

Crime Detection and
Prevention Series
Paper 78

Armed Robbery: Two Police Responses

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Police Research Group: Crime Detection and Prevention Series

The Home Office Police Research Group (PRG) was formed in 1992 to increase the influence of research and development in police policy and practice. The objectives are to sponsor and undertake research and development to improve and strengthen the police service and to identify and disseminate good policing practice.

The Crime Detection and Prevention Series follows on from the Crime Prevention Unit papers, a series which has been published by the Home Office since 1983. The recognition that effective crime strategies will often involve both crime prevention and crime investigation, however, has led to the scope of this series being broadened. This new series will present research material on both crime prevention and crime detection in a way which informs policy and practice throughout the service.

A parallel series of papers on resource management and organisational issues is also published by PRG, as is a periodical on policing research called 'Focus'.

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Foreword

Armed robbery is a relatively rare but very serious crime, and the police response therefore needs to be as effective as possible. The importance of this is reflected by the national key objective on violent crime, and by the creation of the ACPO Armed Criminality Working Group whose advice was recently published in 'Tackling Crime Effectively: Management Handbook 2'.

This report summarises what is known about the extent and nature of armed robbery nationally, highlighting the very welcome 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 was important in South Yorkshire.

S W BOYS SMITH
Director of Police Policy
Home Office
October 1996

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Executive summary

This project began as part of PRG's Police Operations Against Crime Programme. The aim was to examine police responses to armed robbery to identify examples of good practice. The report also hopes to contribute to work by the ACPO Crime Strategy Group who have prioritised armed robbery and called for a review of existing practice.¹

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

The intention is not to compare directly the operation of these two units, due to differences in the number and types of robberies carried out in the two locations. Instead, the examination of police methods is contextualised and assessed in relation to the changing number of robberies recorded, the type of offenders active in each area, as well as the general physical and geographical conditions which determine whether certain forms of intervention are more or less appropriate.

The research identified, however, 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.

In reviewing the operation of the units the focus was predominantly on armed robberies involving commercial premises, in particular the:

- changing incidence of armed robbery both locally and nationally;
- changing distribution of armed robbery between targets;
- use of firearms;
- types of offenders involved;
- principal methods of detection;
- process of prosecution.

The study was centrally concerned with an examination of the processes of detection. In both locations an attempt was made to identify the principal methods by which armed robberies were cleared up. Although it is recognised that there is no clearly identifiable primary mechanism in every case and that the process of detection tends to involve a combination of different elements, an assessment was made through a review of selected cases, to identify which elements were most critical in making an arrest possible. The aim of using this typology was to gain a clearer understanding of the relative contributions of each element to the processes of arrest and prosecution.

¹ ACPO priorities were listed in the Appendix of the minutes of the internal meeting of the Crime Committee, 2 March 1995.

The analysis reveals both commonalities and differences in the two force areas, with the Flying Squad employing a more proactive, intelligence-based response. South Yorkshire, on the other hand, relied far more on the speed of the response and on interviewing skills in gaining admissions.

Several issues were raised about the intrinsic benefits of specialist units and the appropriate forms of management and accountability. The main implications for the development of a more effective police response to armed robbery which emerged from the research involve the need for:

- the development of proactive strategies, particularly in relation to the cultivation of informants;
- greater use of good quality video equipment in all commercial premises;
- an improved police response time to calls and the more systematic deployment of armed response vehicles;
- the development of a database on known and suspected robbers which might facilitate the linking of robberies which carry the same 'trade marks';
- improved communication between different force teams involved in dealing with armed robberies of commercial premises;
- a greater recognition of the likelihood of certain premises being repeatedly victimised.

Since the research has been completed, both force areas have undergone a process of consultation and reorganisation. South Yorkshire CID have been moving in the direction of a more proactive approach based on gathering more detailed computerised information on suspects. The Flying Squad has remained essentially the same in terms of its existing remit, although it is now formally under the command of the Organised Crime Group in the Metropolitan Police District.

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1. Policing armed robbery

Introduction

Robbery straddles the conceptual divide between property crime and violent crime. This ambiguity is reflected in how it is recorded and categorised. The official crime statistics in England and Wales present it as a form of violent crime, whereas the British Crime Survey categorises street robbery as a form of property crime.

Categorisation is further complicated because a number of different activities, levels of force and types of target are included within the general category 'robbery'. While the two principal types of robbery - street robbery and commercial robbery - are linked in that they involve the (attempted) taking of money or goods with the use of force, they are contrasting types of crime in terms of the victims and offenders involved. The targets of street robberies are individuals, the targets of commercial robberies are businesses and financial institutions. Recent research has shown that only a small percentage of those involved in commercial robberies have ever been involved in street robberies, and that they see themselves as engaged in a distinctly different form of crime to 'muggers' (Gabor and Normandeau, 1989; Matthews and Gill, 1993).

The focus of this study is armed robbery involving commercial premises. Although less than one per cent of recorded crime, armed robbery is viewed by the public as among the most serious offences. It is also a popular reference point for current debates about whether we are becoming a more violent society (Pease, 1988; Levi, 1994).

Within the category of commercial robberies involving firearms there is considerable variation between types of target, encompassing banks, building societies, offices, shops and petrol stations. These different types of premises are normally divided into 'band 1' targets which include banks, building societies, security vehicles, post offices, betting shops and jewellers; and 'band 2' targets which include the remaining types of commercial premises such as shops, off licences, garages and offices.

A further ambiguity arises about what level of 'force' makes an attack on commercial premises into an armed robbery. In many cases 'armed' robbers are not in fact in possession of a firearm, but have only an imitation gun, or even no weapon and are merely bluffing.

The research

The report evaluates the strategies adopted for combating commercial robberies in two force areas; the Metropolitan Police District (MPD) and South Yorkshire. The forces were selected in order to examine a dedicated unit (the Flying Squad) and a force without a dedicated unit.

The aim was not to compare directly each force's strategies and tactics because of wide differences in the number and type of armed robberies in each location, and in the types of offenders involved. The aim was to evaluate each set of responses within the particular context, to assess relative effectiveness and to explore the advantages, if any, of a dedicated unit.

The research was based primarily on an examination of police reports from January to December 1993 in both areas. All cases of armed robbery involving a firearm (band 1 and band 2) were included in South Yorkshire (164). In the MPD a sample of 235 cases was selected from the total of 1,193 armed robberies against commercial premises because of the volume of cases recorded. This was spread as evenly as possible across band 1 targets (banks, building societies, post offices, cash in transit, betting shops and jewellers) ie. those dealt with by the Flying Squad.

Of the MPD cases examined, approximately half had 'successful' outcomes in that an offender was arrested and charged. Both 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' cases (ie. no arrest made) were looked at for insights into developing an effective response to armed robbery. The cases were divided as evenly as possible between the four branches of the Flying Squad with 51 cases located in Finchley, 63 cases in Barnes, 63 cases in Rigg Approach and 58 cases in Tower Bridge. The analysis also drew on:

- interviews with a structured sample of officers of all ranks in both forces;
- relevant documentation supplied by both forces;
- data relating to recorded crime and clear-up rates in both forces;
- supplementary interviews with relevant officers in Nottingham and Manchester;
- secondary literature relating to developments in armed robbery both locally and nationally.

Most of the fieldwork was carried out in 1994 while both forces were undergoing re-organisation and re-structuring. This had both positive and negative implications for the research. On the positive side, it raised a number of issues in officers' minds about new operational and organisational options to deal with armed robbery. On the negative side, restructuring brought a degree of uncertainty which made some officers apprehensive and reluctant to be frank lest critical comments might feed into the reassessment exercise and potentially produce undesirable consequences. The findings of this research relate mainly to the organisational arrangements in force before September 1994.

Structure of the report

The report has three main sections, followed by a summary and discussion of the major points emerging from the research. Section 2 provides an overview of the changing nature of armed robbery against commercial targets in recent years, in

terms of type of targets selected, nature of offenders involved and use of firearms. The police response to armed robbery has developed against this changing background.

Section 3 examines the role of a dedicated armed robbery unit - the Flying Squad - to identify the associated advantages. Section 4 examines a non-dedicated team - South Yorkshire - to establish the response to armed robbery in their area. Section 5 summarises the main issues raised and focuses on the implications of these two different styles of intervention, looking for examples of good practice.

2. Recent trends in armed robbery

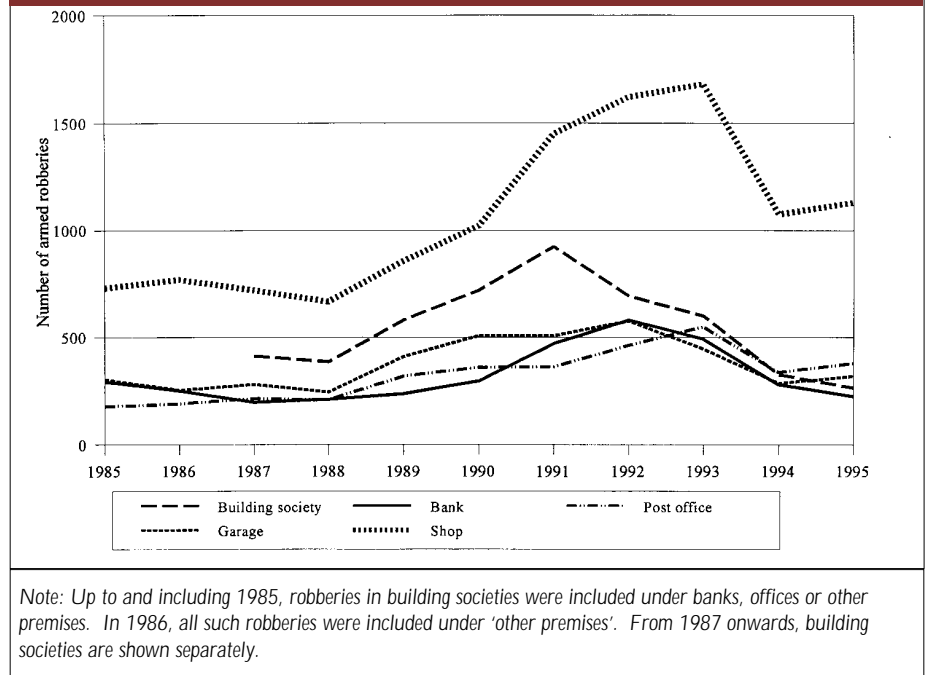
The use of firearms

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 per cent in 1995 (3,963 offences). The proportion of robberies in which firearms were used has also been reducing in recent years, from nearly 12 per cent of robberies in 1991 to 6 per cent in 1995 (Home Office, 1996).

² Official figures for armed robbery also include: offices; places of public entertainment; residential; public highway; and, other premises or open space.

Figure 1 shows the principal commercial locations of offences,² and indicates the variation between targets over the last decade.

