Stealing From Cars

A study of theft from motor vehicles in the Thames Valley

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July 2003

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1. Introduction - origins of the research and the objectives of the study

The Thames Valley Partnership has contributed over a number of years to the development of a clearer understanding of car crime and methods for tackling it. Similarly the Partnership has explored in a number of papers and conferences the developing ideas and policies on a market reduction approach to crime, as outlined by Sutton (1998) and others.

In much of the literature about vehicle crime there has been relatively little distinction drawn between *theft of* vehicles and *theft of* articles from them. For a number of years the public safety concerns associated with 'joyriding' and vehicle theft made this a major police priority and in collaboration with other agencies a great deal has been achieved. *Theft from* vehicles now massively outweighs *theft of* vehicles, and if anything official recording understates its incidence. There has also been a tendency to underestimate the impact of this very common crime on victims. While some police areas have achieved impressive results by targeting *theft from* vehicles the overall clear–up rate is low in comparison with other forms of theft. As the quality and range of equipment fitted to cars or left in them extends then the values involved have escalated greatly. The genesis of the present project was concern about an increase in the theft of higher value items, and notions that this might be increasingly associated with young people. It was also suggested that an increasing motive was the sale of goods stolen from vehicles for drug use. As well as trying to clarify who commits the crime and why they do it there is also a need to understand how goods are disposed of and whether drugs markets and stolen goods markets have begun to overlap.

Accordingly the present project has been designed both to test these ideas and provide a more detailed analysis of the goods taken than has been available in the past. The study includes the following components.

- An overview of prior research and theory.

- The results of interviews and written responses from the Police, YOT staff, Probation staff, Youth Service staff, Drug and Alcohol Action Teams, and Trading Standards Departments. An overview was also sought from the Community Safety partnerships.

- A detailed analysis which groups items stolen to produce a picture of the nature of goods stolen and their relative values, using data provided by Thames Valley Police. The analysis provides both a Thames Valley wide perspective and an analysis of each of the 10 police areas.

- A demographic analysis of those arrested for *theft from* vehicles by age, gender and police area. In order to obtain a more specific comparative profile these figures are compared with equivalent data on personal robbery and other forms of theft.

- The results of confidential in depth interviews with 20 young offenders. The interviews covered not only the true nature of their crime but also the methods used to sell goods and any links with drug use. It was also possible to obtain information about personal background and attitudes towards crime. Such studies have become increasingly difficult because of the number of research projects and the understandable reluctance of some young people to participate. I was greatly helped by YOT and probation staff in this but all the interviews were conducted by me alone and with an assurance of complete confidentiality. In an effort to spread the sample carefully, as well as learning something about the criminal careers of those stealing from cars, I drew my samples from lists of young offenders with at least three convictions for some form of theft. This was necessary because the numbers of young people known to Youth Offending Teams and the Probation Service specifically for *theft from* vehicles is very small - testimony to the relatively low conviction rates.

Finally I attempt to draw together some conclusions in respect of the place of young people in *theft from* vehicles, the motives involved and the implications for market reduction.

Thanks are due to the Government Office for the South East who funded the study and to a large number of people who gave their views and provided information. I am particularly grateful to Sue Raikes and Siri Moorby of Thames Valley Partnership for their support and guidance; Mike Vince and Nick Bolton of Thames Valley Police for facilitating access to, and guidance on police data; Professor Richard Huggins, Department of Law and Social Studies at Oxford Brookes University for his academic advice, and Luke Hedge for his help in correlating the statistical information.

The Thames Valley is a exceedingly diverse area, as will be clear from the information given on the different locations. In interviewing young offenders I have attempted to cover a range of locations. There are inevitably different concentrations and priorities between such diverse areas, but enough, I think is common to allow some generalisations to be made and it is hoped that this proves useful not only in the Thames Valley but in the region as a whole.

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2. An overview of prior research and analysis

2.1 The history of a problem

In their 1992 paper, 'Tackling car crime - the nature and extent of the problem', Webb and Laycock (1) make the point that car crime began very quickly after the development of large-scale manufacturing. For some years security development was relatively slow. Only in 1949 did Chrysler pioneer the modern key operated starter, and twenty years later legislation in this country introduced the requirement of steering column locks.

During the 1980s there was considerable public concern about vehicle crime and a good deal of policy and design activity. As Webb and Laycock point out, the car has become a central and dominating feature of modern life, with much of the environment designed to accommodate it. It is therefore not surprising that thefts of and from cars have become such a problem.

While much of the early concern was around *theft of* cars themselves, and there was perhaps a tendency to regard car crime as a generic problem, the reality is that until 1980 thefts of and from vehicles have always followed each other closely with a steady but similar pattern of increase.

From 1980 onwards *theft from* vehicles began to grow faster and accelerated rapidly to become one of the commonest crimes in the country, with a 162% increase over the decade between 1980 and 1990, and a doubling of the rate per thousand vehicles on the road in England and Wales. In the same period *theft from* vehicles rose from 48% to 61% as a proportion of all car crime and from 11% to 17% of all recorded crime. While some of the increase was clearly related to increased reporting to police all commentators have been clear that this is insufficient to account for the level of acceleration.

The figures peaked in 1992 and figures for vehicle crime have steadily reduced since then, with the risk of *theft of* a vehicle diminishing and now stabilising since 1990. There has also been a decrease in *theft from* vehicles but its sheer volume, clearly fuelled by the development of attractive and marketable in-car entertainment features, has kept it as a major area of criminal activity with huge costs attached. The overall decreases have been achieved because of both improved security technology and targeted policing, with extensive awareness campaigns, a clear line on the necessity of secure car parking, and the use of police intelligence. Sustaining that position and making further progress towards the Government's 30% vehicle crime reduction target between 1999 and 2004 remains, however, an extremely difficult challenge.

2.2 The nature of *theft from* vehicles and the consequences

In their 1999 paper 'Vehicle Crime Reduction- turning the corner' (2) Sallybanks and Brown suggest that there remains a significant problem with under-recording, with 53% of thefts from vehicles not brought to police attention. This belies the impact which *theft from* vehicles has on victims. The British Crime Survey of 1998 (3) shows significant public concerns, with men more worried about theft of and from their cars than about burglary or mugging, and concern particularly high among the 16 to 24 age group. Women were *as* worried about car crime as about burglary, with again the highest level of concern among the younger age groups.

The British Crime Surveys have suggested that higher income earners are more at risk of *theft from* vehicles. But the risk of car theft is highest for young people, those on low incomes, the unemployed, single parents and those in rental housing. It is, however, dangerous to over-generalise on this issue, given the volume of the crime involved and the spread of goods taken. Sallybanks and Brown (op cit) report that while inner city areas are most vulnerable to *theft from* vehicles there is relatively little difference between council estate and non-council estate areas. However, areas with a high level of physical disorder are slightly more likely to experience *thefts from* vehicles than other areas. When the ACORN classification of neighbourhood types is used there is a focus on the poorest neighbourhoods.

Overall information about the victims of *theft from* vehicles is less clear cut than for *theft of* vehicles, with both higher rates for higher earners and some emphasis on areas of disorder and high levels of hardship.

There is clear evidence of repeat victimisation. The Home Office definition provided by Bridgeman and Hobbs in 1997 (4) is as follows:

'Repeat victimisation occurs when the same person or place suffers from more than one incident over a specified period of time.'

Pease (1998)(5), a leading researcher in this field, indicates that the central virtue of repeat victimisation as an operational concept is that it enables police resources to be concentrated effectively on high risk individuals and places for specific periods of time. It also fuses the roles of victim support and crime prevention, which have been historically separated. In the Biting Back project in Huddersfield, Chenery, Holt and Pease (1997) (6) demonstrated that this approach yielded a 30% reduction in domestic burglary and a 20% reduction in *theft from* vehicles.

As they indicate, one can think of a repeat vehicle crime as being one or more of the following:

- offences against precisely the same vehicle.
- offences against any vehicle so long as it has the same keeper.
- any vehicle in precisely the same place (just as domestic burglary would be the same kind of event whoever happened to be in the home at the time).

While it may be clear that security technology and awareness have improved, Webb and Laycock (op cit) reported survey work in 1992 which showed that even by that date, 4% of cars had an unlocked door, boot or open window. The 1998 British Crime Survey (op cit) found that in 12% of thefts from vehicles, entry was made through an unlocked door.

It would be fair to say that there is less known about the nature of *theft from* vehicles than *theft of* vehicles, but the prevailing view has usually been that external car parts and car stereos/radios together constitute approximately two thirds of incidents. The British Crime Survey of 1995 (7) gave the following breakdown.

Items stolen	% of incidents
External parts	32%
Stereo/Radio	30%
Bags/Money	9%
Tools	8%
Telephone	3%
Internal parts	2%
Petrol	<1%

Source: Mirrlees- Black et al 1996.

Clearly this leaves some 15% of other items at less than 1% and the picture, though helpful in giving an impression of the dominant targets, is otherwise rather generalised. In order to understand more about the motives of car thieves and a more up to date position we do need to understand more about the nature and proportions of a wider range of items as well as any local variation. This is the reason behind the detailed analysis of reported loss in the 10 Thames Valley Police areas in the year ending 31st march 2002, given in the next section. This clearly charts the more recent impact of sophisticated audio products and the arrival of portable IT equipment, which currently constitutes a significant proportion of incidents but a huge proportion of the value taken in some police areas.

In attempting to understand and describe the demand for stolen goods it is likely to be helpful to focus on the most frequently stolen goods. In his paper, 'Hot Products; understanding, anticipating and reducing demand for stolen goods' (1999), Clarke (8), suggests that we need a model which incorporates both target qualities and offender motivations.

The earlier work of Cohen and Felson in 1979 (9) had used the acronym Viva, signifying the following:

- **V**alue
- **I**nertia
- **V**isibility
- **A**ccessibility

Clarke (op cit) suggests that VIVA has some serious limitations, and the most obvious one is that it avoids any consideration of motivation. We need in fact to take into account the 'choice structuring properties' referred to by Cornish and Clarke in 1987 (10)

The 'Hot Products' paper suggests an acronym that captures both situational and motivational characteristics: CRAVED, which stands for the following:

- **C**oncealable
- **R**emovable
- **A**vailable
- **V**aluable
- **E**njoyable
- **D**isposable

This approach, while generally helpful, still fails to take account of several other major dynamics relating to offender motivation and opportunity. The most obvious one, considered in this study, is the impact on all acquisitive crime of drug taking. This is considered in more detail in other sections, but clearly drug users who **need** to steal for drugs rather than those who **choose** to spend money from crime on drugs account for a significant proportion of all theft. There is no reason to believe that *theft from* vehicles is under-represented in this respect, it may offer lower detection risk than targeted theft from shops, and be less frightening than burglary. While most commentators agree that displacement is never total, there is evidence from within the Thames Valley that a strengthening of police and inter-agency activity around drugs and street crime may have led in Oxford to a displacement into increased *theft from* vehicles - a crime which had previously been successfully reduced.

2.3 Motives and young people

A relatively small number of studies have been carried out into the motivation of offenders. Smyth (11) carried out a survey in Greater Manchester in early 1990 with a sample of 86 car crime offenders. All those involved were male with over half under the age of 20. While much of the emphasis of the study is on the *theft of* cars, a great deal is also said about entry to and *theft from* vehicles. Key issues were as follows:

- 36% of offenders felt that entry and theft of a radio cassette player could be done in less than 30 seconds.

- Excitement and financial gain were the top two motives mentioned.

- Offenders in the survey indicated that taking of cars was more likely to be planned than *theft from* them, which was a spur of the moment activity in 59% of cases.

- 77% said that they would break into a car just for the radio/cassette, with 67% for a handbag, 79% for a leather coat, 55% for a briefcase, 31% for cassettes, and 21% for shopping. Visibility was a major factor in selection of opportunity.

- For exterior items, the most commonly mentioned target item was wheels.

The study undertaken by Briggs in Northumbria in 1991 (12) suggests that 63% of his sample of car thieves were more interested in the car stereo than the car itself.

