

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

MARKING PROPERTY

"Over 95% of all Suburb burglaries are from houses that have not marked their valuable property with their postcode and house number."

In order to appreciate the significance of this, let's look at the problem in greater detail.

Burglaries (and attempted burglaries) in the Suburb for the year 1991 are well up on the previous year and likely to be in the region of 220 altogether. The police say that only some 5 or 6 of these burglaries were from houses or flats that had marked their property and got Marked Property stickers displayed. Furthermore, the police go on to say that the reason why most of these few houses were entered was because they only had one or two stickers displayed which were not seen by the burglar! But 6 homes out of 220 is, in fact, less than 3%.

Exploring this in even more detail, there are altogether 5,200 houses and flats on the Suburb. Of these, 1,580 have got Marked Property stickers displayed and 3,620 have not. So, only 6 of the 1,580 Marked Property houses/flats were burgled – or one house/flat in every 263; whereas 214 of the 3,620 Non Marked Property houses/flats were burgled – or one house/flat in every 17!

Put another way, this means that if you have NOT got Marked Property stickers displayed, the chances of your home being broken into are 1 in 17; whereas, if you display Marked Property stickers, your chances are vastly decreased to 1 in 263!

Or, put yet another way, if you have Marked Property stickers on your home, all else being equal, the odds are that you will be broken into once in every 263

years; whereas if you DO NOT display Marked Property stickers – and again all else being equal – the odds are shortened enormously to your being broken into once in every 17 years.

Of course, you can shorten the odds even further by leaving doors and windows open or unlocked when you go out or retire to bed, or by doing a whole range of other unwise things as set out in the previous NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH article!

How to mark your property

The procedure really is very simple. Most Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators have property marking kits consisting of an electric engraving tool and Ultra-Violet (U.V.) pens which you can borrow for 24 hours. Most Co-ordinators, or one of their Wardens, will show you how easy it is to use the electric engraver after a very little practice on the back of a biscuit tin, or a kitchen spoon or on a baked bean can. Most Co-ordinators will help you to make a start – especially if you are elderly or infirm. And some may even do the job for you. Your Co-ordinator will explain that the electric engraving pen should be used to mark most of your valuable possessions – almost everything, in fact, with the exception of glass, porcelain, clothing and carpets, all of which should be marked with the U.V. pen, the marking being invisible



until a powerful ultra-violet light is shone on it.

What should be marked

Almost anything of value can be marked and Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators have check lists of suggested items such as computers and clocks, jewellery, silver, electronic equipment, TV sets, stereo systems, pictures (frames only), valuable carpets, porcelain, cameras, binoculars, bicycles and sports equipment. The police have checked with leading valuers and, contrary to popular belief, silver and jewellery are not devalued by engraving, provided the marking is discreet – ie, on the underside of silver items, on the inside of

A resident in Meadway went to collect her repaired sewing machine but found she had lost the ticket. "In that case, madam, you can't have your machine," said the shop assistant, "because we can't tell which of these 30 machines is yours." "But it's marked with my postcode and house number," she replied. "Ah, that's different," replied the assistant and she located the machine immediately.

A Suburb resident, on returning home from an engagement in a large London hotel, realised that her spectacles were missing. On the off chance, she phoned the hotel reception who confirmed that they had her spectacles which had been found on the hotel forecourt and which were readily identified by her postcode and house number engraved on them.

gold or platinum rings or on the inside of necklace clasps. But precisely what items are marked is entirely up to you. If you only mark half a dozen items such as your TV set, microwave oven, video recorder, camera, watch and the frame of a valued picture, you will still be entitled to the Marked Property stickers. But probably the simplest procedure is just to go round each room marking every stealable item. Other items worth marking are umbrellas, handbags, briefcases and spectacles – perhaps not particularly valuable, but a bonus to have them returned to you when left in trains, buses, taxis and so on. Your postcode and house number will enable the police anywhere in the United Kingdom to locate your particular house within minutes.

Some excuses for not marking property

Experience over the last few years has shown that people can produce the most ridiculous excuses for not marking their property. Some of them are:

"I haven't got anything of value worth marking." Almost every home has something worth stealing even if only the TV set or radio. There must be something

in your home which you would miss if stolen. So the answer is to mark whatever you have got of value to you – even if only of sentimental value – and get the Marked Property stickers displayed. After all, the burglar doesn't know whether there is anything worth stealing until he has broken in with all the damage which that can entail. Don't give him the temptation to try.

"I don't want to put up the stickers because they will draw attention to the fact that I have items worth stealing." Of course you have items worth stealing. Nearly everybody has. A burglar will have a go at the easiest target on the assumption that there are attractive items for him in every home.

"I would like to mark my property but I haven't got the time." The average time to mark property in the average Suburb home is probably a couple of hours. If you had 8 hours to spare you could probably mark just about every item in your home including the cat and the spare wastepaper basket. If your home is burgled it will almost certainly take you considerably longer than this to clear up the mess and sort out everything with your insurers.

"We are only tenants and move house every 18 months." Then mark your property with the postcode and house number of your business, your bank or the address of your mother-in-law.

"I am about to give away all my possessions and become a hermit." Oh, all right – I admit defeat!