Figure 1: Offences of robbery recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used by location of offence, England and Wales (1985 - 1995)



The number of armed robberies increased for all locations between 1988 and 1990. Building societies were the first to show a decrease in 1992, followed by banks and garages in 1993. In 1994 the number of attacks decreased for all targets, with the greatest reductions at building societies (46%) and banks (43%). Both these targets

RECENT TRENDS IN ARMED ROBBERY

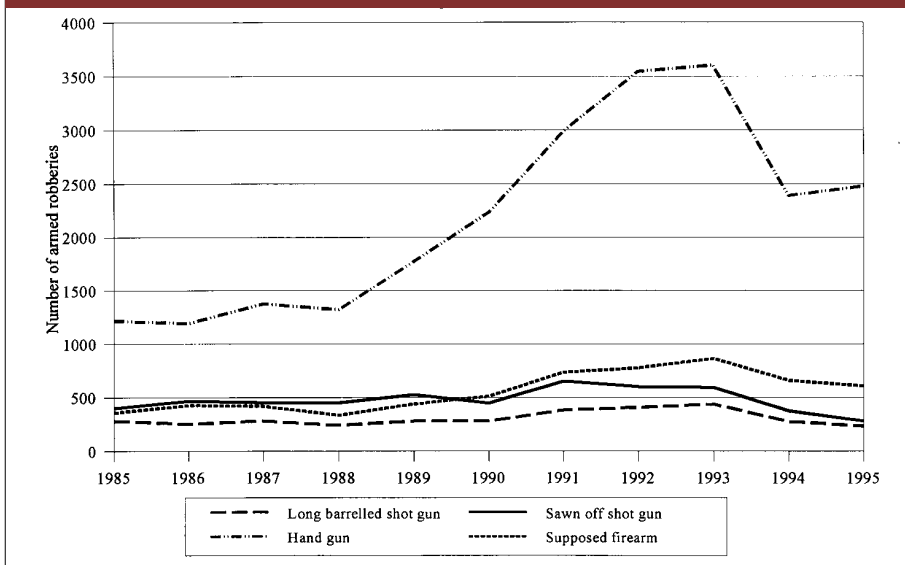
saw a further reduction of 19 per cent in 1995 making them the two targets with the lowest number of attacks. While the number of attacks increased for post offices (13%), garages (12%) and shops (5%) in 1995, they were still below their 1993 levels (Home Office, 1996).

Recent research on robberies against retailing outlets also indicates that armed attacks on shops, off-licences and garages are particularly prevalent. Research by the British Retail Consortium (1994) found that the net loss from all robberies and till snatches was £11.5 million in 1993-4 with 17 per cent of off-licences, 13 per cent of shops and 11 per cent of garages reporting attacks. Similarly, the Police Foundation (1993) study 'Violent Crime in Small Shops' found that 25 per cent of the 92 shopkeepers interviewed reported having been threatened with a knife, or a real or imitation firearm within the last year.

Type of weapon

The type of weapon used has changed over the decade, with a large increase in the use of hand guns and a smaller increase in the use of supposed firearms between 1985 and 1993 (Home Office, 1996). In 1994, there was a sharp decline in the use of firearms, particularly hand guns.

Figure 2: Offences of robbery recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used by type of principal weapon, England and Wales (1985 - 1995)



This decline continued in 1995 for all weapons except hand guns which increased by 4 per cent, accounting for 63 per cent of armed robberies in that year. Figure 2 indicates the patterns of usage for those firearms most frequently used in armed robbery.

Morrison and O'Donnell (1994) point out that there is a tendency for both witnesses and the police to over-estimate the proportion of real guns used in robberies. This is because unless a weapon is fired or recovered after a crime, there is no way of knowing for certain if it is real or imitation, loaded or unloaded. Also, they suggest that in several cases where robbery was carried out using the threat of a concealed firearm, the robber was actually unarmed. From their interviews with convicted armed robbers, they conclude that only about one third of all weapons used were actually capable of firing a lethal shot.

Number of injuries

³ These figures relate to all categories of offences involving injuries caused by firearms other than air weapons: separate data for robbery are not available. We know, however, that just under 70% of offences in which firearms other than air weapons were used were robberies.

Between 1988 and 1993 the number of injuries³ caused by firearms other than air weapons increased from 371 to 721. There were fewer injuries in 1994 (623) and 1995 (617). The 1995 injuries comprised 69 fatal injuries, 220 serious injuries and 328 slight injuries. The proportion of all offences in which injury was caused has hardly changed over the decade, being 11 per cent in 1985 and 11.1 per cent in 1995, although the proportion was much smaller in the intervening years reaching 7.5 per cent in 1991 (Home Office, 1996).

Of all armed robberies recorded in England and Wales in 1995, 29 per cent were carried out in the Metropolitan Police District. This compares to 60 per cent in the 1960s. Looking behind these numerical changes in armed robbery, it is possible to detect some related changes which have occurred over the past two decades in the nature of armed robbery in this country. These shifts include deskilling, displacement and diversification.

Deskilling

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a general shift away from 'craft' robberies - which typically involved one robber with some technical skills, for example the ability to safecrack - towards 'project' crime - which required organisational skills to co-ordinate several robbers, but relied on brute force, initially in the form of clubs, pickaxe handles and the like, and increasingly superseded by firearms (Hobbs, 1988). Project crime, because of its audacity and the level of violence, became the object of media attention and was epitomised in the public mind by the Great Train Robbery.

Over the past few years, there has been a noticeable shift towards spontaneous attacks, normally involving a lone robber who relies on the presence or threat of a gun to carry out the robbery. As Ekblom (1987) noted in relation to attacks on sub-post offices in the mid 1980s, the increased reliance on firearms reduced the time spent planning for the robbery and consequently increased the number of unsuccessful robberies. He also

noted that the introduction of security screens into many types of commercial premises during the 1980s provided greater protection for both the cashier and the robber who was now less likely to be pursued by 'have-a-go-heroes'.

Several authors have highlighted the relative ease with which commercial robberies can be carried out either with a real or an imitation firearm. Entering a premises, holding a firearm against the screen and threatening the cashier requires little in the way of planning, co-ordination or skill. Thus commercial robbery has attracted a significant number of lone, relatively unorganised and in some cases more volatile and desperate individuals. Recent research shows that over 60 per cent of armed robberies involving building societies involved minimal levels of planning, and that although the majority of convicted robbers have histories of substantial criminal activity, for a significant percentage of armed robbers involvement in armed robbery represents their first serious criminal offence (Gill and Matthews, 1994). Research has also shown that within the conventional demarcations between 'professional', 'intermediate' and 'amateur' robbers, the last category accounts for by far the largest percentage of known robbers nationally.

Displacement

Displacement is notoriously difficult to measure. It can take several forms - temporal, geographical, target, tactical, or crime type - and changes in the level of reported crime may be due to extraneous factors (Repetto, 1976; Gabor, 1990).

The likelihood and extent of displacement may be affected by the offender's commitment to armed robbery and the availability of alternative, less well protected targets (Cornish and Clarke, 1987). Taking displacement to mean a shift towards more vulnerable targets, Figure 1 indicates possible displacement from building societies and banks to softer targets particularly shops and post offices. This effect is evident in 1992 and 1993. In 1994 armed robbery decreased for all targets, but in 1995 there are again signs of displacement, with building society and bank attacks decreasing and other targets' increasing.

This is almost certainly due to the more sophisticated security measures introduced by many banks and building societies, coupled with the relatively low levels of cash which these premises hold at any one time. Introduction of rising security screens, video cameras, double security doors, silent and audible alarms have made robbing these premises far more difficult.

As noted earlier, the percentage of armed robberies carried out in the MPD over the past three decades has decreased significantly. This partly may be due to increased mobility of particular categories of armed robbers. The main form of displacement which appears to have taken place, however, involves a shift towards more vulnerable and 'softer' targets. This may be seen as a form of 'malign' displacement in that victims

in these premises are likely to lack the protection and training which has become standard practice in the 'harder' commercial institutions (Barr and Pease, 1991).

Diversification

Although little is known about the involvement of armed robbers in other forms of criminal activity there is some evidence that certain robbers are diversifying into other criminal activities, particularly importing and distributing illegal drugs (Dorn et al., 1992). As one commentator put it, armed robbery has in the last decade or so become 'dangerous and unfashionable' while 'the profits from the drugs trade dwarf the proceeds of all but the very biggest robberies', and these proceeds 'can be concealed or laundered far more readily than identifiable bank notes or bullion' (Rose, 1988).

Several commentators have referred to a growing relationship between drugs and armed robbery. While some 'amateur' robbers may be motivated by the desire to obtain money to buy drugs, among the more professional 'criminal diversifiers' armed robbery is a way of financing drug dealing and importing, with higher potential profits. There is a tendency for armed robbery to be less central to their general activities with increased prominence for drug dealing.

Developing a police response

The problem of dealing with several different types of robbers who may employ a variety of weapons and strategies is compounded by the speed and ferocity of the offence. This in turn creates difficulties in terms of witness testimonies, particularly if the offender is wearing a disguise.

The varying rates of detection between different types of commercial armed robbery suggest that certain forms of armed robbery in particular situations are more amenable to detection than others. Cases with the greatest interaction between offenders and victims, and with visual or photographic evidence tend to have the highest levels of detection. Recent developments in photographic, computer and forensic techniques can provide valuable assistance in investigation, while introduction of armed response vehicles in most forces can make an important contribution to clearing up this type of crime (Eck, 1983; Gagnon and Le Blanc, 1983).

The Audit Commission report 'Helping With Enquiries' (1993) emphasised the role of proactive work in criminal investigation and particularly the role of informants. Focusing predominantly on the incident rather than the criminal draws the police away from the type of proactive work thought needed to apprehend those prolific criminals accounting for much of the police workload. They argued instead for an intelligence-led approach, using informants who were seen as a cost effective, but under-used, source of detection. The report also raised questions about the use of resources and gave some consideration to different forms of organisation. These

issues are pertinent to the present study since it looks both at a specialist dedicated unit and an integrated CID team working within a Serious Crime Group.

Nationally, most robbery is dealt with by the CID, with approximately 11 per cent of the workload of detective constables in each force taken up with associated enquiries. The national average clear up rate for armed robbery is approximately 22 per cent. Although clear up rate is not a precise indicator of 'success' or even police performance, since different crimes vary in their ease of detection, as a general guide it remains an important point of reference.

Recent developments related to PACE and the operation of the Crown Prosecution Service, particularly regarding the quality of evidence and its presentation and reliability, have resulted in courts being less likely to convict on the basis of confessions alone and increased the need for more substantial corroboration, particularly when the defendant remains silent. As the Audit Commission points out: 'Consequently there is a far greater imperative either to catch criminals in the act or to build a robust case against them after the crime has occurred, using evidence other than admission. The evidence will be of two types - forensic (fingerprints, fibres, blood samples, etc.) and intelligence based.' (1993) Within the repertoire of detectives there is a range of strategies involving combinations of proactive and reactive approaches, information-based strategies and surveillance techniques.