The connections between being carried in a stolen vehicle, taking vehicles and stealing from vehicles are complex and a number of studies indicate young offenders often beginning early, with 'being carried' a common initial experience, but an early study by Parker in 1974 (13) and another Manchester study by Cooper in 1989 (14) both indicate that ' to make money' was the most common reason given for breaking into motor cars. Parker described how the 'cats-eye business' (stealing car radios) brought economic gains to which they became accustomed, and which therefore maintained their offending.

Research into the issue of car crime and the high crime Pennywell Estate in Sunderland carried out by Spencer (1992) (15) was based on a large number of interviews with young people. Some important insights about the involvement and motivation of young people emerged.

- Over half of the 11 to 16 year sample knew others who were involved in car crime.

- Spencer's school survey found that 32% of the sample had been present when property had been stolen from a car.

- Involvement could begin as young as 10 and initial involvement might be as a lookout or passenger.

- There was definitely a career path and a progression towards profit motivation with offenders coming to rely on the money obtained by selling car parts on a thriving local black market in car parts. All the more experienced youths had contacts who were local and who would buy. It was clear that in this high crime area the ease with which stolen property could be sold encouraged and sustained the offenders' criminal activity.

It does seem clear from all the studies of youth offending and the development of a national Youth Justice Strategy that while many young people may have offended, only a small minority are prolific offenders and the same is likely to be true of *theft from* cars. The report ' Youth Crime: findings from the 1998/9 Youth Life Styles Survey' Flood – Page et al (16) suggests that 26% of young men and 11% of young women have offended. There is a peak for girls at 14 followed by a sharp decline and an overall peak for boys at 18. The relatively high rate for boys at 14/15 seems to be related to a willingness to buy stolen goods from other young offenders. 10% of offenders are responsible for nearly half the offences committed and highly prolific offenders constituted only 2% of the young men in the whole sample.

2.4 Young people drugs and crime

It is important to be careful in describing the relationship between young people, offending and drug use. A number of studies from various parts of the country have indicated that while experimentation with illegal drugs is widely distributed among young people, and many also admit to committing crime, there is no obvious direct link at least in the experimentation and recreational types of drug use.

Mathews and Trickey conducted one of the larger surveys in their Leicester study of 1996 (17). This suggests that for their sample of 768 13 to 16 year olds, drugs were almost entirely purchased from pocket money and from earnings. Only six said they financed drug use from crime. Cannabis, LSD, amyl nitrate and solvents were the most widely used drugs with very small numbers trying heroin, cocaine, or crack. Offending was as widespread as trying illegal drugs, and the proportions were similar. 30% reported involvement in shoplifting, 20% in criminal damage and 19% in handling stolen goods.

Three other significant messages emerged:

i) Among the drug using proportion of the sample 68.7% reported that they were involved in offending before they became involved in drug taking.

ii) Those classified as regular or recreational rather than experimental drug users tended to be generally involved in more frequent and more serious forms of offending.

iii) Both drug use and crime were seen by many respondents as relatively independent activities that were not directly causally related but rather *part of a particular lifestyle and as part of a process of sub-cultural adaptation.*

The theories developed by Walters (1994) (18) suggest that a 'lifestyle model' of the drugs/crime relationship can be developed. Thus, drug use and offending can be seen as inter-related lifestyles and the relationship between drugs and crime lies in the overlap between the lifestyles. If this is the case then the motivation for acquisitive crime may come equally from the desire to finance lifestyle goods and drugs.

This would certainly explain the findings of the early research into drug users carried out in association with the piloting of arrest referral schemes by Edmunds et al (1998) (19). As they point out, for the 97% or so of illicit drug users who have not (or not yet) encountered any serious problem associated with drug use, there is no convincing evidence of direct causal links between drug use and acquisitive crime. For problem users, by contrast, the evidence is overwhelming of clear but complex links. Of an extrapolated national drug spend of some £2 billion, they reckon that £650 to £850 million might be raised from acquisitive crime. The cost to victims at the proper market value of the goods however will be much higher and could be £2 to £2.5 billion or more. Clearly some of this must come from thefts associated with vehicles. It is again pointed out that the complexity of the causal links should be stressed:

Most of those whom we interviewed had long criminal histories with an average of 21 previous convictions. Criminal and drug using careers seem to develop in parallel: acquisitive crime provides people with enough surplus cash to develop a drug habit, and the drug habit locks them into acquisitive crime.

It is also very clear that young offenders and particularly persistent young offenders are a very high-risk group for development of problematic drug using patterns. Newburn and Elliott pointed out in 1999 (20) that young offenders engaged in significant drug misuse (or at risk of doing so) are likely to be found at all stages of the criminal justice process and across the offence categories. The stage of the youth justice system at which a

young person is found may have some bearing on, but is a poor predictor of, the nature and type of drug use they engage in. As they indicate it is therefore possible for identification and assessment procedures to be developed at all stages of the youth justice system. Indeed ASSET, the standard assessment tool for use in YOTs, does make this a relatively automatic process.

Newburn and Elliott come to two other conclusions consistent with all the findings mentioned above:

- *The key risk factors associated with later problematic drug use - early onset of drug and alcohol use; poor educational experiences; disrupted family backgrounds - are also to be found in this group of offenders.*

- *These young offenders will neither necessarily link their drug use to their offending (or vice versa) nor perceive their drug use to be problematic.*

Newburn and Elliott undertook 30 intensive interviews with young drug users referred to drug prevention projects based in youth justice teams in Derby and Sandwell, and also looked at background information on 113 referrals in total. They noted an average age of onset of drug use which was very low (10.3 years). All those interviewed were under 18 and one fifth of all referrals to these projects were under 15.

From the quoted studies it is possible to see rational links to the national strategy on drugs:- the introduction of arrest referral, Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs), the requirement of a holistic and specific young people's strategy in each Drug Action Team (DAT) area, and the funding of drugs work alongside offending behaviour work in Youth Offending Teams.

Parker et al (1998) (21) looked at new heroin outbreaks in England and Wales and are quite clear about factors of susceptibility to heroin use. (Their study of the factors involved in heroin markets and the penetration of heroin into communities is cited later in a summary of work done on drug markets).

Early risk takers who smoke, drink and experiment with drugs in late childhood/adolescence will clearly be more likely to continue. Nonetheless there will be far more of these risk takers than there are new heroin users.

However, if as indicated in the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) report 'Drug Misuse and the Environment' (1998) (22) we do as Parker suggests and ' place these early risk takers on the social exclusion backcloth, then we can see susceptibility become operationalised. There is little doubt that if we add poor school performance and attendance, light parental supervision and growing up at the wrong end of town, then we are offering a basic identikit of the most likely heroin user'.

At the highest risk end of this susceptibility spectrum, says Parker, will be the care leavers, young homeless and institutionalised offenders. One of the major epidemiological issues identified by Parker is the combination of a drop in the age of illicit drug trying accompanied by increased opportunity to try heroin in early adolescence - a dynamic and developing position which continues to call for careful monitoring and justifies the very high levels of police activity involved in trying to limit availability.

Several important local studies confirm the evolving situation. Huggins et al in their study of Heroin, Crack and Crime in Oxford (2000) (23) indicate that of an estimated 1,800 to 2,300 heroin and crack users in Oxford, 70% had begun their heroin and/or crack use between the ages of 13 and 24 years with the 15 to 17 year old age band being the most significant. Their finding of massive increases in heroin use since 1993/5 and a major increase in dual heroin/crack use echoes the previously cited epidemiological studies. The views of police and other professionals given in the later chapter on current inter-agency perspectives confirms that the increasing pattern of use, developing dealer networks and reducing age of first contact with these drugs have all continued in Oxford. The Huggins study shows a high correlation between established use and a range of crime, but especially burglary.

Pengelly, (2001) (24) a senior Thames Valley Police Officer with extensive prior experience of vehicle crime issues, studied the demographic and criminal characteristics of 3,485 prisoners of all ages passing through Reading Police Station Custody Suite, one of the busiest in Europe, during the calendar year of 2000. Questionnaires were completed by custody staff using information gained from 78.9% of all prisoners who were subject to a charge, caution or restorative outcome. The figures are compared with a similar study carried out during 1997, and it is pointed out that major redevelopment of Reading in the following years made the town into a major retail environment with a substantial increase also in the number of licensed premises. These factors are held up as the main factors behind a major increase in shoplifting and a significant but smaller increase in crimes of violence. While some of the inputs are acknowledged as somewhat subjective in terms of drug assessment the size of the study ensures some important findings. For present purposes the following points emerge:

- 33.4% of prisoners of all ages had used or were suspected of using illicit drugs as compared with 27% in 1997.

- By age group the proportionate increases were higher in the younger age bands - from 9.3% in 1997 to 16.7% in 2000 for those under 17 years, and from 32% to 40.5% for the 17 to 21 age range. For the age band 22 to 30 there was an increase from 35.4% to 44.6%.

- Pengelly notes, as with the Oxford study, a substantial increase in heroin use from 18.9% of those identified as using illicit drugs in 1997 to 45.9% in 2000. There is surprisingly a much lower estimated use of crack and cocaine for both 1997 and 2000. While it might be held that this denotes a difference between Oxford and Reading, it is more likely to flow from the acknowledged methodological difficulty of using subjective assessment by staff. This may have under-rated dual use for example. Nonetheless we have a picture, supported by local intelligence, of major heroin growth.

- Age differences are unfortunately not given for the data on the proportion of drug users involved in different types of crime but the close association between drug use and offences of burglary and robbery are clear. In 2000 54% of dwelling burglars and 71.4% of robbers admitted or were suspected of drug use as compared with 27.1% and 35.7% in 1997. For these groups heroin and crack cocaine predominated and higher proportions of these groups were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offending.

- The other very striking crime change is in shoplifting. In 2000 53.9% of all shoplifting offenders were illicit drug users compared with 12.6% in 1997.

- As to *theft from* vehicles, the total numbers of the prisoners in the sample was 90 in 1997, and 102 in 2000 – (0.8% and 2.9% of all prisoners respectively). The 2000 proportion is equivalent to burglary dwelling, which was 100 prisoners or 2.9% of the total - a major decrease since 1997. There were over three times as many shoplifters and eight times as many thieves, but these proportions may only reflect the relatively low risk of being caught for stealing from a car. When offenders were in custody for *theft from* a vehicle, the proportion using or suspected of using illicit drugs went up from 23.7% in 1997 to 36.3% in 2000 - a significant increase but nowhere near as high as for dwelling burglary, robbery or shoplifting.

2.5 Markets for stolen goods, markets for illicit drugs and the involvement of young people

So far we have looked at the history of thefts from vehicles, some issues relating to the nature and consequences of this crime, and something about where it may sit in the proportion of crime committed by young people. We have also taken a national and Thames Valley overview of the nature of connections between drug use and acquisitive crime, including the proportion of this crime committed by young people, and where *theft from* vehicles may be placed in a picture which is complex, evolving and subject to a number of critical variables. It is now important to address some central questions about markets:

- What do we know about market places for stolen goods and the ways in which goods are either taken for personal use or turned into cash?

- What do we know about the market place for drugs and what crossover is there with stolen goods markets?

- To what extent are young people involved in both forms of market?

- What are the main crime and market reduction options available to police and other agencies in tackling the reduction of both the supply and demand for stolen goods and drugs in illegal markets?

Markets for stolen goods – The Sutton Model

Sutton's (1998) (25) model recognises that there is a cycle of theft, handling and receiving of stolen goods which operates much like a traditional business, through supply and demand. It describes in detail how the thief disposes of stolen goods in a variety of ways and how the public is willing to buy them. This model can equally be used to describe drugs markets. It calls for the disruption of the market by intervening at any one or more of the three main stages:

Stage 1:
The theft: either make the property unattractive to the thief (see CRAVED in section 2) or make it unobtainable e.g. property marking, improved security.

The Thief: tackle the offender, for example through detection, diversion or drug treatment.

Stage 2:
Handling the property – make it difficult for the thief to dispose of the property to a handler or fence e.g. by tightening up procedures in second hand shops, including CCTV, and arrest of the handler.

Stage 3:
Receipt of the property – reduce demand for stolen property e.g. persuade the public not to buy stolen property and arrest receivers.

