

Appendix 4

TEXT OF A LETTER FROM CHIEF CONSTABLE TO PARTICIPANTS DATED 6 FEBRUARY 1984

Dear Sir/Madam,

Almost three months have elapsed since you agreed to join the Property Protection Project at the request of your local Police.

I am pleased to inform you that the majority of householders in your area are now taking part and the progress to date is encouraging.

The purpose of my writing to you now is to remind you of the importance of continuing to mark any new property which comes into your possession with your post code and house number not forgetting the presents which you will have received at Christmas time.

Two replacement stickers for your windows are enclosed and I would like to emphasise that the placing of these stickers in your windows is a very important part of the scheme.

If you need any further advice relating to the Property Marking Project or indeed on any aspect of crime prevention, please do not hesitate to contact your local police station.

I hope that you and your family will have a happy and crime-free 1984.

Yours faithfully,

David A. East
Chief Constable

Extract from Crime Prevention News 2/1984

Effectiveness of property-marking to be evaluated

For the first time in this country, the impact of property-marking on burglary is to be evaluated. The research will be carried out by the Home Office's new Crime Prevention Unit.

In November South Wales Constabulary launched a major property-marking scheme in a mining valley of just under 2,500 homes, comprising the village of Machen and a large council estate at Craig y Rhacca. Of the 2,453 houses in the area, 1,949 agreed to take part in the scheme.

This commitment is very high, almost 80 per cent, and says much for the efforts of the police. Although most schemes are well publicised by the police, the public are often then expected to make their own arrangements to obtain suitable marking equipment. Consequently public involvement in and commitment to such schemes has been sometimes disappointing.



The window sticker that can act as a deterrent to would-be burglars. In South Wales, however, each home was visited by Special Constables, under the supervision of crime prevention officers, after a letter from the Chief Constable had alerted the public to the scheme. Marking pens were freely available to each household (made possible by the generosity of the Post Office and Berol Ltd)



A poster announcing the South Wales Constabulary property-marking scheme, and any difficulties could be resolved on the spot by the visiting officers.

Follow-up visits were then made to collect the pens and to ensure that a burglary sticker, warning would-be burglars of the presence of marked property, was visible on the inside, and to check that there had been no difficulties in marking goods.

The research will compare the burglary rate following the introduction of the scheme with that for the ten-year period before it began. Any changes in the rate at which marked goods are stolen will be of particular concern.

A 12-month follow-up is planned and we shall publish the results of the study as soon as they become available.

Appendix 6

A NOTE ON SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

(i) Sample size and displacement

Applied research calls for compromise and the present initiative is no exception to this general rule. Whilst in principle a large sample of target households would have been preferred, in practice, due to constraints of cost, the sample size had to be limited. In addition, because the resources required to investigate displacement would have been prohibitive, an area was chosen which naturally restricted the displacement opportunities for burglary.

(li) Unreported crime

The main aim of the initiative was to reduce burglary which raised the possibility of a 'dark figure' of unreported burglaries in evaluating the scheme. If the dark figure were known to remain a constant proportion of committed burglaries then it could have reasonably been ignored. But there are common sense grounds for suggesting that when a community has attention drawn to crime, through the launch of an initiative of the kind proposed, then burglaries which were formerly unreported might be reported following the initiative, thus producing an apparent rise in offending. The standard response to this possibility is to carry out a crime survey of the area before and after the launch of the scheme. However, again for reasons of cost, this was not possible. It was estimated, however, using data from the first British Crime Survey (Hough and Mayhew, 1983), that if the evaluation were to be carried out in terms of changes in the loss of markable goods (excluding jewellery which was expected to be difficult to mark in any case), then the potential increase in offending (due to an increase in the number of unreported burglaries being reported) would be minimal. As an additional check, the police asked householders on their first visit, whether or not they had been burgled during the previous 12 months. This procedure is less than ideal since there may be some reluctance to admit an unreported burglary to a police officer. Nevertheless, it was felt to be a useful check. This exercise revealed 19 incidents in the year prior to the launch of the scheme. This was fewer than might have been anticipated from the results reported in the British Crime Survey. These incidents were disregarded in the analysis.

(iii) Assessing police/public relations

A similar difficulty arose in relation to assessing the effect of the scheme on police/public relations. Whilst ideally it would have been preferable to carry out a house-to-house survey before and after the scheme this was not possible. As a compromise the police asked, on their second visit to those participating, whether they had any general comments. The police themselves were also asked for an assessment of their reception by the community when calling at houses.

(iv) A note on the data

This paper has relied heavily upon information on burglary which has been provided by the police. Such data has been criticised for its accuracy, reliability and validity (see for example, Burrows and Tarling, 1982; Farrington and Dowds, 1985). Clearly it might have been more acceptable to have taken information on burglary from repeated victims surveys although the cost would have been considerable. Some safeguards, however, were possible. For example, the police officers whose responsibility it was to launch the scheme, oversee the visits to homes in the area and obtain the funding, were from the force Crime Prevention Department and based at Police Headquarters; those responsible for sending burglary data to the Home Office were based on the Sub-Division concerned. They sent information directly to the researchers and had limited contact, if any, with those police officers with a particular interest in the scheme. Furthermore, if the police were to be selective in forwarding reported burglaries, it is most likely that they would fail to mention those incidents in which there was no loss. There were seven 'nil taken' burglaries before the launch and a comparable number — nine — during the follow-up period.

Appendix 7

Listed below are examples of the items considered 'markable' or not in relation to the research. They do not constitute an exhaustive list and are provided for illustration only.

Goods considered potentially markable

television sets

radio

hi-fi systems

electrical goods

bicycles

cameras

furniture

tools

pictures

ornaments

musical instruments

Goods not considered markable

cash

meter contents

fuel, e.g. coal

jewellery

small items, e.g. pipes

sunglasses

nails and screws

fixtures

consumable goods

wallpaper, paint

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