Currently a number of specialist squads, notably the Flying Squad, deal with armed robbery in England and Wales. These have been established because:

- crimes like commercial robbery need mobilisation of particular forms of expertise and equipment;
- in large urban areas a critically co-ordinated response is needed, particularly for highly mobile offenders;
- the level of professionalism and sophistication of armed robbers in a particular area requires a similar level of police professionalism and expertise.

3. A dedicated armed robbery unit: the Flying Squad

Introduction

A principal task of this project was to examine the operation of a dedicated police unit dealing with armed robbery. The 'Flying Squad' of the Metropolitan Police District (MPD) was selected for several reasons. First, during interviews carried out with convicted armed robbers in prison during 1991-92 reference was made to the difficulties and disadvantages of carrying out armed robberies in the London area because of the police presence. As a result some offenders stated that they either had moved to other areas to carry out robberies, or had become increasingly involved in other forms of criminality (Gill and Matthews, 1994).

Second, historically the squad has built up a reputation for innovative and imaginative strategies. It therefore seemed likely to provide a useful point of reference for general development of new techniques and approaches. The relatively high clear up rate for certain categories of armed robbery, which is over 60 per cent in some cases, also suggested that the Flying Squad is an effective unit and may provide useful examples of good practice.

Third, its size and role within the complex organisation and management systems of the Metropolitan Police. One problem is to balance proper accountability for a dedicated unit with the necessary degree of autonomy and flexibility for operational effectiveness.

The development of the Flying Squad

Since establishment in 1918 the Flying Squad has had an illustrious but chequered history. For many, the very name is associated with some of the most notorious robbers and robberies in living memory. Immediately post-war it was dogged by accusations of corruption, and by the 1950s its continuation appeared in doubt. However, four developments during the 1960s and the early 1970s argued for retention:

- a shift from breaking into banks and other commercial premises and cracking the safe or vault, to the routine use of firearms to threaten and intimidate counter staff;
- relatedly, the doubling of the number of armed robberies in the 1960s and their apparent concentration in the MPD (Greenwood, 1972);
- the emergence of several criminal gangs, some associated with certain families such as the Richardsons and the Krays. The spate of apparently more organised forms of robbery, typified in a number of celebrated cases such as the Brinks Matt and The Great Train Robbery, suggested the need for a specialist unit able to respond effectively (Darbyshire and Hilliard, 1993);

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- development during the 1970s of a system of supergrasses and informants facilitated an improved clear up rate for armed robbery and a more intensive operation directed at the more professional and organised criminals.

The Flying Squad was re-organised into four robbery squads with separate area officers - Finchley, Barnes, Tower Bridge and Rigg Approach - with direct responsibility for investigating all armed robberies involving more than three criminals. Since then its efforts have concentrated on band 1 armed robberies.

During the late 1970s the number of armed robberies in the MPD increased from 734 in 1978 to 1,778 in 1982, with estimated proceeds in 1992 in the region of £12 million. Since then the number of armed robberies recorded in the London area has fluctuated considerably. As Figure 3 shows, between 1988 and 1991 there was a steady overall increase in the number of band 1 robberies. Thereafter band 1 robberies substantially decreased to 679 in 1994, a 58 per cent reduction from 1991. Similar fluctuations have occurred in relation to band 2 robberies, which peaked in 1992 and dropped sharply in 1994.

Figure 3: Number of band 1 and band 2 armed robberies in the MPD (1987 - 1994)

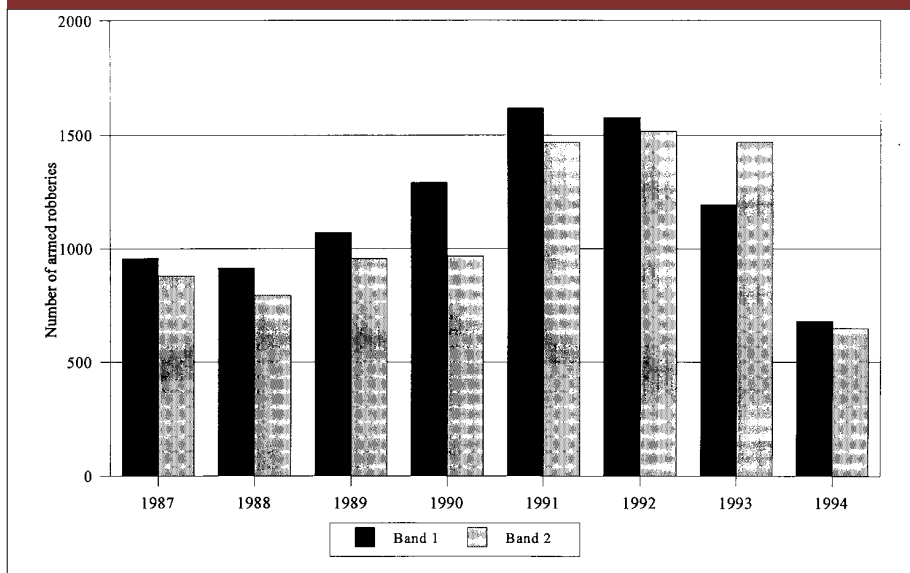
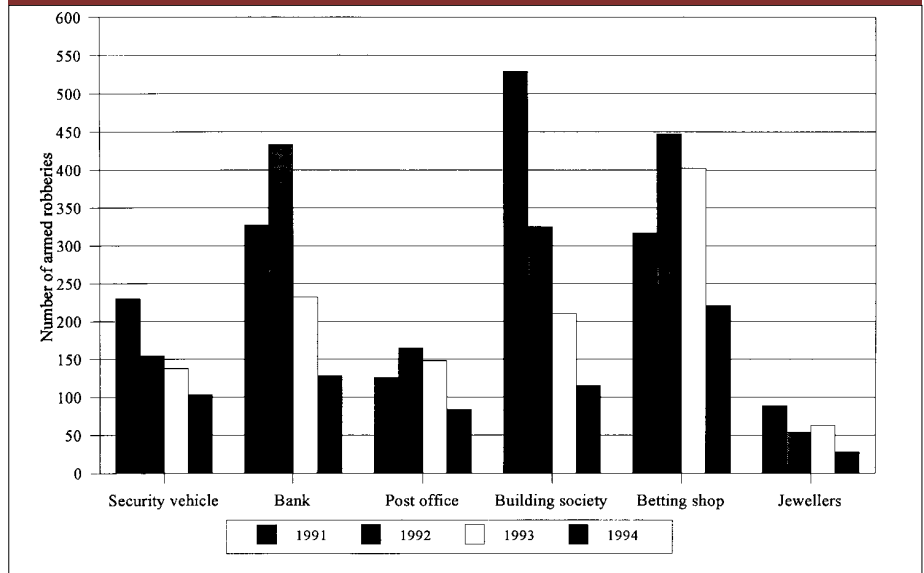


Figure 4 shows that the recorded decrease during 1993-4 is not uniform across all categories of band 1 robberies. The most dramatic decreases concern banks and building societies.

Figure 4: Number of band 1 armed robberies in the MPD by target (1991 - 1994)



Structure and organisation

In 1994 SO8 branch (the Flying Squad) had 173 police and 19 civilian staff. These were divided between four area teams and the central office located at New Scotland Yard. Each area team is headed by a Detective Chief Inspector with three Detective Inspectors.

Staff are usually recruited into the Flying Squad on a three year basis, with extensions in exceptional cases. Given its prestigious nature there are many applicants, enabling it to select from the best qualified officers in the force. Officers are normally selected in terms of their proven abilities in handling and developing informants, collecting and presenting evidence and investigative skills.

In 1993 1,193 offences concerned band 1 targets. All other armed robberies are normally investigated by Divisions. However, some band 2 armed robberies are investigated by the Flying Squad because the suspects are known to them, or are considered to be the type of criminal who could be investigated more effectively by them. In such cases senior CID officers on Division decide in consultation with SO8 branch who should deal with it. At times there are predictably uncertainties and tensions between Divisions and the Flying Squad, particularly when investigation of

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the case involves the visible deployment of armed officers. Interviews with senior Flying Squad officers indicated that questions about 'ownership' did occur on occasion, but generally there was a good working relationship.

In some 2.5 per cent of cases the Flying Squad pursue investigations outside the London area. In these cases the Flying Squad have to negotiate with local forces who do not always welcome their intervention. During 1994 they arrested 61 offenders who were either outside the usual SO8 categories or outside the MPD.

Thus the terms of reference for the Flying Squad although normally quite precise have some flexibility. Increasingly the Flying Squad has become more involved in crime prevention work, liaising in particular with banks and building societies about security measures. Recently the 'Counter Action' campaign was launched in partnership with Threshers to prevent robberies against a range of commercial premises. There is also regular liaison with the cash in transit industry, the Post Office and the licensed betting trade.

Within the band 1 robberies investigated by the Flying Squad there is considerable diversity both in how they are carried out and in victim vulnerability. The following sections consider distribution, amounts stolen, profile of offenders, use of firearms and security devices.

Nature of band 1 armed robbery in the MPD

Distribution of band 1 robberies

The sample of 235 cases included 216 robberies, 17 attempted robberies, one conspiracy to steal and one firearms offence. Table 1 compares the distribution of robberies by target in the sample with the total recorded incidents for 1993, indicating that the sample is sufficiently representative to draw conclusions.

Table 1: Distribution of band 1 robberies in the MPD by target (1993)

	Sample		Total recorded	
	No.	%	No.	%
Bank	54	23	232	19
Building society	43	18	210	18
Post office	30	13	148	12
Cash in transit	28	12	138	12
Betting shop	71	30	402	34
Jewellers	9	4	63	5
TOTAL	235	100	1,193	100

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Amounts stolen

The amounts stolen in the cases examined varied considerably by target, but were on average relatively low, often less than £500. Focus by the media on the larger and more dramatic cases can encourage over-estimation, and play down the minor and routine robberies in which the amount of money involved is minimal. Previous research has shown that a surprising percentage of robbers have little expectation of high yields and in many cases carry out robberies with no clear idea of the likely amount (Walsh, 1986).

Targets involve different sets of risks and ranges of potential rewards. The amounts stolen in attacks on security vehicles, for example, ranged from £10,000 to £2.3 million, while betting shop robberies involved sums between £160 and £5,000. The sample contained two robberies over a million pounds, one involving a jewellers and one involving a security van robbery. Such exceptional robberies can inflate the average amount taken from each target.

The data in Table 2 include attempted armed robberies in which nothing was stolen. If attempts are discounted, then the average amounts actually stolen are as follows: banks - £3,743; building societies - £9,246; post offices - £12,693; cash in transit - £378,479; betting shops - £1,174. In the nine cases of robbery involving jewellers, there were no attempts.

Table 2: Amount stolen by target

	Number	Lowest £	Highest £	Average £
Bank	54	360	28,000	3,285
Building society	43	900	108,000	7,956
Post office	30	30	56,000	9,732
Cash in transit	28	10,000	2.3 million	351,445
Betting shop	71	160	5,000	1,141
Jewellers	9	9,000	3 million	206,427

Profile of offenders

Details were extracted from case reports where the robber was identified. Robbers were assessed in terms of number involved, age, drug involvement, ethnic origin, the use of disguises, and form of threat used.