Traditional crime reduction effort tends to focus on stage one, the theft and the thief. But Sutton seeks a more holistic approach that sets out to reduce demand as well as supply. As long as there is demand for a product someone will supply it – it is a vicious cycle. The police have had limited success in the past because, while they seize huge quantities of suspect goods, they are often unable to identify them as stolen, resulting in few prosecutions, hence the effort to improve marking of goods. While Sutton's relatively complex market reduction model is not widely understood, there is increasing pressure to describe markets and to disrupt them, for example drugs markets in the work of DATs and in the National Intelligence Model.

Sutton reviewed British Crime Survey material and undertook interviews in depth with 45 thieves and handlers in developing a market reduction approach to the marketing of stolen goods. He points out that very large numbers of people in this country are offered stolen goods and many buy them.

- 11% of British Crime Survey respondents admitted buying stolen goods in the last five years, but in true beggar my neighbour fashion 70% thought that their neighbours had stolen goods like videos and televisions in their homes.

- Almost half of males aged 16 - 24 believed they had been offered or bought stolen goods.

- More than twice as many males are offered stolen goods as females, and nearly twice as many buy them.

- 30% of all males living in areas with three adverse area factors and 40% of all males with three adverse personal wealth factors knowingly bought what they thought to be stolen goods.

- Living in a household where the head was self-employed significantly increased the likelihood of respondents saying they had bought stolen goods - the individual interviews with thieves supported this by showing that they repeatedly targeted small business owners asking them to buy stolen goods.

Sutton goes on to point out that stolen property markets, like other illegal markets, are generally localised, fragmented, ephemeral and un-diversified. Different goods are sold in particular ways. Examples are the selling of jewellery to jewellery shops, while stolen cheque books and credit cards are often sold to drug users. Sutton suggests that shoplifters sell clothes, food and other consumables door to door or around pubs.

Sutton devotes considerable attention to car stereos, though with the recent growth and diversification in car audio equipment we might generally talk about car audio equipment. The survey of Thames Valley thefts from vehicles in a later section shows that, while many other items may be taken, audio equipment remains a dominant target everywhere. This has been an issue for a very long time, and Pengelly in 1996 (26) suggested that a high proportion of people do not claim on their insurance even assuming they have cover for contents because of frequently having to pay initial sums and then losing no-claims bonuses. His suggestion that systems are often replaced with 'second hand', some at least of which have been stolen seems a convincing argument.

Sutton suggests that the car audio market remains very large, partly because of the wish of car owners to have the best equipment, which they cannot afford legally, in a field where innovation and sophistication has progressed relentlessly. He also suggests that older equipment taken out after trading-up might then be sold on to friends, even for a small profit. In this way many stereos and the like take a long time to finally 'land' after theft.

Sutton's typology of stolen goods markets can be usefully summarised, as follows:

- Commercial fence - private sales to small shopkeepers and jewellers approached directly by thieves.

- Commercial sales - goods are sold on by the fence for a profit either direct to the consumer (who is unlikely to believe the goods are stolen) or sometimes to another distributor. These commercial sales are normally open, though they can be private.

- Residential fence supplies - distributors operating out of their own houses are approached directly by thieves or friends of thieves and all transactions are private.

- Network sales - an initial friend is approached and the item for sale shown or described. Word is then passed round along friendship networks until a consumer is found. Network sales are usually private.

- Hawking - thieves approach and sell directly to consumers. Transactions in pubs and clubs are semi-private and doorstep sales private.

Sutton notes that ‘ stealing to order’ may be carried out by experienced and inexperienced thieves alike and operates in all the markets forms described except hawking.

We may extrapolate from Sutton’s’ work something about the dynamics of the *theft from* vehicles world. Observed decreases in recent years may have much to do with increased security, but the endless spread of new and highly desirable equipment in cars and the persistent hard core of the population which does not take security precautions continue to make cars a major target. The latest phenomenon, very marked in the Thames Valley, is the considerable rise in theft of laptop computers and other computer equipment. This remains a field of significant ongoing potential for illegal market growth in its own right.

Sutton notes that experienced and prolific thieves sold to a large number of different people, normally at a third of retail value, though jewellery might well be sold to jewellers for the same price as legitimate jewellery. Drug users were generally more likely to take risks and accept lower returns.

While property marking may be important for retrieval purposes Sutton’s survey suggested that it had little deterrent value. Contrary to popular belief car-boot sales were not a means of sale of any significance in the survey findings.

Clearly Sutton’s work indicates the importance of a market reduction approach which goes beyond a pre-occupation with thieves and theft scenes and looks also, as part of an integrated strategy at the markets and the other players in them. Some police services, including West Mercia, have shown success in campaigns which reflect this approach giving out consistent messages to the public and likely market locations - pubs, garages, taxi owners and the like. It is worth noting the West Mercia ’golden rules’:

- make it difficult to sell.
- lower the price.
- narrow the price differential.
- increase the risk and effort.
- make them hang on to it.
- make them travel with it.
- make them keep possession of it.
- make it difficult to use, store or move.
- make them think everyone is watching them.
- undermine their trust in their associates.

There is certainly some evidence that for ‘novice’ thieves failure to ‘cash convert’ at an early stage may curtail criminal careers.

2.6 Implications of research for the current study

It is worth summarising the implications of all this work for the present study.

- There is no reason to suppose that young thieves will not be operating in all the types of market described.

- If preventive action is taken early then this may curtail offending. Easy success with *theft from* cars may in fact accelerate careers and provide the money to access a higher cost lifestyle including drug taking. Early intervention is therefore very important and the quality of Youth Offending Teams intervention may be crucial. Both early involvement and then very intensive contact with more prolific offenders are necessary.

- Young people do seem to be very actively involved in *theft from* vehicles, as the analysis from Thames Valley later shows.

- If the age of onset of illicit drug use is reducing and persistent young offenders are particularly at risk of combining offending and drug taking parallel careers then we might expect an increase in the number of established drug users from this source, and their offending is bound to increase.

- If this is the case then *theft from* vehicles may become an even greater attractive proposition if other avenues such as robbery or burglary become higher risk activities because of police targeting. The general view may be that displacement is never total, but it can easily be very substantial, given the generally low detection rates.

- It is clearly important, when engaging the public through awareness campaigns, to make the link between buying stolen goods and perpetuating drugs markets.

Clarke in his work on 'Hot Products' (op cit) suggests that we may need to identify and anticipate much better the vulnerability of new technology, to build in crime prevention. Laptops and mobile phones were an obvious case where this opportunity was missed. Others will arrive soon enough and the 'mobile office' is clearly a very vulnerable target!

Kock et al (1996) (27), in their work on disrupting the distribution of stolen electrical goods examined available data on stolen electrical goods in the East Anglia police areas, based on consultation with police staff, private sector companies, informants and magistrates. This is one of the first pieces of research to note the emergence of some handler/dealers being prepared to provide drugs rather than cash in exchange for goods - an issue explored further in the present study as a significant emerging trend which merits closer attention.

Kock et al suggest from their consultations a ratio of around five handlers/ buyers to one thief and that *theft from* cars usually took place closer to the thief's home than much other crime - usually within a 10 mile radius. Quite rightly strategic police commentators such as Pengelly (op cit) have therefore stressed the need for local as well as force-wide intervention in tackling *theft from* vehicles. In East Anglia Kock notes that 0.37 electrical items are taken per *theft from* vehicles, a very high ratio. Clear up rates for 1992 and

1993 were 17.5% and 15.9% respectively. As anticipated this is much lower than for other acquisitive crime but higher than the figures for *theft from* vehicles for much of the Thames Valley.

Sutton's work is clearly pioneering in this field and his typology very useful, but we do need to take into account a number of changes that may have been occurring more recently:

- BCS information and the previously cited Youth Crime Lifestyles Survey suggest that many of the youngest people involved in offending are receivers of stolen goods, and that we may need to describe more accurately the specific nature of the markets involving 10 to 16 year olds.

- The world has rapidly become a much smaller place, and so has our own country, with the spread of ICT and the huge, unchecked growth of the small ad industry. As Whitehead and Gray (1998) (28) point out in their study of the impact of computer theft on organisations costs are high, and repeat victimisation is common. While they studied office-based theft the implications for moving computer equipment into the 'mobile office' are obvious. As to an extension of the range of selling methods, they say that of 30 telephone numbers taken as a sample from a national magazine advertising the sale of computer hardware, 10 belonged to convicted handlers.

2.7 Drugs markets

Given the apparent development of some direct exchange of stolen goods for goods, without use of separate markets to exchange goods for cash first, this overview ends with a brief summary of some research on drugs markets, which has so far tended to be studied as an entirely separate phenomenon.

Parker, Bury and Egginton (op cit.), in charting the spread of heroin, note that the heroin supplies, the wholesale depots, are found in the cities which had the epidemics during the 1980s with established supply and dealing systems.

' Wherever we find towns with outbreaks we find the nearest big cities have a role and the old site cities are, in turn, usually involved. In short the big suppliers who work with the 'kilos' are usually geographically removed from both new markets and young customers.'

The research on more local dealing in the new outbreak towns showed great similarity in the description of dealing systems, acting as the conduit between the suppliers and the susceptible population. While there were some open markets these were normally closed down quickly and the two main semi-closed market systems operating were the home based dealer and the mobile dealer. Neither of these dealing systems is new or unique to heroin, and both normally require potential buyers to be vetted before they are given contact information.

Since it is at these lower level markets that we might expect to see growth in the number of participants and some variety of motive, this is where crossover with stolen goods will most likely occur, and may help to support a customer base. Large numbers of participants and a significant proportion of 'small timers' are users and offenders themselves. As a number of police officers indicated to me, dealers will prefer cash in most given circumstances, but may pay with drugs direct for specific stolen goods which they have ordered, or which have high value. Since we know that users will settle for lower prices when selling stolen goods to conventional stolen goods markets, the exchange for drugs direct may offer particularly good advantage to the dealer.

It would seem that heroin spreads easily because of the level of profit at each level, the vulnerability of new users whose resistance has been undermined by non opiate experience, the manner in which heroin has been marketed to the recreational drug scene, and the huge growth in dealing, with established drug dealers going into heroin, to be joined by large numbers of new dealers.

May et al (2000) (29) examine the impact of low-level police enforcement on two drug markets and the adaptations that both sellers and users employed when attempting to avoid detection. One market was conducted through a structured hierarchy kept in place by the threat of violence. It had previously been an open market but police activity had impacted on this and selling was now through a closed system. The market was based on heroin with crack emerging as well. Breaking into this market as a new seller would be difficult, as it was essentially a closed shop.

The second market was a fragmented free market drug distribution system with many sellers working independently selling both heroin and crack. Enforcement activity had turned these markets into closed ones. However, pharmaceutical drugs were available and traded predominantly through an open street-based market. Though violence was a feature of these markets it differed from the first in that violence did not shape the distribution system.

In the first market, for all the structure and violence, users commented that drug sellers would often accept stolen goods in return for drugs, including electrical equipment, such as televisions, videos and laptop computers, or items such as jewellery or shop vouchers. In the second, more loosely organised and fragmented market, case study material also indicated both use of credit and a willingness to exchange for goods by some of the sellers.

Police enforcement had made the markets more secretive and less visible. This is a difficult dilemma for police in that when visibility drops public concern drops as well. Public interest and pressure may then shift to other concerns making for potential conflict over the use of police time and resources. The authors conclude that source-led policing was both cost-effective when compared with surveillance operations, and the most reliable method of gathering intelligence on market structures. They also note that demand reduction strategies are a vital part of the equation. Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, and other offender treatment initiatives are clearly important in this, but there needs to be a range of well-organised local provision including good and available facilities for methadone prescription. Though this study concentrated on metropolitan city settings

those issues will resonate throughout the Thames Valley.

It would seem therefore that an understanding of drugs markets and their evolution is highly necessary in devising local enforcement strategies. It also seems that a wider generation of young people are using drug markets, most of which now appear to some extent to be willing to take stolen goods, let alone the cash generated by all forms of acquisitive crime. The stolen goods market is therefore more complex than it was. While young offenders may see drugs as part of a high cost lifestyle which their offending supports, it seems clear that heroin/ crack and drug use generally are now a more significant component of that lifestyle, with the most established users then caught up in very prolific offending. Clearly the place of stolen electrical goods and high cost items is relevant to this overlap of markets, and the goods concerned do feature prominently in any analysis of thefts from vehicles. The present study is an attempt to learn more about these connections.