ACTION NOW – Do get in touch with your Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator immediately and arrange a firm date with him/her to borrow the marking kit. Details of Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators are in the yellow Suburb Directory. **PL**

The gold and silver brooch belonging to a lady in the Suburb fell off her coat in the street near the Tate Gallery. It was found by a passer-by who handed it in to the nearest Police Station. In due course, because it was engraved with her postcode and house number, the police were able to return it to her.

GARDEN SUBURB THEATRE

From the beginning of 1992 Hampstead Garden Suburb Dramatic Society is changing its name. The society voted at its AGM in October to become the Garden Suburb Theatre – not such a mouthful as the old name and one which will be more immediately recognisable to both members and audience alike.

However this does not mean that the Garden Suburb Theatre will be turning its back on the past. As Chairman Philip Grant says: "We hope to preserve the spirit and traditions of the society while looking forward to a challenging future."

The Garden Suburb Theatre has an exciting start in February with the world premiere of 'Touchstone', a new musical by member Terry Rogers who has written and directed several other successful musicals for the society, including 'The Prince and the Pauper' and 'Troy'.

Set in the East End of London during the Blitz, 'Touchstone' tells the story of two children evacuated to the West Country who find King Arthur's sword, Excalibur, with the magical Touchstone in its hilt. Only by getting it to the King can they save Britain from German invasion ...

See 'What's On' for details. **DL**

APPLICATIONS FOR TRUST CONSENT

Some residents are unclear why Planning Applications have to be seen by two separate Authorities: the London Borough of Barnet and the Trust. The answer is that the Suburb was developed as a Leasehold Estate, and the Trust and its predecessors have from the beginning had strict control over all designs, materials, use of buildings and provision of amenities. Even though many properties are now Freehold, the Trust's rights of control have been maintained (by the High Court) to safeguard the standard of alterations to properties.

Conservation Area

In addition, because the Suburb is so important in the history of British domestic architecture and town planning, it was designated in 1968 a Conservation Area – comparatively recently in its history – so that, for the time being at any rate, there is additional protection under planning legislation. But this has already been shown to be affected by the political climate, whereas the Trust works entirely free of any political or profit-making motive, serving only the interests of the residents and the national bodies who are represented on the Council.

A broader view

It was considered that since the Suburb is so important in the history of both British domestic architecture and Town planning a separate organisation was needed for its conservation and

preservation. Other conservation areas are also protected by local organisations, such as the College Estates in Dulwich. By having two separate and independent authorities look at all plans, the Suburb benefits from a higher standard of overall design control. The Trust can take a much broader view and evaluate factors which are outside the remit of the local authority. In most cases the London Borough of Barnet and the Trust will come to similar conclusions on applications, but there are instances when the two authorities diverge. For example in looking at plans, Barnet cannot take purely aesthetic considerations into account.

Not a museum

The objectives of the Trust are not to stop residents from changing their houses but to ensure that changes are done in a harmonious way and in keeping with the spirit of the original design. The Trust recognises that the Suburb is not a museum, but a living community and in modernising their homes residents want larger kitchens, family rooms, more bathrooms,

and utility rooms and would often like to utilise attic space for additional accommodation. In most cases these alterations can be designed within the guidelines laid down by the Trust, and without spoiling the character of either the individual house or the neighbourhood. The Trust is here to serve the community and ideally it would like to approve all applications.

Procedures

The number of refusals can be kept to a minimum if certain simple procedures are followed.

a. Even before employing the services of an architect it is a good idea for the home-owner to have an informal chat with the Trust architect, Mr Wilfred Court. He will outline in general terms the Trust's policies towards the particular kind of alteration required – extensions, loft conversions, garages etc. At the same time he will tell the owner which sort of designs might be suitable in terms of size, materials, detailing etc.

b. If the house-owner decides to go ahead with the alterations, his architect should keep in touch with the Trust while he is

drawing up the plans. Mr Court is willing to attend site meetings with architects to discuss points of detail and help with the choice of materials etc. Through the close involvement of the Trust the chances of a successful application are greatly improved.

Neighbours

When an application has been received an indemnity form is sent out and neighbours are notified. They have two weeks to write back with their objections. Once the relevant fee has been paid the application is considered by the Property and Plans Committee of the Trust which meets in the middle of each month. All decisions have to be ratified by the full Trust Council which also meets monthly.

In evaluating applications the Property and Plans Committee takes into account a number of factors. These include the report of the Trust Architect, the views of the Conservation Area Advisory Committee and the London Borough of Barnet, and letters and neighbours. The whole process from submitting the application to the final

decision of the Trust Council takes around two months. When an application is refused reasons are given and from these the applicant can often deduce the kind of changes that are required to make the plans acceptable.

Too harsh?

The Trust has been criticised for being too harsh and unreasonable and for being completely unrealistic in its conservation policies. To those critics we answer that under the Scheme of Management, the Trust has a legal obligation to uphold certain standards and that if it became too lax it would be accused of not doing its job properly. Obviously the Trust has to strike a delicate balance between these opposing views and while accepting alterations insist on the highest standards.

Design asset

We hope in future that the Trust will move closer to the community and be seen as a definite asset to the Suburb by fostering good designs and workmanship. It is assumed that most people come to live in the Suburb because of the delightful houses, which have remained relatively unspoilt and most residents would be horrified if we allowed indiscriminate 'improvements' to take place. By working closely with the Trust we are confident that the whole community will benefit so that in 100 years there will still be a Suburb of which our grandchildren can be proud.

HAMPSTEAD - GARDEN - SUBURB - TRUST

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