- Fifty five per cent of cases involved one offender, 32 per cent involved two, 11 per cent involved three and two per cent involved four or more offenders. Banks and betting shops involved over 40 per cent of single offenders, while robberies against security vehicles tended to involve two or three offenders working together.

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- All the known offenders were over twenty years old with approximately one third being in their mid-twenties. Those involved in post office robberies on average tended to be younger, while those carrying out attacks against security vehicles were the oldest overall age group.
- Almost half of the offenders arrested had some involvement in the use or distribution of illegal drugs. The strongest associations with drugs were robberies against building societies (64%) and betting shops (60%).
- From the reports recording the ethnicity of offenders, just over 60 per cent were white European and 34 per cent Afro-Caribbean. Over 90 per cent of attacks against security vehicles were carried out by white Europeans, while 60 per cent of betting shops were robbed by Afro-Caribbeans.
- Fifty five per cent of known offenders wore some form of disguise. Disguises were most commonly worn by those carrying out bank robberies (64%) and most infrequently worn by those robbing betting shops (48%). Disguises included balaclavas, wigs, overcoats, crash helmets and glasses. Officers interviewed considered that robbers tended to employ similar disguises for the robberies which they carried out.
- Just as certain robbers used the same disguise on different occasions, there was also a tendency to employ the same style of threat in carrying out the robbery and even to use the same wording. In the vast majority of cases an oral threat was used while demand notes were employed with some frequency in bank (20%) and building society (12%) raids.

Use of firearms

The use of weapons in the MPD varied by target with robbers employing a mixture of firearms and other weapons as Table 3 indicates. In line with national trends, hand guns were the most frequently used weapon. In 75 per cent of cases the weapon was seen and in the remainder it was implied. Besides hand guns, shot guns and knives, other weapons included baseball bats and clubs.

Table 3: The use of weapons by target (1993)

	Hand gun	Shot gun	Knife	Other	Total
Bank	32	10	2	10	54
Building society	24	3	5	11	43
Post office	19	5	5	1	30
Cash in transit	16	2	4	6	28
Betting shop	39	9	6	18	71
Jewellers	6	2	1	–	9

In several cases a replica firearm was considered to be a sufficient threat. From interviews carried out with convicted armed robbers in London, Morrison and O'Donnell (1994) found that those involved in robbing security vans always carried at least one loaded gun, while only half the robberies involving banks and post offices involved real, loaded guns. Building societies, on the other hand, were most frequently attacked by robbers carrying replicas, or simulating possession. They also found a close connection between the type of gun used and the level of planning by robbers. They concluded that the preparations made by real gun users 'were much more elaborate than those made by other offenders with most wearing disguises, co-ordinating their activities with at least one other accomplice and devising complex methods of escape'.

The use of firearms and the selection of targets by offenders is widely considered to be affected by the level of security. From the sample of cases examined it was possible to identify the range of security devices used.

Use of security devices

Targets exhibited significantly different levels of use of security devices. As Table 4 shows, cameras and video equipment were widely used in banks and building societies in the MPD, but not in post offices, betting shops and jewellers. Betting shops in particular were found to be poorly protected.

	Camera		Video		Guards		Alarm		None		No record	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bank (54)	41	76	6	11	–	–	3	6	2	4	2	4
Building society (43)	22	51	10	23	–	–	1	2	4	9	6	14
Post office (30)	1	3	–	–	–	–	3	10	7	23	19	63
Cash in transit (28)	–	–	1	4	18	64	–	–	8	29	1	4
Betting shop (71)	8	11	4	6	–	–	–	–	56	79	3	4
Jewellers (9)	–	–	6	67	1	11	–	–	2	22	–	–

Police response

Since 1991 the Flying Squad clear up rate for band 1 robberies has increased slightly from 31.3 per cent to 32.3 per cent in 1993. However, there is considerable variation between targets, as Table 5 indicates.

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Table 5: Clear up rate for band 1 robberies in the MPD (1991-1994)

	Incidents detected							
	1991		1992		1993		1994	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bank	120	37	206	50	159	69	83	65
Building society	230	43	147	45	111	53	70	61
Post office	43	34	39	24	26	18	22	26
Cash in transit	38	17	17	11	16	12	23	22
Betting shop	35	11	103	23	56	14	75	34
Jewellers	41	46	14	26	17	27	11	39

In 1994 the Flying Squad achieved a clear up rate of over 60 per cent for robberies involving banks and building societies, while robberies involving security vehicles had a clear up rate of just over 20 per cent.

This study focused on the principal reason for arrest. There are, however, often several overlapping factors which make an arrest possible. Thus it is not always easy to determine which single factor was most important. Case records were reviewed and the investigating officers were also interviewed to help determine the main reason for arrest.

Table 6: Principal reasons for arrest and/or detection

	No.	%
Caught at or near scene		
Public initiated	9	8
Police initiated	14	13
Subsequent police investigations		
Video/photo	6	6
Informant	43	40
Forensic	7	7
Surveillance	4	4
Admitted offence while in custody ⁴	4	4
Protracted police enquiries (3 months and over)	21	19
TOTAL	108	% exceeds 100 due to rounding

⁴ This includes cases where offenders admitted to robberies other than those for which they were taken into custody.

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Caught at or near the scene

From the sample of cases, 23 of the total 108 involved the offender being caught at or near the robbery scene.

Public initiated

The public and security staff foiled armed robberies in some cases either by not co-operating with the robbers' demands or by 'having a go'. In two cases, the alarm was given and the offenders were apprehended by the armed response unit.

Police initiated

Most interventions near the scene were police activated. In one case a gang of armed robbers was spotted by uniformed police who contacted the Flying Squad. In another case the suspect was caught as a result of a 'stop and search' operation being carried out in the area. Most of these cases, however, were the outcome of police intelligence and surveillance operations. A regular scenario involved the police following suspects over a period of time, having linked them with a particular style of robbery or working on information received. In keeping the individuals or gang under surveillance, the aim is to locate the target and if possible to apprehend the suspects during or shortly after the commission of the crime. In this way, more definite evidence is available and the chances of prosecution are felt to be much higher than through arrest at an earlier stage on a conspiracy charge.

Two crimes cleared up immediately after the robbery itself were the result of offenders returning to the scene of the crime. A further two cases involved suspects being apprehended on firearms charges which were linked to known robberies.

Caught via subsequent police investigations

Video and photographic evidence

In cases of arrests shortly after the robbery, video and photographic information played a relatively limited but not insignificant role. The improved quality and location of video cameras was sometimes instrumental in identifying offenders. Introduction of 35mm lens cameras in many premises and pioneering work in picture enhancement has undoubtedly brought convictions in cases which previously would have been left unresolved. In one celebrated case this was achieved by identifying a distinctive ear lobe partly visible to the camera and later matched to the suspect. Of the 108 successful cases only 52 had video or photographic evidence. Of these only three were described as 'excellent', 40 as 'good', three as 'fair', and six as 'poor'. In a further four cases cameras were present but either had no film or were not activated. Video evidence was identified as the primary reason for arrest in only six cases. As noted above, there are number of premises where cameras are not in use or are badly

located. Also, even where good photographic evidence is available it is not always possible to identify and trace the offender.

Informants

Police intelligence, provided primarily by informants, was the most important factor in identifying offenders and making arrests in a significant number of sample cases. After a robbery occurred informants provided critical information in some 43 cases. Informants played a major role both where offenders were caught at the scene of the crime and in cases involving more protracted police enquiries. Review of 108 successful cases indicates that informants were significant in over 60 per cent of these. However, in many of them video, photographic or forensic evidence had an important corroborating role, particularly in relation to eventual prosecutions.

Forensic evidence

Availability of good forensic evidence was critical in seven of the successful cases, and provided useful corroborating evidence in a number of others. Having their own forensic team provides the Flying Squad with readily accessible and reliable support. Forensic evidence can be helpful in identifying offenders, usually through examination of discarded clothing, or analysis of fingerprints found on retrieved weapons and recovered vehicles

Surveillance

In cases where certain individuals are suspected but little firm evidence is available, surveillance can be extremely valuable in gathering further evidence and eventually making an arrest. The Flying Squad has its own specialist surveillance unit as well as access to other surveillance teams when required. In dealing with cases involving lengthy planning and a number of offenders, surveillance activities can provide valuable information on movements and criminal associations of suspects. Although surveillance operations are credited with being the primary factor in making arrests in only four cases, apart from cases where offenders were caught at the scene of the crime, they are an important dimension to police work. Surveillance techniques were employed in 36 per cent of the cases examined (87) and these cases were often described as being part of a pattern or involving known offenders.

Admissions while suspect is in custody

In four cases offenders admitted the offences, either as a result of direct questioning or while being held on other charges. Although the number involved is relatively small, this method of clearing up crime requires fewer resources and often reflects investigating officers' skill in utilising the vulnerability of the suspect.

In one case a suspect simply wanted to confess. The other three cases, however, involved extensive interviewing, evidence gathering and identification parades.

Admissions were achieved in these cases primarily as a result of successful interviewing, and the careful selection of police officers in the Flying Squad undoubtedly played a part in these outcomes. In several cases, however, despite being confronted with the evidence, the suspect refused to admit the offence or comment. In other cases, more protracted investigations were necessary.

Protracted investigations

Twenty one cases involved protracted police enquiries. In these cases, surveillance, video and forensic evidence were normally mobilised to help build up evidence. This involved more extensive detective work, and in several cases detection was achieved through a combination of information and the search for links between robberies that initially appeared to be unconnected.

In other cases, the suspect was known to the police but difficult to locate and therefore interview. This was particularly evident where offenders had absconded from prison or failed to return after home leave. Although there was only one such case in the sample, data collected by the Flying Squad suggest that there were 17 people arrested in 1993/94 for carrying out armed robberies while absconding from prison.

Lost cases

To examine the processes of detection and arrest from another vantage point, 127 cases were examined where no arrest was made and the case dropped. In the majority of 'lost' cases the principal reasons were a lack of photographic and/or forensic evidence, no witnesses, or the case was not part of a pattern. Other reasons included the offender wearing an effective disguise, forensic evidence being disallowed, the failure of identity parades, or when suspects became conscious of surveillance and ceased activities.

In some 'lost' cases investigations ran into months and were extremely time consuming. But most successful cases (85%) were cleared up within six to eight weeks mainly due to the quality of information available and the diligence of the officers. Because of the significance of informants in the process of detection, the next section looks at this in more detail.

Role of informants

The data examined support the Audit Commission view that informants 'offer a very cost effective source of detection' and that detectives should be encouraged 'to cultivate information on high priority crimes or criminals. Forces should also review the current budgets for informants and ensure that officers are aware of the cost efficiency of informants.' (1993). On a general level, this is clearly the case. Provided they are properly administered and controlled, informants are a valuable tool in the fight against crime. The Home Office issued guidelines on their use in 1969 and these have been expanded and supplemented by guidelines produced by

the Association of Chief Police Officers in 1995. A national database of informants has also been set up and is being maintained by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS).