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3. An analysis of goods and their values stolen from vehicles in the Thames Valley in 2001/2 by police area

3.1 Source of data and method of analysis

Thames Valley Police provided as raw data a full list of recorded items stolen for each of the 10 Police Areas in the 12 month period ending 31st March 2002 - the last full year available at the time of the study. Items were recorded against the 'catalogue' of property, which is used to ensure consistent recording. As well as the number of items for each description category an aggregated value was given. At the end of each area's listing a total number of items was given and an aggregate value, giving an overall picture of the scale of *theft from* vehicles in that area. Consultation over the data indicated that these aggregates are affected by some variations in recording practice, and the lack of recorded values against a significant number of entries overall does enable broad statements to be made with reasonable confidence.

There are around 250 catalogue items, including over 20 'other categories' such as 'other clothing' intended to ensure that some description is given for things, which do not easily fit elsewhere. While this approach ensures a high level of data collection and certainly gives the police detailed material about specific types of item, a broader analysis is only achievable if items are grouped generically. Accordingly, for the purposes of the study, I devised 24 categories and then allotted each standard item to one of these categories.

An early issue was the need to eliminate some items from the analysis, given both the need for some limits, and the need to concentrate on *theft from* cars, which is the central purpose of the study. For these two reasons the following were not counted:

- Any item which was clearly in common sense terms another vehicle in its own right- this removed trailers, and caravans.

- Livestock of all kinds. Clearly the horses recorded had not been taken from cars anyway! The various dogs and cats were few in number, though some had very high financial value ascribed to them.

- I excluded from categorisation medical bags and drugs. However a general note on the theft of such items is given later in the section.

- Firearms have not been included as a standard grouping but a specific section does address this as an overall issue.

- In the same way notes have been taken about keys taken from vehicles, and a specific section covers this.

3.2 Groupings used

In order to clarify the components of each heading a general description follows, but the code and titles are given later for ease of reference at the beginning of the police area charts.

- **Audio.** This covers all audio equipment, including speakers, CD equipment, radios, tapes, CDs and all the related equipment.

- **Building Materials.** In reality much of the material under this heading may have come from vans or other commercial vehicles.

- **Clothing and Linen.** Items relating to clothing were covered in this category, with the exception of sports clothing which has been included under the heading of Sports and Leisure equipment to give a fuller picture of the impact of theft on sports equipment as a whole. Non sports footwear is also included here.

- **Computer and I.T. Equipment.** Everything relating to computers, was covered in this heading, which also includes all accessories, and all software items. Since theft of laptop computers is a relatively recent phenomenon, and now constitutes a startling proportion in some areas of the total value of goods stolen, some specific analysis is given in each area analysis.

- **Non I.T Communications Equipment.** This includes primarily mobile phones, but also pagers, and other smaller volume items of equipment.

- **Office and Business Items.** This includes a wide variety of items including stationery, personal organisers and diaries. I also decided to include briefcases, a relatively high volume item in this category to reflect the 'nature of the loss' as appropriately as possible.

- **Food.** This includes all the items recorded clearly as food, or obviously consumable, for example soft drinks, but not alcohol.

- **Alcohol and Tobacco.** This grouping is quite clear cut. It seems likely, however, that given the values involved, a number of the bigger losses were probably from commercial vehicles.

- **Financial Documents.** Since this is a generic category not used in the past and the overall volumes are high it may be helpful to include the whole list of items allotted to this group. The different items are as follows:

    - Building Society Books.
    - Cash Point Cards.
    - Cheque Books.
    - Cheque Cards.
    - Credit Cards.
    - Income Support or Social Security Books, and other benefit related documents.
    - Family Allowance Books.
    - Paying-In Books.
    - Pension Books.
    - 'Other Financial Documents'.
    - Store Cards.

- **Money.** This grouping includes cash, foreign currency, travellers-cheques, and several cash equivalent items, such as vouchers, stamps and travel cards. This grouping also covers cash containers, wallets and purses.

- **Other Documents.** This covers a wide range of items from individual papers and letters through to one of the largest volume items, 'membership cards'. Books are included here, as are Passports. The volume of passport theft is such that specific reference is made to it in some of the Area reports.

- **Domestic items, equipment and toys.** This grouping covers a very wide range of household items including some electrical goods, and in some cases the volume involved indicates that theft from a commercial vehicle was involved. This category also involves the sad litany of losses such as prams, pushchairs, toys, and 'presents'- a reminder that property taken from cars often includes extremely important and deeply personal things.

- **Cosmetics.** This covers perfumes, after-shave, soap, deodorants, and related items.

- **Fuel.** This applies only to vehicle fuel, whether petrol or diesel. In some cases where a high value related to a small number of incidents it was clear that theft of fuel had been from commercial vehicles, though this could not be confirmed from the data.

- **Garden Equipment.** The specific item description was usually sufficient to allocate to this section, but chainsaws, which might otherwise have been grouped with tools, have been included on the grounds of normal function.

- **Furniture.** In practice the number of items involved under this heading was relatively low. Again some of the quantities and values involved indicated theft from commercial vehicles rather than cars.

- **Jewellery.** In addition to the more obvious jewellery items, such as rings, brooches and necklaces, I have included watches and lighters. Some indication of the volume of watch theft is given in Area reports.

- **Machinery.** Items included in this grouping are items of plant or other machinery and not electrical or other tools. As the analysis developed it became clear that most items were 'plant' – unlikely on the whole to have been taken from cars as opposed to vans and other commercial vehicles.

- **Sporting and leisure equipment including sports clothing.** As indicated above this section includes specifically sports clothing. Other items relate to a whole range of sporting equipment, prominently involving golf items, but many other sports as well, including diving equipment, and racquets of various kinds. Riding tack is included in this section. I have included musical instruments in this group.

- **Tools.** This grouping encompasses a wide range of individual items, but power tools, covered in various individual item descriptions are the largest overall category- constituting around 30% to 40% of tool thefts in some Police Areas, and significantly higher percentages of the overall values involved. From anecdotal evidence it does seem clear that a significant amount of this crime involves stealing from tradesmen and commercial vehicles. Also included in this group are items such as tool chests and cabinets.

- **Vehicle Parts.** All previous research on the nature of *theft from* vehicles has stressed the prominence of *theft of* vehicle parts. The same holds for the present research. Parts from outside and inside the vehicle are included, with the exception of audio items, which are grouped separately as indicated above**.**

- **Visual and Photographic.** Included in this grouping are cameras, camcorders, Televisions, Projectors and related accessories such as films.

- **Glasses and Sunglasses.** Preliminary reviewing of the data suggested that thefts of these goods were relatively common across most Police areas, with a relatively high level of unit cost in ascribed values. Accordingly they have been included as a specific grouping, and as will be seen they are significant in all Police areas, with sunglasses having a high proportion of the value.

- **Vehicle Documents and Licenses.** Similarly, preliminary reviewing showed this up as a significant area of loss, and so it has been given a group category. The main items are as follows:

  - Driving Licences.
  - MOT Certificates.
  - Vehicle Excise Licences.
  - Insurance Documents.
  - Vehicle Registration documents.

  While some of these items may have been taken in a wholesale theft of goods, or theft of a file or briefcase some will have been taken for fraudulent use or misuse of the personal details.

An analysis of the nature of items taken by police area is the central focus of this section. Pie charts relating to the number of items against each of the categories used are given for all 10 police areas in the form of an appendix at the end of the study.

3.3 Some limiting factors in the analysis, and some issues about police recording practice

Clearly the process of allotting around 250 described items into 24 categories can never be completely objective. Quite apart from the point made earlier about the non-inclusion of a small number of items, some of the allocations of individual items could certainly be the subject of argument. I have tried to make the allocations on a 'common sense' basis, but inevitably it is also a subjective approach. However, the reasoning is as shared above, and the approach described has been followed through consistently in the listings for each of the 10 police areas.

There are some issues, though to be considered about police recording, which may merit further attention, and these became clear from detailed analysis. They can be summarised as follows:

- The list of items is extremely extensive, but for some categories of goods extremely repetitive. An example is the car /radio cassette player. Reasonably enough there is a distinct category for a car audio system which includes a CD player, but I am not sure if the two descriptions of 'CD player, Vehicle' and CD/Radio/Cassette are anything more than confusing. There are a number of other audio descriptions, as follows: 'Radio'; 'Radio/Cassette'; 'Radio/ Cassette Vehicle', as well as the catch-all 'Other Audio'. The categories used in the Police CEDAR programme have evolved over time and this clearly does cause variations in inputting. The replacement of CEDAR in due course will offer a major opportunity to improve data quality.

- As noted earlier there are over 20 categories of 'other' in the listings. It seemed clear from a detailed examination area by area that in some places the 'other' categories are much more extensively used than in others. There does seem to be a range of practice on this issue.

- There are considerable differences between areas on the proportion of items given an ascribed value. This is one of the reasons why it is very difficult to work out the full economic impact of *theft from* vehicles, and is a concern, given that *theft from* vehicles is already substantially under-reported.

- As I went through the reports for each Police Area it became clear that the value ascribed to recurring items, for example laptop computers' varied widely, not only between areas but within area listings. This is a difficult issue since the input should be primarily determined by the victim's description and estimate. Nonetheless, as with non-recording values, the variations do affect assessment of the economic impact of theft from vehicles.

- There is no apparent distinction between *theft from* private cars, and *theft from* commercial vehicles. When large numbers of items or very high values were recorded it can be assumed that this involved a van or lorry load. Again this is a difficult and complex issue - the offence after all is *theft from* a motor vehicle. There is also in common sense terms a considerable overlap - the self-employed plumber who goes out in a small van and loses his tools may have more in common with the victim who loses her briefcase, than the firm whose van driver is careless at the motorway services and loses a number of cartons of cigarettes. However, if we are to gain a better understanding of the victim issues and re-victimisation risks in *theft from* vehicles we may need to obtain more differentiated data than is presently available.

Despite these reservations about both the recording and analysis I do feel that an interesting and complex picture emerges which may be useful in focusing on priority areas, and gaining a fuller picture of the impact of *theft from* vehicles. In considering each area it is helpful to cross-refer to the individual area chart on numbers of items and the cross-area tables giving values against each category of items.

3.4 Police area reviews

A - Aylesbury Vale

This area covers the sizeable town of Aylesbury and the whole of the Aylesbury Vale District Council, a mixture of small towns and rural communities.

The data suggests the following, at least for the year in question:

- In terms of volume of items and values Aylesbury Vale would appear to be a low to medium range area for *theft from* vehicles, both in respect of items and values - the overall values given were eighth highest out of 10.

- This was the only area where numerically the largest number of losses were in my category of Financial documents, and in Aylesbury Vale losses of these items were numerically higher than audio equipment losses.

- Of the 808 Audio items at a total value of £119,366 the largest individual items were 212 Vehicle CD players (£35,344), and 163 car radio/cassette players (£28,381)

- As with most areas, computer equipment was relatively low numerically, but very high in terms of values as might be expected. 183 items constituted £171,338 in value. Interestingly the 115 laptops taken were the 7th highest level of incidence, but constitutes 63% of all computer items taken. This was the 4th highest among the 10 areas. The average value recorded for a stolen laptop in the Aylesbury vale area was £1,346. This compares with £659 for Reading and £1,582 for Northern Oxfordshire. Because of the recording issues identified earlier it is important not to base too much reliance on 'average' values, but the differences are very marked for laptop computers.

- As with most areas mobile phones constituted by far the largest proportion of non-computer communications equipment, 266 out of 309 items.

- Sports and leisure equipment was a significant area of loss, and golf equipment featured particularly highly on the figures given - constituting 79 out of 223 items and just under 69% of the total value of £32,341.

- The value of tools taken in Aylesbury was proportionately somewhat higher than a number of other areas. With 419 items Aylesbury were seventh highest in terms of numbers, but fifth in terms of value, totalling £86,677. As with all areas the most value attached to power tools - 78 at a value of £21,155.

- The remaining high value range of items were vehicle parts - 347 items at a value of £78,807. Aylesbury was in fact ninth of 10 areas for numbers of parts taken, but third for total value. However this seems clearly to have been skewed by the inclusion of three engines at a total value of £25,800.

