

Priory Court (Continued)

By Bill Bayliss

Peace & Quiet

When we first moved to Priory Court in 1966 I was not aware of what the form was if you experienced nuisance problems in your home. While I knew of the Estate's poor reputation, I wasn't unduly bothered as I had grown up in a rough part of Islington and as the son of a Teacher I had learned to be a good street fighter to survive. We lived in a 3 bedroom flat in P block (Yes, the blocks were listed alphabetically and identified by their alphabet letter) on the 2nd floor. As one of the Estate's caretakers and his family lived below us on the first floor I wasn't expecting any hassle.

Unfortunately, I soon found that Priory Court's reputation was based on fact. For several weeks we endured the noise and hassle from a gang of local youths who congregated in the open space below our block of flats and in the block's entrance hall. The Caretaker did nothing at all about the situation. He was a small chap and was treated with contempt by the local youth. So, I decided that I needed to do something about the problem.

A 'Reasoned' Approach

My initial approach was to approach the youths and explain the difficulty that their behaviour was causing my family. I asked them if they would go somewhere else to hang-out in the evenings so that my children could get to sleep. I explained that my patience was exhausted so I would only be asking them politely this one time. They seemed to take this in good part and moved away from the block for the rest of the evening.

The following evening it started up again. So, I approached them again but not so politely. The group of youths had a leader who was large and flabby and extremely mouthy. The situation became very inflamed and the leader flung a punch at and endeavoured to grapple with me. This was a bad mistake on his part as when I was a kid I had boxed for an Islington club and I had also got a brown belt in Judo. As he grappled me I swept his feet from under him and he fell down taking me with him on top. When I got up I 'accidentally' stood quite hard on his hand. He got up clutching his hand to his chest and was in tears and hysterical. He screamed at me that I had broken his hand and swore vengeance on me before leaving and taking his mates with him.

A Lesson Learned

I never suffered from this problem again and a few weeks later I was approached by a resident from an adjacent block of flats. "You used to have a lot of trouble in your block from the kids" he said. "But you don't have any problems now and they've moved on to my block. What did you do?". I explained to him what my approach had been and the outcome. "Why don't you have a word with them yourself " I said. "If

you like I'll come with you". So we did and this time we were joined by yet another chap from the same block who was also fed up with the situation. Each time the youths were 'persuaded' away from one block they went to another and each time the same solution was applied. It wasn't too long before the youths decided that causing a nuisance under the main blocks or in the Old People's Block wasn't worth the hassle that they experienced from a growing group of united male tenants and they went elsewhere.

The Thief.

Underneath the blocks of flats were Store Sheds that were for the use of each individual flat. These for ideal for storing a Pram (Remember we're talking Silver Cross type prams not the overgrown buggies that are used today) or a bike. Many tenants used the Store Sheds as general store areas and they were often filled with rubbish. I used mine to store my moped that I used to get to and from my place of work some fifteen miles away at North Woolwich. (Although the journey could be done by public transport it took a long time and was expensive).

At the Community Centre, that was only a few yards from my flat, we had experienced a number of break-ins and thefts. Each time the means of access was the same by breaking a window in the hall. Although the thefts were comparatively minor the break-ins caused a lot of aggravation as each time they occurred we had to call the police to report the burglary and get the broken window repaired.

One evening I went to my Store Shed to get my moped out and found to my horror that the door had been forced and the moped was gone. It was quite obvious that this was likely to be the work of a local youth so I went out touring the estate hoping to find that the moped had been dumped. As I reached the far side of the estate I saw a small group of youths with a moped. I walked past them and saw that, although the number plate had been changed, this was my moped.

I continued to walk off the estate and then turned round walking slowly back. The youths were still there and I challenged them about the ownership of the moped. They quickly told me that it belonged to one of the group. "In that case, he's a bloody thief" I said, "This is my moped and I can prove it and I'm going to get the 'Old Bill'". At this point they all did a 'runner' leaving the moped in the kerb. I chased after the youth that they had indicated was the bike's owner and collared him.

I was now in a quandary. I had captured the thief and was holding on to him but I also wanted to get the Police and hand him over to them. Then I spotted a telephone box that was only about ten yards away. I frog marched him to the telephone box and shoved him in. I then forced myself in front of him so he couldn't escape and rang 999. I explained the situation and the Police were there within minutes (I was only about a quarter of a mile from the Police Station) When they interviewed the youth about the theft he admitted it and 'coughed' to twenty plus other thefts that included the break-ins to the Community Centre. Ironically, I have to report that my moped was in better 'nick' when I got it back than before it was stolen. Not only had they changed the number plates (Which I recovered) but they had also fixed several small mechanical defects!.

Bonfire Night.

Every November the Fifth kids would light a bonfire on the estate and let off fireworks. The problem with this was that the bonfire could well get out of control and some of the youths used to through 'bangers' at

younger kids. One Bonfire Night some of us from the Community Centre, who lived on the Estate, decided that we would have a proper controlled bonfire and fireworks display .

We decided that this would start about six o'clock so that local families could come out to watch and we built the bonfire on a disused piece of ground on the edge of the Estate by the allotments. We informed the local fire brigade of what we were doing and we roped off an area around the bonfire to keep people at a safe distance and where fathers could let off fireworks.

Unfortunately, one local youth decided that six pm was too early to light the fire and climbed on top of the bonfire and sat beside the Guy Fawkes effigy. He loudly proclaimed that he wasn't going to move until he and his mates were ready to light the fire and that we had no right to take over Bonfire night. Several of us tried to reason with him explaining that we wanted to provide a Bonfire Night where families could enjoy themselves. However, he was adamant that he wasn't going to move.

I tried again to reason with him and told him that when 6pm came we would light the fire regardless of whether he was on it or not. I knew that if we did light the fire with him still sitting on it that we could rescue him if necessary. Reasoning with him didn't work and he obviously enjoyed being the centre of attention to an audience. Six o'clock came and after a final warning to him, we lit the fire. He came off the top of the bonfire like a scalded cat and went away to sulk. A good evening was had by all present.. The kids enjoyed the bonfire and the fireworks and the parents liked the fact that the event was organised to keep their children safe.

A Horse At The Bar

One chap, who was a member of PCRCA, came in to have a drink on Xmas eve and brought his horse with him. Everybody thought this to be extremely funny and somebody gave the horse a drink from a bucket. However, I politely explained to the owner that he couldn't actually leave the horse in the bar and persuaded him to tether it outside to a railing in a grassed area. He stayed all evening drinking steadily.

After we had called 'time' and persuaded people to go home we were left with the horse rider who at our request went outside to get his horse and go home. He was pretty drunk and I was astounded when he insisted on mounting the horse to ride home. I saw him mount and set off and I returned to finish off the closing of the Community Centre.

About a quarter of an hour later, after the Bar Staff had cashed up and left, I locked up and left the Community Centre to walk across the road to my flat. To my utter amazement I saw the horse and rider about 30 yards away down the road. The horse was going round and round a mini roundabout in the road that was designed to slow down through traffic. I stood and watched for a few minutes but it was obvious that, without any intervention and guidance, the horse would continue to circle the roundabout. I didn't know exactly where the rider lived and it was very late. I took the horse's bridle and pointed him along the road that led to the outside of the Estate in the general direction of the rider's home and then I went off to bed.

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February 2011