Compared with using informants, other forms of detective work can appear slow, expensive and uncertain. In many cases the choice is not between using informants or engaging in protracted detective work, but a combination of the two approaches or alternatively using the latter where the former is not available or is inadequate.

The reputation that the Flying Squad currently enjoys partly draws on its historical development of 'supergrasses' during the 1970s. Cultivating and milking those involved both directly and indirectly in the criminal 'underworld' proved to be critical in gaining a series of notable convictions. The Flying Squad has built on this strategy while in recent years attempting to divest the process of its more unsavoury associations.

Selection of Flying Squad officers now considers the ability of officers to cultivate and handle informants. Currently there are just over 100 registered informants in the four branches of the Flying Squad who regularly provide information, not only on robbery but on a range of criminal activity, and both actual and potential offenders. Besides providing a steady flow of information they are also used in cases where leads are not forthcoming.

The annual cost of registered informants by the Flying Squad is estimated to be approximately £120,000 including rewards paid by insurance companies and commercial institutions for information leading to arrests. From available figures it appears that each registered informant is paid on average £1,000 per annum. In terms of the number of robberies which information from this group helps to clear up, compared with the cost of alternative approaches, it is an extremely cost effective strategy. As one senior officer put it, 'one phone call from an informant can be worth a month's detective work.' There was little doubt amongst senior officers that the major difference between the operation of the Flying Squad and other non-dedicated responses was more systematic use of registered informants.

The research identified a wide variety of informants. They can be divided between the active (criminals) and non-active; between the paid and the unpaid; between the long-term and one-off, and between those who are acquainted with the offender and those who are strangers, as well as those who operate proactively rather than reactively. More detailed investigation of informants may reveal which combination of attributes provides the best quality and most consistent information, and the most useful sources. From the police perspective the aim is to cultivate as many sources of relevant information as possible. The difficulty arises in sifting this information and in deciding on its reliability. This is an important process of police decision-making and calls on experience.

Recovery of property and firearms

One important aspect of police success is property recovered. Not surprisingly, the likelihood of recovering property was greatest when offenders were arrested at or near the scene. In other cases, recovery of proceeds was at best partial. In addition to proceeds, firearms and other weapons were recovered in 35 percent of cases, and in one particular cash-in-transit robbery a total of seven vehicles were recovered. In 1994 the Flying Squad recovered 44 hand guns, 35 replica hand guns, 33 shot guns and 22 rifles, as well as eight other assorted weapons, including one machine gun. They also recovered just under 20,000 rounds of ammunition. The recovery of firearms is widely considered to be a mark of police success, on the assumption that removing firearms from the market is an important method of reducing the number of armed robberies. Relatively little is known, however, about what difference their removal makes to the general availability of firearms.

Police use of firearms

Police use of firearms has been a major area of concern and debate in recent years. A number of serious crime incidents in which individuals have been fired upon by the police have attracted a considerable amount of media and public attention. This focus has in turn prompted discussion over the routine arming of the police and its possible effects on the general use of firearms.

The Flying Squad is a regular user of firearms. During 1994 it carried out 417 armed operations and was involved with other specialist units on a further 400 occasions. In effect Flying Squad officers are involved in an armed operation two or three times a week. In 1994 shots were fired on a total of 17 occasions by armed robbers resulting in six victims being injured, two being fatally wounded, and two police officers sustaining injuries. In 1993, when more shots were fired by armed robbers, police fire was returned on only two occasions, resulting in no injury on one occasion and a suspect being hit in the leg on another occasion. The suspect involved in this incident fatally shot himself after being injured.

The use of firearms by suspects was significantly less in 1994 than it had been in previous years. There has been a gradual decline in the number of occasions in which shots have been fired in the MPD and the number of people injured since 1986. So it would appear that police deployment of firearms has not resulted in the increased use of firearms in armed robberies or in the number of people injured. Within the offender-police relationship there appears to be a recognition that carrying guns, whether real or imitation, is an essential part of gaining control in robberies, while the experience and familiarity with weapons amongst carefully selected and trained police officers appears to minimise their actual use.

Table 7: Occasions on which shots were fired in the MPD and number of armed operations (1986 - 1994)

Year	Occasions shots fired	Persons injured	Fatalities	Number of armed operations	Suspects shot by the police
1986	62	16	0	810*	0
1987	79	21	0	705*	4
1988	56	17	1	644	3
1989	39	9	3	718	2
1990	40	3	1	692	1
1991	37	9	0	598	0
1992	46	8	0	714	1
1993	37	6	1	716	3
1994	17	6	2	817	1

* includes SO8 and SO9 (Regional Crime Squad) operations

Prosecuting and sentencing offenders

Different factors affect detection and prosecution, since those primary in the former may play only a secondary or corroborative role in the latter.

Most robbers plead guilty. Only four cases from the sample pleaded not guilty, although there were 44 cases (53%) still awaiting trial at the time the research was completed. Interviewed officers said that they had a good working relationship with the Crown Prosecution Service, although general problems arose over identification of offenders, fallibility of witnesses, and in some cases reluctance of witnesses to give evidence or appear in court. Examination of criminal histories reveals that in 45 per cent of cases offenders had previous convictions, most frequently for armed robbery.

Sentences imposed ranged from 18 months to 18 years, and of the not guilty pleas, three resulted in acquittals. These sentences mirror the range given nationally. Although some officers complained that the courts are too lenient on convicted offenders, the evidence is that both in London and nationally, average sentence lengths for robbery in general have increased significantly from 38.5 months in 1981, to 47.5 months in 1991. While comparable data for armed robbery are not available for earlier years, the average sentence length between 1993 and 1994 increased from 68.5 to 72.1 months.

Disclosure

A recurring issue in interviews with Flying Squad officers was the rules governing disclosure. Senior police officers felt that some ten cases had been 'lost' in 1993 as a result of the rules and that this had limited their effectiveness, particularly given their reliance on informants.

For both ethical and practical reasons the police are unwilling to release the name of informants. Where they feel that disclosure of material from or about an informant would not be in the public interest they can apply for a Public Interest Immunity Hearing before a judge. Where immunity is granted, the police can proceed. However, in some cases where immunity is not assured the police can be called upon to release names. They will, as a matter of policy, generally drop such cases. Otherwise they would jeopardise their relationship with informants and consequently the flow of information.

In one case which has become a point of reference on these issues, three young men were seen meeting together and were suspected of planning a robbery. Two days later the three men met again but one man left while the other two men carried out an armed robbery. They were caught and subsequently charged. In court the defence lawyer claimed that the man who left the robbery was an informant, and although the police admitted there was an informant involved in the case they stated that they could not confirm or deny that it was the man who walked away. In this case the judge said that the man should give evidence and allowed him to be questioned about his possible role as an informant. At this point the police dropped the case, and although the other two offenders had been caught 'in the act' they were acquitted.

This case exemplifies the type of problem which faces the police and courts over existing rules of disclosure and the use of informants. The Government has taken action to address these problems in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996.

4. Policing armed robbery in South Yorkshire

Introduction

South Yorkshire is a Metropolitan police force of approximately 3,000 officers and 1,115 civilian support staff. It covers an area of over 600 square miles and a population of just under 1,300,000. There are four main population centres - Sheffield, Doncaster, Rotherham and Barnsley. Sheffield is the largest of these with a population of approximately 500,000. Like many forces, South Yorkshire has been going through restructuring, although it is policed on a divisional and sub-divisional basis at the time of writing.

Sheffield has two divisions - Sheffield North (F Division) and Sheffield South (E Division) - each with three sub-divisional areas. Three further divisions (A, B, and C) coincide with the boundaries of Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham. Each has three sub-divisions, except Rotherham which only has two. There are therefore five divisions in the force and fourteen sub-divisions.

Each sub-division is commanded by a Superintendent, and has a Criminal Investigation Department headed by a Detective Inspector. In addition, on a divisional level there is a Detective Superintendent and a Detective Chief Inspector. All armed robberies are investigated by sub-divisional CID officers. At force headquarters there is a surveillance unit of twelve officers, which has a secondary role as a Serious Crime Squad.

Nature of armed robbery in South Yorkshire

Distribution of armed robberies

Figure 5 shows a significant increase in the number of armed robberies in South Yorkshire between 1987 and 1993, with a substantial decrease in 1994. The reduction in bank and building society robberies was particularly marked, with only four bank and six building society robberies recorded in 1994, compared to 11 and 21 respectively in the previous year.

Nearly two thirds of all the county's armed robberies were committed in Sheffield. The remainder were distributed fairly evenly throughout the force with Doncaster accounting for 15 per cent, Barnsley 12 per cent and Rotherham 17 per cent.

Due to the far lower number compared to London, it was possible to review all the South Yorkshire armed robberies in 1993.

Table 8 shows the profile of all armed robberies, including attempts, for 1993. It also shows the number of crimes detected in relation to each target. The most common targets in South Yorkshire during 1993 were shops, building societies and post offices. Detection rates for shops and post offices were amongst the lowest recorded, while the detection rate for building societies was relatively high.

POLICING ARMED ROBBERY IN SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Figure 5: Number of band 1 and band 2 armed robberies in South Yorkshire (1987 - 1994)

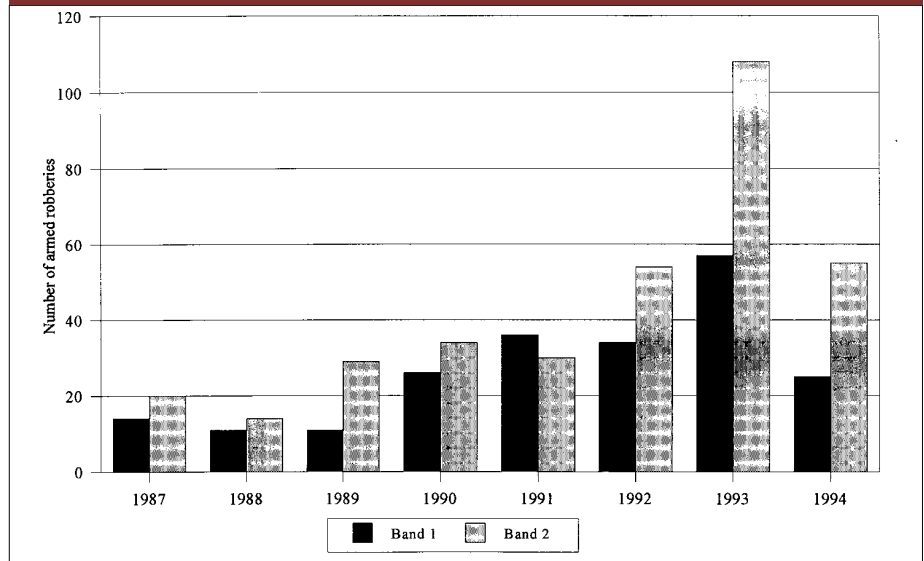


Table 8: Number of armed robberies in South Yorkshire including attempts (1993)

	Number of records	Number with no success	Number detected
Bank	11	2	4
Betting shop	6	0	4
Building society	21	9	10
Licensed premises	11	3	2
Off licence	10	5	3
Office	10	1	2
Other	31	7	9
Garage	18	5	5
Post office	21	11	7
Shop	26	12	6
TOTAL	165	55	52

Amounts stolen

Although there were a number of cases in 1993 where over £50,000 was stolen, and one case involved over £1 million, the vast majority of cases involved relatively small sums. There were also significant disparities between different types of target.