B- Oxford City

The Oxford Police Area covers a high-density population with significant sections of relative deprivation and considerable ethnic diversity. The high student population and younger age profile than neighbouring Police Areas are significant demographic factors. In Oxford a major initiative on vehicle crime had been implemented and this produced very substantial reductions in theft from vehicles. This is reflected in the numbers and values of items taken, since local policing and partnership priorities have clearly had an impact on both incidence and detection.

The main issues to emerge in analysis, so far as goods and values are concerned are as follows:

- Audio equipment is clearly the largest group of items. Again Vehicle CD players (389 items, £38,695) and Vehicle radio/cassette players (236, £17,089) predominate.

- The figures for computer equipment overall are the lowest of all 10 areas both in terms of incidents (103) and values (£64,168). A very high proportion of both items (63/103) and values (£62,117/£64,168) were made up by laptops. It is not clear whether the figures for computer equipment overall reflect disproportionate under-reporting, or successful crime prevention. However, given the value of laptops we might expect reporting levels to be high everywhere, and again Oxford is very low with only 62 laptops recorded. One possibility of course is that with a high student and academic population laptops were more likely to be taken in burglaries, but the fact remains that Oxford was the lowest of all 10 Police Areas for theft of laptop computers from vehicles.

- Again mobile phones were the most frequently taken item in other communications equipment (238 phones at £8,844). Again the values accorded against a relatively similar number of phones taken in Aylesbury is low (266 items valued at £21,905 in Aylesbury).

- Sports and Leisure items were recorded in greater volume than in Aylesbury, but the comparative values were almost half (£17,000 for 376 items in Oxford and £32,341 for 223 items in Aylesbury) If the one reported boat valued in Oxford at £800 is taken out of the comparison the discrepancy is clearer still. These differences appear again to relate to the factors identified above. Golf equipment was again a significant proportion of value (20 items valued at £6,880).

- Oxford recorded the lowest number of tools taken of all 10 areas (265 items at a value of £31,062) of which predictably a high proportion numerically and in value were power tools.

C- Slough

The Slough police area is largely coterminous with the Slough Borough Council area but also includes parts of the South Bucks District. Slough itself is densely populated, and has, unlike the other Berkshire unitary authority areas many of the characteristics of an outer London Borough. The area is ethnically diverse with a high Asian population. Several wards and estates have high levels of crime, and associated problems. Recorded crime is at high levels. Burglary crime between 1998 and 2002 was second highest to Reading among the 10 areas. In the year ending 31st March 2002 the figures for all varieties of theft plus personal robbery placed Slough third in incidence of the 10 areas with 10,326 recorded crimes of which 5,921 or 58% were thefts from a vehicle. While the volume is higher in Reading, as might be expected from the relative population sizes, the difference is not large. As a percentage proportion of all thefts, including personal robbery, this is the highest rate for theft from vehicles in the Thames Valley.

The main issues from an analysis of items and values would appear to be as follows:

- Audio items are only exceeded by the 'other documents' grouping in terms of volume, and the ascribed total value of the audio goods taken is second only to Reading. Vehicle radio/cassette players amounted to 471 items at a value of £82,780, and the variously described vehicle CD playing equipment added to 133 units at a value of £112,630. CDs themselves were stolen to a value of £21,691.

- On the available figures computer equipment theft was a major issue in the Slough Police Area. The volume of laptop computer theft was very high indeed with 1,254 offences and 1,452 laptops taken. There was also a high level of theft from vehicles of computer accessories (304 items at an aggregated value of £112,630).

- The level of mobile phone theft from vehicles (680 at a value of £65,601) is very high in Slough.

- Money in its various forms is another high area of theft in Slough with 1330 items valued together at £132,745. A significant factor here was 52 thefts of foreign currency valued collectively at £58,784 - more than the value of UK currency (535 thefts valued at £49,190).

- Among the high level of 'other documents' taken a particular issue in Slough is the high rate of theft of passports, 217 in all- the highest of all 10 police areas. This compares with 149 for Reading, and may reflect either the demography of the area, the proximity to Heathrow, or some other unidentified factor.

- Slough also records the highest total values for sports and leisure equipment, £91,549 for 676 items. Within this category 123 mentions are made of golf equipment at a total value of £41,675.

- Similarly the theft of tools is higher than anywhere else in Thames Valley - 1214 items at a value of £251,031. The vast majority of the items and values are power tools.

- While car parts figures are high for Slough they are more in line with other ratios and a number of other areas.

- In examining the Slough data it seemed that the value placed on items was somewhat higher than in some other areas. As indicated elsewhere there does appear to be a need for more consistency in this regard.

D - Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes police area covers the city of Milton Keynes and is coterminous with the unitary authority boundary. Milton Keynes is the major centre of population in the north of the Thames Valley area, with a number of demographic differences as compared with other areas, including a younger age structure and somewhat less ethnic diversity than the other main population centres.

In the year ending 31st March 2002 Milton Keynes had 10% of all theft offences in the Thames Valley, on a par with Chiltern Vale in the south and below Oxford and Slough with 13%. Thefts from vehicles constituted 36% (2946) of all thefts and personal robberies, almost on a par with 'other theft'.

The main issues relating to Milton Keynes are as follows:

- As in other places audio equipment is a high number and high value category. In volume terms the range of audio equipment goods taken from vehicles constituted the most frequently taken items stolen from vehicles in Milton Keynes, with 330 Vehicle CD players taken at a value of £48,634. Car radio/cassette players, as elsewhere were also popular targets (228 at a value of £15,992). Reflecting on British Crime Survey results on actual levels of crime, though, it is worth remembering that this represents less than one car radio/cassette player taken per day for the city. It must therefore be assumed that some items (for example audio equipment) are reported at a lower level to Police than other categories of item. In terms of assessing the impact of vehicle crime, and the public response to it, this is an issue, which merits more detailed investigation. It has certainly not been considered to any degree in the literature so far. In any event the bulk figures for theft of audio equipment are much boosted by the theft of CDs themselves.

- Though significantly lower than in the police areas in the south of Thames Valley, computer equipment nonetheless constitutes a significant category of loss in Milton Keynes, with the largest item being laptop computers (144 items, valued at £159,691).

- Compared with other areas the figures for theft of money from vehicles seem to be low for a large population centre like Milton Keynes, (416 records and value of £16,234, of which £14,225 was cash, with no entry for foreign currency). As in other cases of difference between areas, there is no obvious reason.

- Similarly the number of items taken and the values accorded for garden equipment seem low in Milton Keynes, though the figures are significantly lower again in Oxford.

- Figures for sports equipment are relatively high and again a major item is golf equipment (135/468 items and £31,207/£52,942.) This is one of the higher 'golf ratios'.

- Figures for tools are 5th highest out of the 10 police areas, (467 items) but the values are eighth out of 10 (£70,680). This seems to reflect a mix of low valuation especially for power tools, and also a tendency not to record values, bringing the aggregate value down. This was true of some other items in Milton Keynes as noted above.

- Vehicle parts in Milton Keynes showed the opposite tendency. The area was fifth of 10 in terms of items, but second in terms of ascribed values, (629 items and £113,741 in value)

- There was a relatively high level of *theft of* vehicle documents in Milton Keynes, notably theft of driving licenses (105) and Vehicle Excise Licenses (105)

E – Reading with Wokingham

Reading with Wokingham police area is the largest in terms of recorded crime in the Thames Valley, and as has been noted elsewhere, Reading police station is one of the busiest in Europe. Reading is not only a major commercial centre but sits on major road and rail intersections. The Police area covers both the Reading Borough and Wokingham Unitary council areas. Some of the western suburbs, though, are in the West Berkshire Council area, which is covered by the West Berkshire police area.

Because of the size, the levels of *theft from* vehicles and the losses involved are significantly higher overall than the other nine areas.

An idea of relative scale is given by Reading's 38,982 all crime figure for 2001/2 as against 22,135 for Oxford, 24,322 for Slough, and 23,187 for Milton Keynes.

The figures for *theft from* motor vehicles in 2001/2 were 6,738 or 39% of all thefts and personal robberies in Reading, and this was the same as for 'other theft (39%, 6,694). For all categories of theft Reading had 21% of all crimes in the Thames Valley (17,189) - the next highest percentage areas were Slough and Oxford at 13%.

Theft from vehicles expressed as a percentage of all theft was exactly the same in Reading as for Thames Valley as a whole (39%).

The main issues arising from an analysis of the Reading data were as follows:

- The volume of audio items was huge by comparison with other areas, with the emphasis as elsewhere on CD players (944, £97,289) and car radio/cassette players (602, £25,212) but in Reading fascias were also being taken in significant numbers (136, £4,860).

- Theft of clothing was a significant activity with 1043 items at £24,899 value (though not disproportionate to other areas).

- Theft of computer equipment from vehicles was very high with a total of 998 items at a value of £514,541. While accessories and other items of equipment added to considerable sums the theft of laptops was strikingly the major item. 656 were taken at a total value of £432,564. The geography of laptop *theft from* vehicles is quite striking in the Thames Valley - the higher levels of theft are in police areas along the east/west motorway routes to and from London - the West Berkshire figure of 272 is disproportionately high for the area, then Reading (656), Chiltern Vale (424), Slough (1,452) and Thames Forest (552).

- Mobile phones were taken in large numbers from vehicles in Reading (968 at a value of £32,172).

- Theft of money was at a high level also in Reading with 1614 items valued of which 659 were cash, and this constituted the major part of the value involved- £60,031.

- Next to Slough, Reading was the main location for theft of passports from vehicles - 149.

- The fuel value given for Reading is high for the relatively small count of items - 41 items and £11,248. This may involve theft of diesel from commercial vehicles.

- Garden equipment, as with some other urban settings is relatively low (52 items and £7,262 value).

- In sports and leisure equipment, Reading ranks only sixth in values ascribed, though at 1,001 items it is by some way the largest area for incidence. This suggests an under-valuation or a failure to record values. Again golf equipment (206 items at £25,691 was the biggest single set of items within the category.

- There may be a similar under-valuing in respect of tools, where Reading is second only to Slough in terms of numbers but fourth of 10 in terms of total values - meaning that the average ascribed price per item in Reading is generally significantly lower than elsewhere.

- The same issue appears to apply to vehicle parts where 924 items are only valued at £20,944. This is the lowest total ascribed value for this category across the 10 areas, and occurs because of both low ascribed figures and non-valuation.

F – West Berkshire

West Berkshire police area covers the West Berkshire Council area, and includes the towns of Newbury and Thatcham as well as a range of smaller rural communities, and the western suburbs of Reading. In terms of theft offences of all kinds and personal robbery West Berkshire had the smallest volume of the 10 areas in 2001/2, with a 4% share or 3,052 offences. 47% of those crimes were *theft from* vehicles - second only to Slough as a proportion of theft and related crime.

Though the smallest area in volume of theft related crime, West Berkshire ranks sixth out of 10 in terms of total value of goods taken from vehicles (£995,642). This is largely explained by the high figures for theft of laptops as indicated below.

The main points to emerge from analysis are as follows:

- West Berkshire is the only area where the broad category of 'domestic items and toys' exceeded audio as the largest incident group, though the value of audio equipment was considerably higher. Audio equipment *theft from* vehicles was relatively low nonetheless, and only Southern Oxfordshire had lower value figures on a roughly comparable number of losses.

- Theft of computer equipment from vehicles was relatively high in West Berkshire, as indicated above, and West Berkshire ranked fifth on number of items taken, despite its small overall volume. 272/501 items were laptop computers- 54% of all computer items stolen and 37% of the value of all goods taken from vehicles. Geographical factors as suggested earlier are likely to be important, but this issue merits further analysis.

- Mobile phones were again a common item taken (171 / £11,223).

- Several of the West Berkshire groupings suggested the likelihood of theft of commercial vehicles and their contents. On enquiry it emerged that the high level figures for theft of alcohol from vehicles (13 items at £50,140) were accounted for by two truck thefts of £20,000 and £30,000 respectively. If these figures are taken out the alcohol taken from cars is at a very low level. Similarly, in the domestic items category in West Berkshire the multiple theft of vacuum cleaners from a lorry constituted the vast majority of the overall category value.

- In some categories in West Berkshire there were gaps in valuation and this certainly skews the figures. An example is the jewellery category, which returns 27 items at a value of £2,305, but no valuation is given for the watches taken.