Table 9: Average amount stolen by target location

	(£)
Bank	4,624
Building society	1,673
Betting shop	910
Post office	3,990
Office	162
Off licence	79
Garage	310
Licensed premises	4,535
Shop	335

The data presented in Table 9 includes 55 attempts in which nothing was stolen. If these are discounted, the average amounts stolen are: banks - £5,652; building societies - £2,929; post offices - £8,379; and licensed premises - £6,236.

The South Yorkshire records show a surprisingly high level of takings from robberies against licensed premises. What is also of concern is the high level of violence involved. In three of these cases, the victims were tied up and in one instance sprayed with a noxious liquid. Because money tends to be kept in a safe rather than behind the counter, a high level of force is used by offenders to gain compliance.

Unsuccessful robberies

The reasons for unsuccessful robberies ranged from poor planning to the deployment of security measures in commercial premises. As Table 8 showed, most categories of target experienced a significant percentage of unsuccessful attacks during 1993.

Victim resistance, by refusing to hand over money, was a major reason for unsuccessful robberies. Shops, off licences and sub-post offices, which are frequently run by owners/managers, tended to display higher failure rates than targets such as banks and betting shops in which the victims were employees (see Working Group on Commercial Robbery, Home Office, 1986). The failure rate in building society branches and banks appeared to reflect target hardening devices such as rising screens, alarms and video cameras.

Profile of offenders

A profile of robbers was constructed from the available information on numbers involved, age, ethnicity, previous convictions, location and the use of disguises.

- Banks and building societies tended to involve the highest percentage of lone robbers (90 per cent and 76 per cent respectively) while just over 40 per cent of attacks against post offices involved one offender. In contrast, attacks at licensed premises invariably involved more than one offender.
- The average age of armed robbers in South Yorkshire was 28 years. Building societies and licensed premises attracted older robbers with average age between 30 and 40, while garages, betting shops, post offices and shops involved much younger offenders, on average between 20 and 25 years old.
- Ethnicity was recorded in 112 cases, with 85 described as European white, 16 as black and 11 as Asian.
- Eighty nine per cent of offenders had previous convictions. Just over half (54%) had previous convictions for burglary and 21 per cent for robbery. Thirty nine per cent had convictions for drink related offences; while 20 per cent had convictions for possession of drugs (mainly cannabis).
- Twelve per cent of robbers targeted premises within one mile of their home, 53 per cent travelled between one and five miles, while 28 per cent travelled over 10 miles.
- In approximately one third of cases robbers wore some sort of disguise. Disguises ranged from balaclavas to ordinary hats and sunglasses. There was a tendency, however, for disguises involving everyday apparel such as sunglasses or overcoats not always to be recorded by the police.

Use of firearms

Along with national trends, hand guns were the most frequent firearm used in armed robberies in South Yorkshire, accounting for 52 per cent of the total. Sawn-off shot guns accounted for 23 per cent of the firearms used, which was considerably higher than the national average of ten per cent. These figures are based on police reports which are reliant for the most part on victims' accounts. There was found to be no clearly distinguishable pattern of weapon type in relation to different targets, although there was some evidence that shot guns were more closely favoured by those attacking post offices, while hand guns were more common in attacks against shops.

Number of injuries

Armed robberies in South Yorkshire involved a relatively low rate of physical violence or injury. Out of 165 incidents, firearms were only discharged twice, on both occasions causing damage only. In three cases the firearm was used as a blunt instrument. During two robberies victims were punched, and in a further two sprayed with a noxious liquid. In all, nine persons suffered slight injury, and one serious injury. Due to the small numbers no clear patterns can be discerned. Those victims sustaining injury were mainly involved in offences at licensed premises and dwellings, although one injury occurred during an attack on a post office.

Police response

The overall detection rate for armed robbery in South Yorkshire in 1993 was 31 per cent. The detection rate varied considerably by target as Table 8 indicates. The high success rate for betting shops shows how relatively small samples can be distorted by one prolific offender (or in this case a team), but in general armed robberies involving financial institutions such as banks, building societies and post offices were more likely to be detected than those carried out in shops and garages and licensed premises. This appears to be related to the varying levels of security on the one hand, and the types of offenders involved in robbing different premises on the other. In South Yorkshire the principal mechanisms by which arrests were made were significantly different in emphasis from those in the MPD. Informants played a much less central role, while the speed of the police response was critical in a significant percentage of cases. Table 10 shows the principal reasons for arrest and/or detection in South Yorkshire.

Table 10: Principal reasons for arrest and /or detection

	No.	%
Caught at or near scene		
Public initiated	1	2
Police initiated	11	23
Subsequent police investigations		
Video/photo	4	9
Informant	8	17
Forensic	1	2
Surveillance	4	9
Admitted offence while in custody⁵	17	36
Protracted police enquiries (3 months and over)	1	2
TOTAL	47	100

⁵ This includes cases where offenders admitted to robberies other than those for which they were taken into custody.

Caught at the scene

Public initiated

Only one offence involved a perpetrator being caught at the scene by a witness. An offender entered a restaurant at 7.50 am with a sawn-off shot gun, threatening the staff and customers, demanding cash. A customer managed to disarm the offender, but during the struggle the firearm was discharged, fortunately without causing injury. The offender was eventually overpowered and detained until the police arrived.

Police initiated

Only one offender was detained at the scene by the police. The target premises was an off licence, and the swift apprehension was partly due to the fact that the offender was drunk and to the proximity of patrolling officers.

In ten cases offenders were caught within a three to four mile radius of the scene of the crime. Of these, one involved the victim following the offender at a short distance and pointing him out to a passing officer. Of the other nine, five involved witnesses obtaining vehicle registration numbers and the cars being spotted by officers either responding to the robbery or patrolling nearby. The remaining four involved the circulation of victim/witness descriptions to officers who stopped and arrested suspects in the vicinity. All these cases relied primarily on information from the public (victims or witnesses) in the first instance, and then the quality and speed of the police response.

In all eleven cases arrests were made by uniform officers (including on one occasion two Special Constables), except in one instance involving detectives responding to the incident. Armed Response Vehicles, although they may have been deployed, were not responsible for any arrests.

Caught via subsequent police investigation

Video and photographic evidence

Video evidence was available in 15 cases. In just over half the offender wore no noticeable disguise, and an examination of these eight robberies showed that all but one of the offenders were either resident outside the force area or an absentee from prison.

Of the 15 cases, eight involved building societies, five banks, one a post office and one an off licence. In 13 of the 15 cases, the videos or photographic evidence did, or could have assisted in identifying the offender in some way, although in five instances the photos were only of use in identifying clothing, hats or jewellery, rather than facial features. Video evidence was the principal reason for arrest in three cases, while photographic evidence was the principal reason in only one case. This case involved a bank robbery during which a photograph was taken and then shown

on local television. The offender was subsequently identified by a member of the public. The main role of photographic evidence was to provide supporting and corroborative evidence and in some cases it was influential in either prompting admissions or enabling detectives to link offences.

Informants

Informants were involved in only 12 cases, four of which involved the same team of offenders. The targets in this case were a series of betting shops, and the informant was motivated by a substantial reward offered by the bookmakers. In eight cases, the use of an informant was the principal reason for the offenders' arrest, although in three instances the case was discontinued either before or at court. Creedon (1992) has noted reluctance amongst officers in Leicester and Northampton to use informants because of concerns about their use and because of the general pressure of work. In his study of 241 robberies he found only four cases which involved paid informants.

The amount spent by the police on informants by South Yorkshire in 1993 was very low. Although the force as a whole spends approximately £50,000 per annum in total, the amount spent on information relating to armed robbery was reported to be only a fraction of this amount. Few informants were paid any kind of retainer and those who were paid provided a variety of information only some of which related to armed robbery. It was normal practice to seek payments from insurance companies and financial institutions to pay informants. In general, money was paid either by the police or financial bodies on results.

Forensic

Forensic evidence played a relatively minor role in detecting armed robberies during 1993, although fingerprints led to detection in one offence. In three other cases, forensic evidence in the form of head hair was found - one from a motorcycle helmet, one from a vehicle and one from a mask.

Surveillance

There were four robberies during 1993 which were primarily detected through surveillance operations. A further operation involved armed police targeting a number of people suspected of committing offences at post offices. This operation, however, was brought to a halt when one of the two main suspects shot and wounded the other.

Another offence was detected as a result of information received concerning a gang which was planning to commit a robbery. A watch was kept on a stolen vehicle which was to be used in the robbery, whilst a firearms team was assembled. However, before this could happen the offenders arrived in a second stolen vehicle and after a chase were arrested in nearby flats.

Admissions while in custody

Seventy per cent of offenders made admissions during tape recorded interviews at the police station. These admissions were usually made on the basis of considerable if not overwhelming evidence, often in the form of photographic or circumstantial evidence. Admission was the principal reason for prosecution in 17 cases, accounting for 36 per cent of arrests/detections. This was far higher than in the MPD where they accounted for 4 per cent of arrests/detections. A possible explanation is that the smaller number of offences in South Yorkshire combined with their local information and networks means that officers have better knowledge of the robbers operating in their area, which can be used when interviewing suspects. In addition, where prolific offenders in South Yorkshire have been identified, the offences for which they were responsible will represent a higher percentage of detected robberies overall.

Protracted police enquiries

Although several cases involved pursuing partial descriptions of people or vehicles, only 11 cases were detected as a result of protracted detective work, while only three cases were detected through prison 'write offs'. All involved the same offender who had committed a total of four armed robberies after escaping from prison.

Interestingly, 25 offences were linked to other armed robberies. These 25 armed robberies involved 14 offenders. Five of the most prolific of these 14 offenders were responsible for 63 offences nationally, and all these offences involved banks and building societies. These cases underline the importance of linking offences. During 1994, the methods by which the police established such links were largely ad hoc and informal. Offences were linked mainly through telex messages rather than through the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS).

Four offences were detected by other forces, and there were two cases where the offender was arrested committing another armed robbery by another force, but interviewed and prosecuted in South Yorkshire. In 33 per cent of cases, a firearm was recovered during the course of the investigation, and in several cases either clothing or the vehicle used during the commission of the offence was recovered.

In sum, a quarter of all arrests were attributable to an effective police response which resulted in the offender being arrested at the scene or 'nearby'. Many of these arrests were due to information from victims or witnesses in the first instance. Seventeen per cent of arrests were the direct result of the use of informants and in over one third of cases the offender made an admission while in custody. The contribution of other factors appears minimal, but the significance of photographic evidence and detective work should not be under-estimated, because they often link offences and provide corroborative evidence.