- Within the sports and leisure category golf equipment is again significant with a quarter of the value for the category as a whole- £12,180. In the West Berkshire data most sports and leisure items are grouped in the 'other sporting' category, so there is less specific information available.

- West Berkshire has a relatively high valuation for 'other documents' and this relates to 61 items without specific definition values at £8,005.

G - Chiltern Vale

Chiltern Vale covers the Wycombe District Council area, centred on the large town of High Wycombe, as well as the adjacent district council areas of Chiltern and most of South Bucks. Chiltern District Council includes the towns of Amersham and Chesham, and surrounding villages. South Bucks District Council has its headquarters in Slough and is made up of a number of villages and small towns. As indicated earlier the southern

parishes are covered by the Slough police area. The area overall is extremely affluent though Wycombe has significant relative deprivation, and some problematic estates. Wycombe has a substantial ethnic minority population, both African-Caribbean and Asian.

Chiltern Vale has 10% of Thames Valley recorded theft and personal robbery for 2001/2- on a par with Milton Keynes, though the largest centre for all crime in the area is in High Wycombe, with lower figures for the other towns. Thefts from vehicles constitute 41% of all categories of theft/personal robbery in the area (3,342 cases). The proportion and volume figures are most comparable to the figures for Thames Forest.

The main issues relating to the analysis and value of goods taken from vehicles are as follows:

- Chiltern Vale has the third highest aggregated value for audio equipment, and second highest for number of items ((£164,147/1434). The main items involved as with other areas were Vehicle CD players (464/£69,740), and the variously described car radio/cassette players (311/ £35,332). Fascia removal was also more frequent than in most other places (47/£5,385)

- For computer equipment taken from vehicles overall Chiltern Vale ranks fourth behind Thames Forest, Reading and Slough. In accorded value totals though, £569,968 for 609 items places Chiltern Vale, second only to Thames Forest (831 items valued at £712,549). This clearly relates to the previously raised issue about lower rates of valuation for such goods in Reading and to some extent in Slough. If the position on laptops is examined Chiltern Vale is one of the three areas (Chiltern Vale, Thames Forest and Reading) with very high volume - 424 items at a value of £533,859. As the chart indicates Chiltern Vale has one of the highest ratios of laptops to stolen computer equipment, and the second highest reading for laptops as a proportion of the total value of all goods taken from vehicles (39%).

- 404 mobile phones (£29,085) were a major loss area, though the overall figures for communication equipment in Chiltern Vale were somewhat affected by a single high value two way radio loss at £10,000.

- Chiltern Vale was an area with high money loss from vehicles - 1049 items at £61,950. The vast majority was in cash (394 items at £44,542), but 244 handbags and 322 purses and wallets were also taken.

- Chiltern Vale was a relatively high area for theft of garden equipment (74 items at £17,825).

- Theft of machinery was related in Chiltern Vale mainly to generators - again not an issue relevant to understanding *theft from* cars.

- Sports and leisure equipment again featured prominently - Chiltern Vale was ranked fourth in terms of items, and third in terms of values. Again golfing equipment was a major grouping, 92 items at £32,825.

- Similar ratings applied to a high volume of tools and as in all areas the various power tools constituted a high proportion of value.

J - Northern Oxfordshire

This police area covers both the West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Council areas. West Oxfordshire is a relatively low crime district with a mix of small towns and villages, and an older population structure than average. Cherwell has a large town at Banbury, and a fast growing town in Bicester. Cherwell's crime rate overall is significantly higher than West Oxfordshire's.

Overall figures for all theft offences place show Northern Oxfordshire as having 6% of Thames Valley offences, comparable with Southern Oxfordshire and Aylesbury Vale. *Theft from* motor vehicles constituted 34% (1,515 episodes) of all thefts and personal robberies in North Oxfordshire for 2001/2 as against 'other theft' which was 40% (1766 episodes).

The main issues arising from analysis of items and values relating to Northern Oxfordshire were as follows:

- In audio equipment thefts, as in other areas the most frequently taken items were CD vehicle players (152/727 items at a value of £38,573), and radio/cassette players (132/727, £17,379). Theft of CDs was also common.

- In computer goods Northern Oxfordshire ranked eighth of 10 for items taken, and seventh for value. However, laptops were relatively less prominent in this police area, with one of the lowest laptop to total computer items ratios (50%). Similarly the value of laptops taken as a percentage of total value taken from vehicles was low at 17%, as compared with figures of 39% in Chiltern Vale and 46% in Thames Forest.

- Mobile phones were again a common item stolen - 113/143 non-computer communications equipment, at a value of £9,482.

- The Northern Oxfordshire figures for food and consumables are the highest for the Thames Valley - 73 items at a value of £29,189. Of these totals 27 at a value of £13,726 are specifically recorded as food. It seems likely that these figures are to do with commercial losses and manner of recording rather than a specific Northern Oxfordshire issue. On enquiry it emerged that four high value thefts from trucks accounted for £13,400 of these losses, so clearly theft of food from cars is in fact at a very low level.

- Similar considerations may apply to the high levels for alcohol and cigarettes. 16 of the 25 mentions and £35,788 of the total value relate to alcohol.

- The very high figures given for jewellery, again the highest for the Thames Valley are again unlikely to give a representative picture of risk. Five of the 26 items were recorded as watches at a value of £133,199. On enquiry it emerged that one single theft of watches from an articulated lorry was responsible for £132,993 of this loss. Clearly theft from commercial vehicles is a significant issue in Northern Oxfordshire, and they put into perspective the position in respect of theft from cars.

- Generally most other categories reflect issues raised in all the other reports, but sports and leisure equipment scored lowest in the Thames Valley for values (£15,230) and also for items (105), and this appears to be a significant difference in comparison with other areas.

- Data for tools and particularly power tools confirmed the cross-area importance of this item in assessing theft from vehicles.

- There is generally less dramatic difference between areas in respect of theft of car parts. In Northern Oxfordshire the main items taken were car wheels, with 44 mentions and a total value of £27,956.

L- Thames Forest

The Thames Forest police area is coterminous with the two unitary authorities of Bracknell Forest District Council and The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The two areas differ considerably in character, Bracknell being a post war new town, and Windsor and Maidenhead, a grouping of established communities, with a high level of affluence. Both areas are near London with road and rail links, and a high number of commuting residents.

In the year ending 31st March 2002 the police area had 11% of Thames Valley thefts of all kinds (8,640 incidents), just larger in volume than Milton Keynes and Chiltern Vale, and just smaller than Oxford and Slough. A relatively high proportion of all thefts in Thames Forest were thefts from motor vehicles for the year in question - 42% of the total, the fifth highest ranking proportion, and above the average of 39%.

The main issues emerging from an analysis of items and values are as follows:

- The value rating for audio equipment taken from vehicles is the fourth highest in the Thames Valley, but the nature and proportions of the main goods taken are consistent with other areas - with 298 vehicle CD players (£44,336) and 128 radio/cassette players (£21,365).

- Thames Forest shows a high level of loss for computer equipment taken from vehicles with an ascribed total value for these goods of £712,459 (831 items). These characteristics are shared with Reading, Slough and Chiltern Vale. In common with those areas the number of laptop computers taken is high and the impact on overall values higher still. Laptop *theft from* vehicles constituted 46% of the total value of all goods taken from vehicles in the area during the year.

- 312 mobile phones were taken at a value of £25,475.

- Thames Forest had a relatively high loss of credit cards within the financial documents grouping -519 of a total of 1209 items-a higher proportion than in Chiltern Vale (483/1396), but lower than Slough (663/1416).

- Within the 'other documents' category 96 passports were taken in the area.

- Within the jewellery category the level of loss was relatively low compared with neighbouring areas, but as was the case in most places the main value items reported were watches - 31/100 items at a value of £5,534.

- Sports and Leisure items were important in Thames Forest and the total ascribed level of value of £70,325 was only exceeded by Slough. Only Reading and Slough had higher numbers of items. A detailed reading revealed a very wide range of items taken, but 57 related to fishing at a value of £8,657, and 83 to golf at a value of £27,674.

M - Southern Oxfordshire

This police area covers the large geographical area constituting the local authorities of the Vale of the White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils. Both are affluent and relatively low crime areas, with a mix of country towns and villages, though parts of Southern Oxfordshire border on Reading. The main population centre in the Vale of the White Horse is Abingdon and South Oxfordshire District includes the population centres of Thame, Wallingford and Didcot, which is a main growth area in the southern half of the county.

Southern Oxfordshire had 6% of all Thames Valley theft crime in 2001/2, the same level as Northern Oxfordshire and Aylesbury Vale. *Theft from* motor vehicles was 39% of all thefts and personal robberies in the area (1828 incidents) and this is the same percentage as the Thames Valley overall figure.

The main issues emerging from an analysis of goods taken from vehicles and their values is as follows:

- As with other areas the predominant items were CD players and equipment (289 items at £38,729) and car radios/cassette players (190 items at £25,161).

- For computer equipment *theft from* vehicles, only Oxford had lower figures than Southern Oxfordshire, but the theft of laptops was appreciably higher than both Northern Oxfordshire, and Aylesbury Vale. The average value ascribed to a laptop was just under £1,000.

- 205 mobile phones were taken at a value of £9,427.

- Approximately 70% of the alcohol and cigarettes category was made up by nine alcohol items valued in total at over £7,000. On checking the position it was confirmed that one very large value theft from a commercial vehicle constituted the vast majority of this overall value.

- Under the jewellery category, seven items at £14,397 were listed under 'other jewellery'. On checking it emerged that this was accounted for by one single offence involving theft from a commercial vehicle. Otherwise the losses were limited to 10 watches recorded at a total value of £726 – again demonstrating that

once major commercial vehicle thefts are taken out of the calculations a low level of loss emerges for thefts from cars.

- Sports and leisure values were somewhat increased by the inclusion of five boat engines at a value of £5,224, but again the place of golf equipment showed up - 71 items at a value of £22,704 - more than half the whole category value.

- Vehicle parts were a significant category in the area, with 349 items at a value of £51,764, and as with some other areas the biggest value items were wheels - 71 items yielded a value of £31,993.

3.5 Other issues

a) Medical bags, medical equipment and drugs

Theft of a range of medical equipment ranging from doctor's bags through to medicines were reported in all the 10 areas, and not surprisingly the volume tended to be proportionate to the overall volume of *theft from* vehicles.

The lowest area was Aylesbury Vale with seven items at £292.

A number of areas fell into a middle level, as follows:
Oxford (34 items and £920 value)
Milton Keynes (22 items and a rather higher value at £1,768)
West Berkshire (17 items again at the relatively high assessed value of £1,630)
Northern Oxfordshire (29 items at £19,690 - this almost entirely related to one expensive item, and otherwise the figures are in line with other similar areas)
Southern Oxfordshire (40 items at £720)

At rather higher levels of activity were the following:
Slough (105 items at £6,667)
Reading with Wokingham (122 items at £18,766 of which 26 items and £18,565 were classified as medical instruments)
Chiltern Vale (66 items at £18,333 of which £15,370 was classified as relating to instruments)
Thames Forest (49 items at £6,185)

Given the broad definitions involved it is not possible to do more than suggest that there must be a health and security risk in some of these losses and although they will not all have related to medical personnel, the overall loss in the Thames Valley of theft of medical items from vehicles of £74,972 in 2001/2 is not insignificant.

b) Firearms

Firearms of one kind or another were reported stolen from vehicles in eight of the 10 police areas, the two exceptions being Slough and Milton Keynes.