Prosecuting and sentencing offenders

In 44 per cent of cases, the principal factor leading to a conviction was admission. In 27 per cent the main factor was the recovery of property - proceeds of the offences, firearm used, clothing, or vehicle involved in the robbery. Identification by the victim or witness was critical in 18 per cent of cases, with other evidential factors secondary. In all but two cases the offence was found to be part of a linked series.

Of the 47 armed robberies in which arrests were made by the South Yorkshire Police in 1993, 12 cases were still pending in September 1994. In four cases, the prosecution was discontinued, and in a further two charges of armed robbery were replaced by amended charges. In one case, the two offenders received verbal cautions by the police and the remaining suspects appeared in court and were dealt with. Three pleaded 'not guilty', and of these one case proceeded to trial and the offender was convicted. The other two cases did not proceed for legal reasons.

Although certain police officers expressed dismay at the discontinuance of cases by the Crown Prosecution Service, the number is relatively low. Of the four cases discontinued, one was due to a break in the continuity of evidence, and another because the identification evidence was not corroborated in court. In the other two cases the police did not reach the stage of charging the suspects and discontinued the cases after seeking CPS advice. There were no cases in which disclosure was seen as a problem.

The length of sentence for individual robbers was conditioned by the number of previous convictions; most had a considerable history of convictions for a variety of offences. The longest sentence given was twelve years for a robbery involving a security vehicle in which two offenders were brothers. Although both men had no previous convictions, they were given a long sentence because they had abducted a security guard, and because one of the offenders was employed by the company. Those involved in bank robberies, building societies and robberies involving licensed premises tended to receive sentences of between seven and ten years, while those convicted of robbing post offices, shops, and betting shops received sentences averaging four years. Overall, those convicted of armed robbery received an average sentence of five and a half years.

In sum, there were some pronounced differences between the type of offenders carrying out armed robberies in South Yorkshire and those in the MPD, in relation to weapon use and target selection. The fact that only one cash in transit robbery was recorded for the whole of 1993 suggests that the number of professional 'project' criminals operating in the South Yorkshire area is small compared to the London region. Also, the relatively low number of successful robberies in South Yorkshire as well as the relatively high number in which the amounts stolen were less than £500 provides some indication of the type of robbers operating in this area.

5. Summary and conclusion

Recent years have seen substantial changes both in the incidence and nature of armed robbery and in the police response. The increases during the second half of the 1980s have been reversed in the last two or three years. These and other changes raise issues about the most appropriate and effective way to tackle armed robbery. Although there are significant regional variations in the level and type of armed robberies committed, this review provides a useful reference point to examine these issues.

Reactive vs. proactive policing: the crime or the criminal?

In many respects the major difference between the Flying Squad and South Yorkshire CID is between a proactive and reactive approach to armed robbery. In the Flying Squad the use of informants, both registered and unregistered, proved to be a very cost-effective aspect of their work. While both forces had similar levels of arrests/detections from catching offenders at or near the scene, in South Yorkshire the speed of the police response was critical in some cases to detection and arrest. Interviews with officers also suggested that in South Yorkshire an estimated fifty per cent of offenders were arrested within 24 hours of the robbery.

In a city the size of Sheffield, it is possible to arrive at the crime scene within minutes. It is also possible to close off possible escape routes quickly and close down particular areas. In London, however, although the police were able to reach the scene of a robbery within ten to fifteen minutes, this was invariably too late to catch an offender. The size and structure of London also makes rapid police response difficult to mobilise.

In both force areas the role of armed response vehicles was normally to follow armed robbers some time after the robbery had taken place. Because of the relatively small number of vehicles and the possibility of their deployment some distance away from the robbery, officers responding immediately are invariably unarmed and unprotected. This is a potentially dangerous strategy and although there have not been any fatalities amongst South Yorkshire Police as a result of responding to armed robberies, there is a case for reviewing the deployment of armed response vehicles and for providing the police involved with adequate protection.

South Yorkshire officers felt that more time and effort should be put into cultivating informants to improve the quality of information on armed robberies and facilitate proactive interventions. At the time of the research the amount spent on registered informants was considered inadequate, and most officers interviewed would like to see more resources made available. South Yorkshire has, however, recently established a proactive team whose remit involves targeting a number of known criminals, not just those involved in armed robbery.

To some extent there are limits on the development of proactive strategies and there is a danger in focusing too much on criminals rather than crimes. In areas such as South Yorkshire, the number of offences and professional or even persistent armed robbers may be too small to sustain a proactive unit within force.

In the London area where 'project' crime persists and the number of professional armed robbers is relatively high, targeting criminals can be a more effective way of clearing up armed robberies. Identification and even arrest of suspects, however, is only one aspect of the process. Good detective work involves the gathering and presentation of evidence and this can be critical in achieving a successful prosecution. In many cases the use of video and forensic evidence played an important part in constructing a case, while in certain cases it was the availability of good photographic evidence that encouraged informants to come forward. In short, the issue is not simply a question of proactive or reactive approaches, or focusing primarily on the crime or the criminal, but deciding on the appropriate balance and combination of strategies within different contexts and in relation to the type of offenders operating in particular areas.

Specialist units

Similar issues arise in relation to specialist robbery squads. Non-specialist units tend to provide a response which is localised, dependent on individuals' availability and current workload. A dedicated or specialist unit on the other hand offers the potential of:

- a more proactive approach;
- improved co-ordination;
- maximisation of detective skills;
- increased use of informants;
- ability to carry out more extensive special operations;
- use of specialist back-up teams (e.g. forensic and surveillance);
- ability to liaise more closely with other organisations.

The number of specialist armed robbery squads in this country remains relatively low, as the case for maintaining them reflects the number of armed robberies carried out in any particular force area and the number of offenders committed to armed robbery. In areas where these are relatively low, as in South Yorkshire, there is little justification for a dedicated unit.

There can also be some disadvantages with specialist squads. These can include a limited remit and scope of intervention, and an elitism which becomes associated

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with the squad, sometimes producing resentment and distancing from other departments. The tenure policy for squads introduced throughout the police service, however, should help to address these sorts of problems.

To some extent the recent changes in Nottingham exemplify some of these issues. Nottingham established a specialist robbery squad in 1991, at a time when the number of robberies in the area was increasing steadily. After operating for three years, however, recorded armed robberies decreased by over 50 per cent from 128 in 1992, to 57 in 1994. This level of armed robbery was considered too low to justify a specialist squad and it was integrated into a more general CID unit covering a range of serious crimes.

Management and organisation

Both the Metropolitan Police and South Yorkshire Police were undergoing reappraisal and reorganisation during the research period. This raised critical questions about the management and organisation of different units.

Several options were being considered for the organisation and management of the Flying Squad. Principally due to the recent decline in the number of band 1 robberies in the MPD, it was felt that the Flying Squad might become a 'victim of its own success' and have its terms of reference radically altered. Instead, after some discussion, it was decided to extend their remit to include armed robberies involving casinos and bureaux de change, 'tiger kidnaps' in which hostages are taken, and firearms trafficking.

The reason for not radically altering the terms of reference was the fear that this might dilute their expertise and consequently make them less effective. It was also argued that there remain a significant number of armed robbers active in the London area, as well as those currently in prison likely to reoffend on release.

These arguments overlook, however, the substantial changes in band 1 and band 2 robberies nationally and the potential decrease in armed robberies due to a combination of target hardening and crime prevention measures, particularly in bank and building society branches. The use of rising screens, double locking doors, better surveillance equipment, reduced levels of cash, and changing practices for dealing with robberies have significantly changed the risk and reward ratio for offenders. The trend in this country appears to be a smaller number of more professional criminals carrying out band 1 robberies, and a greater number of opportunist and 'deskilled' individuals carrying out band 2 robberies.

Similar discussions about strategies of reorganisation have taken place in South Yorkshire. Eleven semi-autonomous local districts have been created, to provide a more specialised and localised service. This may be an effective way of responding more directly to local demands and may help to reduce certain forms of crime. However, the probable benefits to policing armed robbery are more uncertain.

Localised structures may make it more difficult to co-ordinate responses across divisions and may lead to reluctance from local commanders to make staff available to deal with robberies in neighbouring areas. Although the new system has only been in force for a few months and its impact is as yet difficult to ascertain, it would seem that clear policy directives will need to be formulated to determine just how joint operations between divisions will be encouraged and managed, and how major crime will be handled generally.

These organisational difficulties highlight the importance and problems of communicating information between divisions and linking centralised forms of control to local and divisional cases.

Gun control and the use of firearms

Fewer robberies involved firearms in most police force areas in 1994 compared to 1993. In the Metropolitan area, which in 1994 accounted for 32 per cent of all robberies involving firearms the number almost halved, down from 2,488 in 1993, to 1,312 in 1994.

Arguably, if robbers use weapons other than guns, or use firearms which are not convincing, the probability of victims and/or witnesses intervening and 'having a go' is likely to increase, and also the numbers injured. Equally, regular arming of well trained, experienced officers appears to make the police relatively careful about the use of firearms. Thus the often quoted assertion that the streets of London are becoming increasingly like New York is inaccurate. In New York during 1994 there were 316 occasions on which firearms were used by the police, compared to three occasions in London (Waldron, 1994).

There is little to support the contention that routine arming of the police would do very much to reduce the number of armed robberies. The probability is that more offenders would carry loaded weapons, while a percentage of officers lacking proper training, experience or composure would probably cause more injuries and fatalities amongst the offenders, the general public and their own ranks (Hetherington, 1994).

Offender profiling

The research literature tends to divide offenders into three main groups - the professional and career robber, the amateur or opportunist robber and an intermediate category of offenders who have committed a number of armed robberies together with other offences (Gabor, 1987). These divisions correlate very generally with the level of planning, the type of weapon used, the level of mobility, the type of target selected, and how the robbery is carried out (Gill and Matthews, 1994).

In the two force areas examined, different overall profiles of armed robbers emerged, with a greater number of professional and career robbers operating in the London region and a far less committed and more diverse group operating in South Yorkshire.

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From this and related research, a profile of the armed robber emerges which indicates that they are virtually all male, in their mid-twenties, with previous convictions often for burglary and other forms of property crime. There is considerable evidence that members of the professional and intermediate group have 'progressed' into robbery after a lengthy criminal career beginning in their teens. For the more professional robbers there is also evidence of involvement in drugs offences. It has also been found that some armed robberies are carried out to pay for drugs, particularly by the more opportunistic and desperate robbers. As Morrison and O'Donnell (1994) found in their sample of London robbers, for 21 per cent of these offenders, 'the first port of call after the robbery was their drug dealer'.

It was also found that robbers tended to use the same or similar disguises, modus operandi, weapons and even the same type of verbal demand or note. These similarities provide the basis for developing links between apparently discrete events, and several senior officers interviewed saw the construction of offender profiles related to different modus operandi as a potentially useful way of identifying certain offenders.

Making the right connections

In both forces the detectives emphasised the importance of linking offences and identifying the 'trade marks' of particular groups of offenders. In London the process in 1993/4 involved the use of hand written files which were difficult to access and were reliant upon the experience of the officers involved.

Nottingham has recently developed a computerised database adapted from HOLMES, which is able to include speech and a wider range of information than was available from the Police National Computer. These details include:

- type of target and location;
- description of the offender(s);
- precise words used in the robbery;
- method of escape;
- description of vehicle(s) used;
- disguise if worn;
- available forensic evidence;
- photographic evidence;
- full details of M.O.;
- list of witnesses, statements and evidence.

From this data source it is expected that links can be made between different armed robberies and that even minor details of the robbery can provide important clues to the identification and eventual prosecution of the offender.

Since reorganisation, South Yorkshire Police have established a database of armed robbery for the whole force, providing on-going intelligence and crime pattern analysis at West Barr. Two full time officers are employed to operate this service and it is planned to provide a stream of useful information to feed into the investigation process. The Flying Squad, since its incorporation into the Organised Crime Group, has begun to develop a computerised intelligence unit as a central reference point for all commercial robberies in the MPD.

At the national level, the National Crime Faculty are undertaking work to co-ordinate the intelligence on serious criminal offences and offenders contained on a number of computerised databases.

Putting the words to the pictures

Since there is evidence pointing to robbery patterns and there is on some premises good quality photographic equipment in use, there is always the possibility of linking the modus operandi with the available photographic evidence. At present, identification is often a lengthy process of sifting through known offenders, working through descriptions given by witnesses and at a later stage using identity parades. These processes can be slow and identification parades can be unreliable, particularly for armed robbery. Witness trauma and potential delays in arranging identification parades can adversely affect both the nature and quality of evidence available and witness reliability.

Prospectively, computerisation will make quick direct links between photographic evidence and details of how specific robberies were carried out. This will be helped by new computerised facial identification systems and the possibility of developing an 'authentic' computerised system of known 'faces' and suspects which can be quickly retrieved and shown to witnesses.

These developments may provide a useful contribution to cases reliant upon detailed detective work to identify offenders, or gather evidence.

Developing links between forces

Linking modus operandi with other available evidence is likely to be most effective where offenders are local and have previous convictions for related offences. Information supplied by both forces indicates that over 75 per cent of robbers carried out their offences within their local force area. Making links is more difficult if offenders travel outside the force area to commit their robbery. Officers in both London and South Yorkshire felt that the mobility of robbers was increasing, creating a new set of problems.

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Particular problems are the circulation of information and the jurisdiction of officers in other force areas. There were several reports of good co-ordination, as in the case of the 'Kagool robber' who travelled by train to his various targets. He was caught after committing more than eighty robberies (although convicted of a lesser number) by a combined initiative involving several forces including Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, West Yorkshire and West Midlands. Apart from such celebrated cases, dissemination of information and co-ordination between different force areas is not particularly well developed. Interviews with South Yorkshire officers identified Force Intelligence Bulletins followed by telex messages as currently the most effective means of linking crimes.

Repeat victimisation

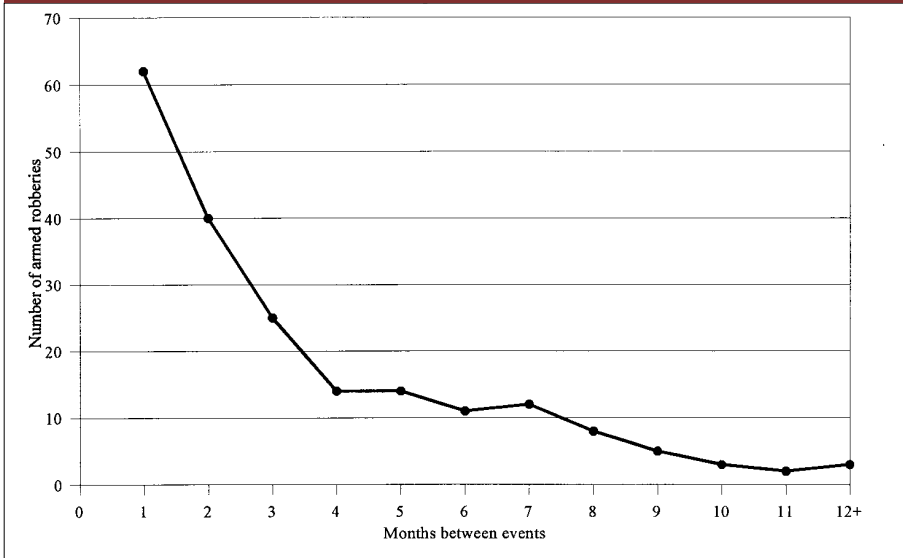
Tackling repeat victimisation may help forces to target the vulnerabilities of different premises more accurately and to identify armed robbers. Recent work on burglary, racial harassment and domestic violence has shown that some victims are repeatedly victimised and that repeats occur within a relatively short and sometimes predictable time period (Farrell and Pease, 1993). Identifying likely targets and increasing their protection has proved to be an effective crime prevention strategy (see for example, Anderson et al., 1995). The levels of repeat victimisation in both London and South Yorkshire were examined to establish whether this approach was applicable to armed robbery.

In the MPD there was a significant number of repeats, although the time span varied considerably by target. Repeats were most evident in relation to building societies, banks and betting shops. Two building society branches were each robbed three times within a twelve month period, one betting shop was robbed three times and one was robbed four times in the same period. Table 11 presents data for all known band 1 armed robberies in the MPD over a two year period.

	Number of robberies	Number of repeats	Percentage repeated
Bank	351	51	15
Building society	320	49	15
Post office	222	16	7
Cash in transit	255	9	4
Betting shop	618	73	12
Jeweller	89	1	1
TOTAL	1,855	199	11

Figure 6 shows the time between the 199 repeats against all targets in the MPD, and follows a similar pattern to that found for other offences with just under a third of the repeats occurring within a month of the original incident.

Figure 6: Time course of repeat band 1 armed robberies in the MPD (Jan 1993 - Dec 1994)



Targets appear to be most vulnerable in the period immediately after the initial attack, with the likelihood of repeats declining significantly after three months. This implies that security measures need to be put in place as swiftly as possible after the initial incident.

A similar analysis was conducted for South Yorkshire, except that it included both band 1 and band 2 armed robberies. As with the MPD a significant number of repeat armed robberies were recorded and the sample included all robberies in which a weapon was used or suspected.

Table 12 shows that building society branches, post offices, general offices and garages experience the highest percentage of repeats. For shops, off licences and garages, a significant percentage of the repeats occurred soon after the initial robbery. However, for banks, building societies and post offices, the repeats were more evenly spread over the subsequent six month period, thereafter rapidly declining.

These findings have potentially significant implications for crime prevention measures. If the number of repeats can be reduced it could have a considerable effect on the overall level of armed robberies in different locations. However, it is not clear from the available data whether the vulnerability of the targets concerned, or the same offenders returning to known targets, is the prime determinant of these patterns.

	Total armed robberies	Repeated offences	Percentage repeated
Bank	27	4	15
Building society	63	21	33
Post office	54	11	20
Garage	68	15	22
Off licence	53	9	17
Licensed premises	48	0	0
Shop	198	19	10
Office	23	6	26
Betting shop	11	1	9
Other	54	0	0
TOTAL	599	86	14

Crime prevention

Several other useful crime prevention initiatives are being developed in the MPD. These mainly involve liaising with financial organisations, and more recently betting shop owners, to develop improved security systems and methods of reducing the amount of cash held on particular premises, to reduce the rewards and incentives of robbery.

The recent 'Counter Action' campaign, developed with the off licence chain Threshers, provides an example of an effective crime prevention strategy. This campaign involved over 600 visits to different retail outlets over a twelve month period. Robberies involving retail outlets which were some 4,800 in London in December 1993 fell to 3,000 by July 1995. Although extraneous factors may have affected this decrease, the initiative appears to have helped reduce risk by improving security and decreasing the amounts of cash handled in stores. It also aimed to reduce shopkeeper anxiety and stress and to increase the possibilities of an arrest being made in the event of a robbery.

In a slightly different vein, the development of a 'Forecourt Watch' scheme involving most of the major oil companies aims to advise on security measure in garages. ACPO has representatives on the committee co-ordinating this initiative (Joselyn, 1993).

Crime prevention strategies in relation to armed robbery, however, remain an underdeveloped aspect of police work, although it is an area in which specialist units are generally more active. In South Yorkshire there was little evidence of the

development of robbery prevention initiatives. Although a number of cases were recorded in which photographic equipment was inoperative or defective, or in which the film in the cameras had not been changed for a considerable period of time, the police did not feel that actively providing advice and guidance to local firms was part of their remit. The Police Scientific and Development Branch (PSDB) at the Home Office has carried out a great deal of work in this area, which includes producing guidance on minimum standards for CCTV systems and so forth, and is a source of assistance to forces.

Conclusion

National and local figures for armed robbery indicate changes in both the type of target selected and in the type of offender involved. There is evidence of a target shift from banks, cash in transit and building societies to more vulnerable targets such as shops, garages and off licences over the last few years. One significant change, however, has been the dramatic decrease in both band 1 and band 2 robberies in different parts of the country during 1994. The reasons for this decrease are not yet clear, but it appears to be the outcome of a triangulated movement, decreasing the vulnerability of targets, reducing the risk-reward ratio for actual and prospective offenders and improving police effectiveness, shown by improved clear up rates for some targets. The combined effect of these movements appears to be changing the overall profile of armed robbers to a relatively small number of specialist and professional robbers attacking potentially lucrative targets, and a growing number of lone, unorganised and in many cases desperate individuals who focus on softer targets, with minimal planning. There is also evidence that some armed robbers are diversifying into drug related crime.

At the national level, similar reasons were cited by police force statistical officers for the 1994 reduction in armed robberies (Home Office, 1996). These included:

- the police were 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.

While individual forces will need to take account of local armed robbery patterns, there are a number of general issues which could contribute to the development of appropriate and effective policing response. These include:

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- systems to improve the flow of information through the cultivation of informants or through the construction of a computerised database;
- local, regional and national databases of all known and suspected armed robbers, with detailed offender profiles, which can identify patterns and styles of offending, and link them to the 'trade marks' of different offenders;
- extension of crime prevention activities, particularly in relation to band 2 targets, to reduce their attractiveness to potential offenders;
- further development, deployment and maintenance of good quality video equipment in all types of commercial premises;
- analysis of repeat victimisation to help identify vulnerable targets and develop strategic crime prevention measures;
- reviewing the deployment of armed response vehicles and developing methods for increasing speed of response in different localities;
- improving communication and co-ordination between forces and divisions, in sharing information and in the development of investigations.

Forces may also like to refer to the advice on tackling armed criminality prepared by the Armed Criminality Working Group of the ACPO Crime Committee contained in *Tackling Crime Effectively* Volume 2 (ACPO Crime Committee, 1996).

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