The breakdown for the eight areas is as follows:

Aylesbury - One shotgun valued at £40
Oxford - One firearm valued at £200
Reading with Wokingham - Four firearms with no ascribed value
West Berkshire - Six firearms with no ascribed value, one recorded ammunition item and two shotguns valued at £900
Chiltern Vale - Four rifles at £1,200, two items of ammunition and two shotguns without ascribed value
Northern Oxfordshire - One rifle at £50
Thames Forest - One rifle without ascribed value
Southern Oxfordshire - One shotgun and two items of ammunition all without ascribed value

Clearly there is some connection with rural sporting interest. The overall numbers of stolen firearms for a year across a large Police area are not great – 23 in all. On the other hand this can be seen as worrying given the high level of restriction applied to firearms and their storage, and the fact that these items were all taken from vehicles.

c) Keys

It was not possible to be clear from the recording what keys were for cars and what for other functions, but the numbers involved overall suggest that there is a continuing problem with awareness of this issue from drivers. The list of numbers of keys are as follows:

Aylesbury Vale	77
Oxford	62
Slough	241
Milton Keynes	112
Reading with Wokingham	223
West Berkshire	42
Chiltern Vale	150
North Oxon	26
Thames Forest	142
South Oxon	76

Total: 1,151

It is clear therefore that loss of keys, storage of keys in cars and related matters remain a significant problem for crime prevention.

4. The place of *theft from* vehicles in the context of Thames Valley crime, and an analysis of those charged with *theft from* vehicles by police area

4.1 The overall crime position 1998 to 2002, and the place of *theft from* vehicles against other forms of theft

In the last decade crime levels overall have lessened markedly, but the last four years for which there is complete data show a plateau effect following the low figure for 1998/9. It is well known that the nature of reported crime has also shifted during the last decade, notably in the reduction of *theft of* vehicles compared with *theft from* vehicles; the decrease in overall burglary levels, and the relative increase in violent offences. It is also clear that intelligence led policing and the targeting of specific crime concerns can have a marked and rapid impact in specific areas, and the success of initiatives on *theft from* vehicles in Oxford and more recently Slough are examples of this.

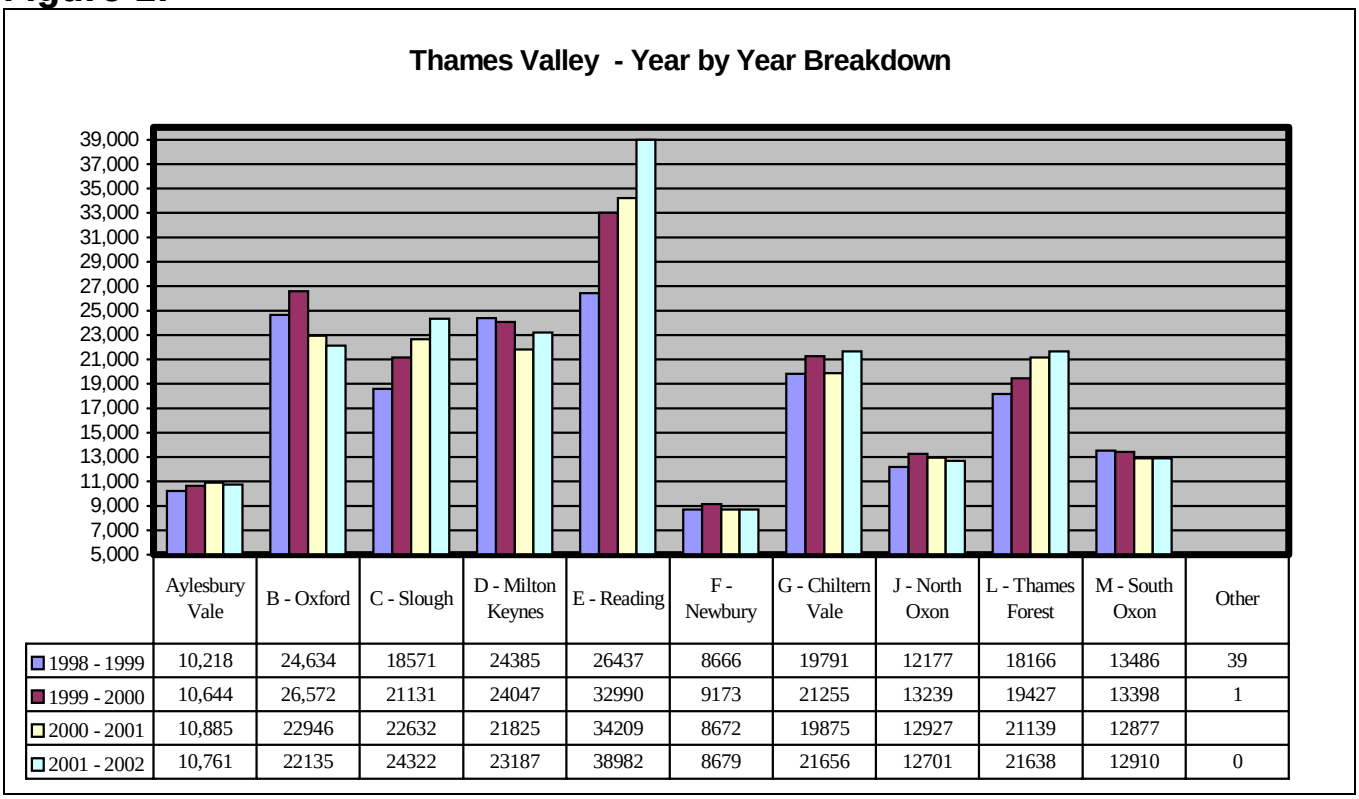
Figure 1 shows the total volume of recorded crime for each Police Area in the years 1998/9 to 2001/2. This gives an impression of the relative 'crime size' of each area, and also demonstrates that the trends over a four-year period are by no means uniform.

If all categories of recorded theft are aggregated then the relative proportion of each police area within the Thames Valley is as shown in Figure 2. Calculated across the 'old county' territories Oxfordshire has 25%, with just over half in Oxford itself. Buckinghamshire has 26%, and Berkshire has 49%.

The place of specific categories of theft as recorded by police is given in Figure 3. One striking issues is the huge volume of *theft from* vehicle - almost the same proportion as the 'other' category which includes shoplifting[*]. The relatively low proportion of *theft of* vehicles as against *theft from* vehicles is also shown, though it is not clear how many of the thefts from vehicles occurred as part of a vehicle being taken. The interviews with young offenders described in Section 6 give some examples of young men who took vehicles as a primary activity but then stole from them as a profitable secondary activity.

[*] The only type of offence not included in the overall term 'other theft' is theft from employee, of which there were 724 offences across the Thames Valley Area in the year 2001/2.

Figure 1.



	Aylesbury Vale	B - Oxford	C - Slough	D - Milton Keynes	E - Reading	F - Newbury	G - Chiltern Vale	J - North Oxon	L - Thames Forest	M - South Oxon	Other
1998 - 1999	10,218	24,634	18571	24385	26437	8666	19791	12177	18166	13486	39
1999 - 2000	10,644	26,572	21131	24047	32990	9173	21255	13239	19427	13398	1
2000 - 2001	10,885	22946	22632	21825	34209	8672	19875	12927	21139	12877	
2001 - 2002	10,761	22135	24322	23187	38982	8679	21656	12701	21638	12910	0

Figure 2.

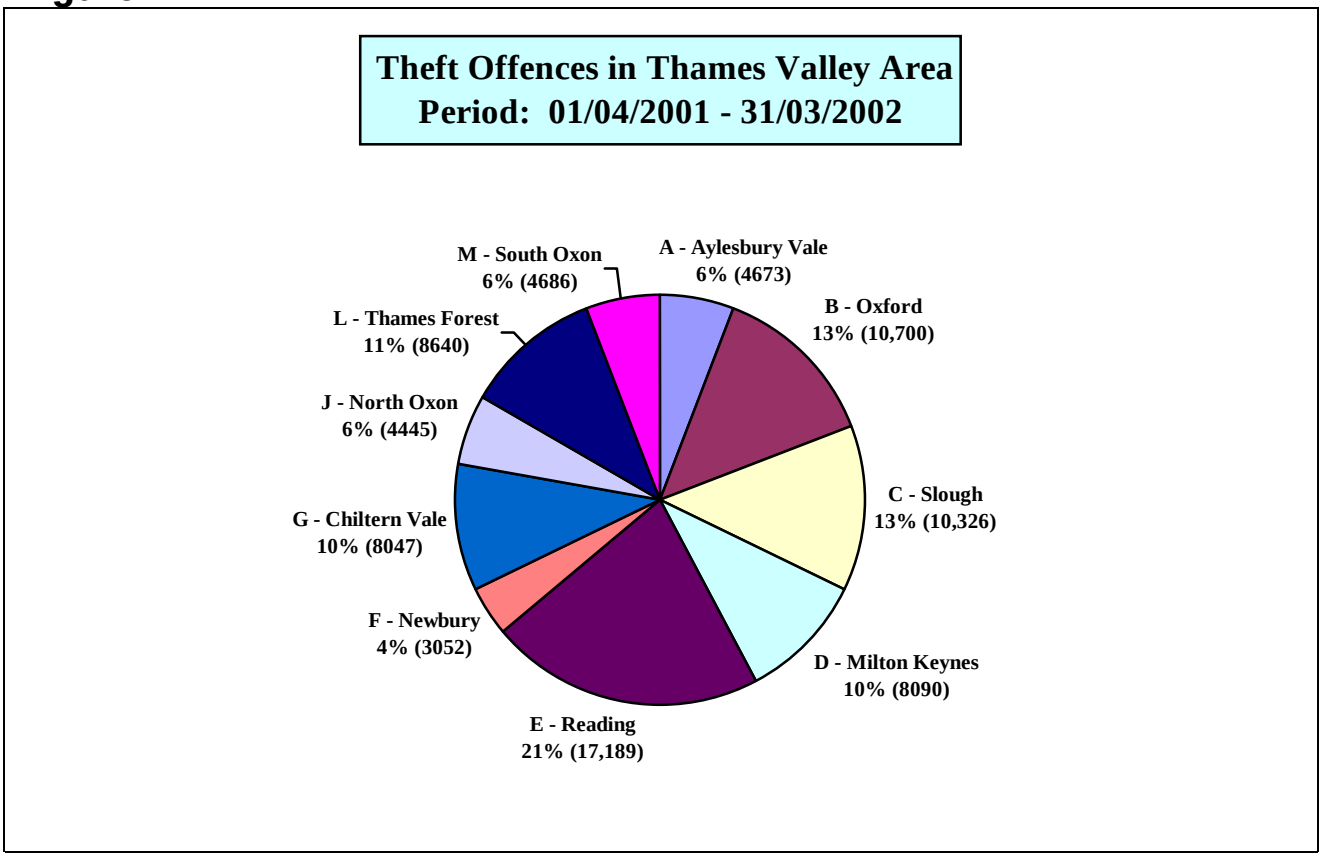
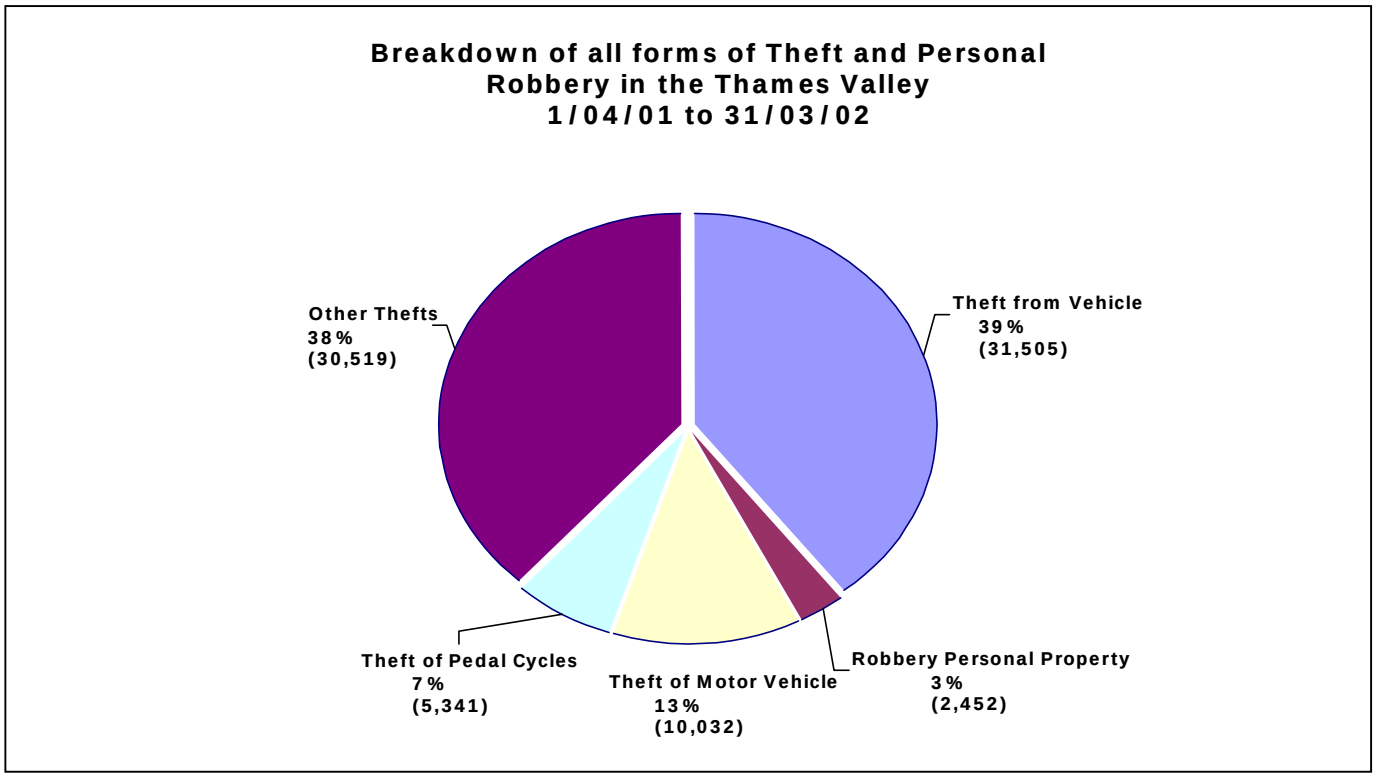


Figure 3.



4.2 The relative place of *theft from* vehicles against other forms of theft, and personal robbery by police area

Data giving the relative proportions of each form of theft and personal robbery for the year ending 31st March 2002 in each area are given in Figure 4. While the different size of each 'pie' needs to be remembered the proportionate differences between areas are of interest. Some of the main issues appear to be as follows:

- In most police areas *theft from* vehicles as a percentage of all thefts and personal robberies is in the range 36% to 42%. The exceptions are Oxford (21%), West Berkshire (47%) and Slough (58%). Given the targeting by police of *theft from* vehicles in Oxford this appears to be clear evidence of impact on crime patterns. The highest proportion by some way was in Slough. In this police area a targeted programme of work was initiated and more recent reported results show major reductions both in volume and proportion.

- The figures do not shed light on the issue of displacement from one form of crime to another, which may result from police campaigns. Similarly there is little data available on the longer- term impact of such campaigns, once another target has been identified and particularly if resources are moved. This would be a profitable area for further research. Some professional opinions about displacement and consolidation are given in the next section.

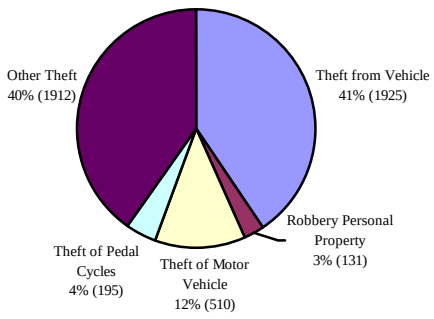
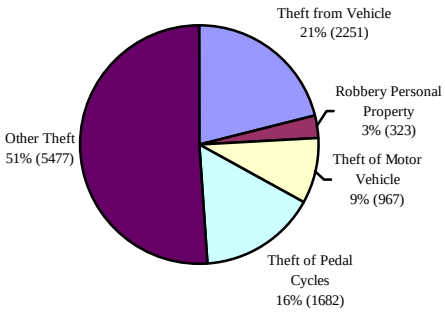
- There is less variation across police areas in the place of vehicle theft in the context of all thefts and personal robberies. Oxford again has the lowest proportion at 9%, suggesting that the initiative on vehicle crime there has impacted both on stealing vehicles and their contents. Otherwise all Areas are in the range of 11% to 17%. The two highest proportions are Milton Keynes and Northern Oxfordshire, but Slough, at 12%, has proportionate figures much lower than its figures for theft of contents.

- There is a similarity in the proportions between Areas for theft of pedal cycle - nine Areas have this as between 3% and 9% of all recorded thefts and personal robberies. The exception, as might be expected by tradition and opportunity is Oxford at 16% and a volume of 1,682 offences. This compares with a proportion of 6% and 1,106 pedal cycle thefts in Reading with Wokingham, the largest of the Police Areas for crime by overall volume.

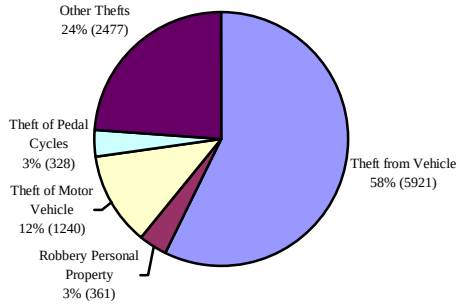
- Personal robbery constituted between 1% and 5% of aggregated theft and personal robbery offences in all 10 Thames Valley Police Areas.

Figure 4

Breakdown of Offences by Area
April 2001/March 2002

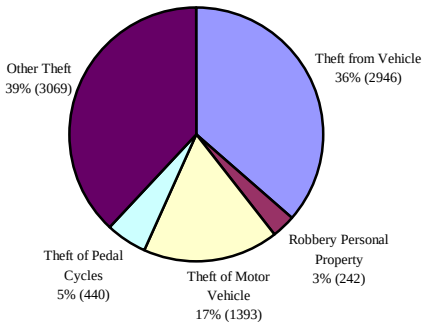
<table>
<tr><th>A - Aylesbury Vale</th><th>B - Oxford</th></tr>
<tr><td> 
</td><td> 
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total of theft offences: 4,673</td><td>Total of theft offences: 10,700</td></tr>
</table>

C - Slough



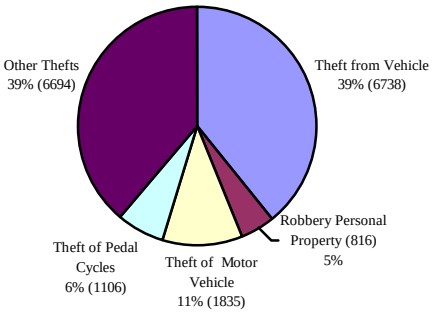
Total of theft offences: 10,326

D - Milton Keynes



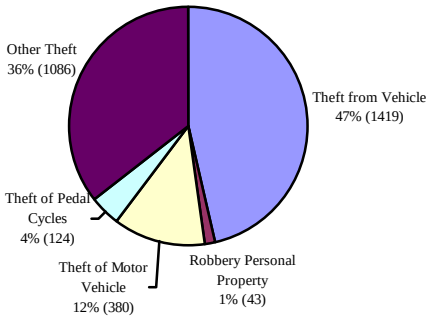
Total of theft offences: 8,090

E - Reading



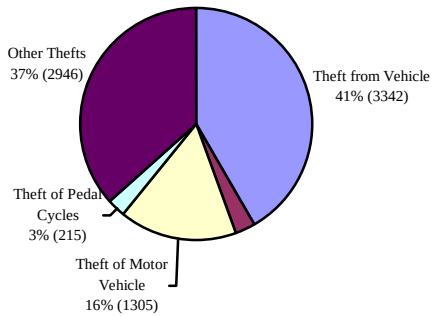
Total of theft offences: 17,189

F - Newbury



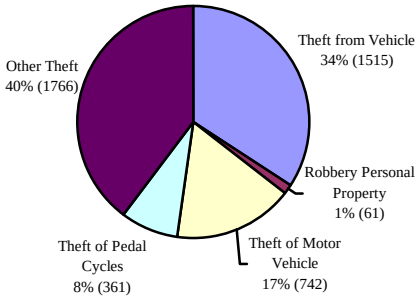
Total of theft offences: 3,052

G - Chiltern Vale



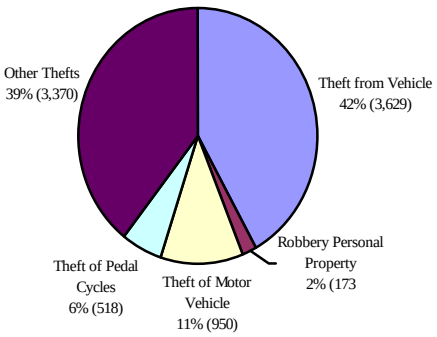
Total of theft offences: 8,047

J - North Oxon



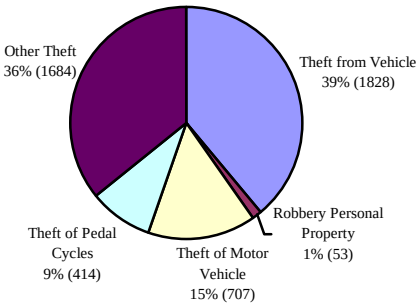
Total of theft offences: 4,445

L - Thames Forest



Total of theft offences: 8,640

M - South Oxon



Total of theft offences: 4,686

4.3 Gender *theft from* vehicles and other forms of theft in the Thames Valley

In this and subsequent sections the data relates to those actually charged with offences. Given the relatively low clear-up rate for most forms of theft, and particularly *theft from* vehicles, there must be some uncertainty about whether the data on those who have actually been caught can fairly represent an overall profile of those who steal in different ways. While this limitation should be taken into account the confidential interviews described in Section 6 suggest that those who have been convicted have frequently committed significant numbers of similar crimes (and others), for which they were not detected, and so the data may be more representative than it seems at first examination.

In all but one Police Area (Chiltern Vale) the percentage of males apprehended for offences of *theft from* vehicles was higher than for personal robbery or other forms of theft. Across the Thames Valley the aggregated male percentages were as follows:

- *Theft from* motor vehicles: 97% male.
- Personal robbery: 90% male.
- Other thefts: 86% male.

In summary, though there were 2,111 charges for *theft from* vehicles across the Thames Valley in 2001/2 only 71 of those charged were female. 38/71 (53.5%) were aged between 12 and 18. We can say, therefore that *theft from* vehicles is a more heavily male activity than any other form of theft. The number of females involved is very small indeed.

4.4 Age and *theft from* vehicles

For the purposes of analysis a number of age groupings were adopted and applied to the detailed data provided for each police area. In a small number of cases age was not recorded, but generally the data does enable a comparative picture to be drawn.
The groupings selected were as follows:

Below the age of 12
Age 12 to 15
Age 16 to 18
Age 19 to 21
Age 22 to 24
Over 25 years.

Since one of the objectives of the study is to assess the nature and extent of young people's involvement in *theft from* vehicles these groupings were chosen to reflect some of the normal milestones and legal status changes - pre-secondary school; secondary school entry up to final year of required school attendance; school leaving age to youth court upper limit, and age of majority; young adulthood, early twenties, and over 25. This final category is of course the largest, but in common with all forms of crime there is a taper effect with relatively small numbers of significantly older offenders.

Figures 5, 6 and 7 show the numbers by age grouping and gender across the Thames Valley for *theft from* vehicles, 'other theft' and personal property robbery respectively.

The salient comparative issues are as follows:

- Up to age 12 the number of offenders overall is very small across all three categories, but there is only one case of *theft from* a vehicle. Given the common assumption that a good deal of theft, including theft from motor vehicles, is committed by very young people this appears to be a significant finding, though it may be that factors relating to police recording need to be borne in mind.

- Personal property robbery is a crime with a substantial majority of charged offenders aged between 12 and 18. In all the later age groups the figures drop away sharply to an even distribution across the remaining age bands. This is in marked contrast to *theft from* vehicles and 'other' thefts.

- The number of offenders charged with *theft from* vehicle climbs sharply in the 16 to 18 age range, in common with the other two categories, but in proportion is more sustained across the 19 to 21 age range, compared with the significant falling off in numbers of 19 to 21 year olds for robbery and other theft.

- Similarly the rate of decline in the numbers of offenders is lower for *theft from* vehicles.

- The figures for over 25s charged with *theft from* vehicles are higher than those for the 16 to 18 age group.

Essentially personal property robbery is a young person's crime. Those charged with a broad range of 'other theft' start proportionately earlier than those who steal from vehicles, but there is a falling away in numbers after the age of 18, and the 16 to 18 age group is clearly the peak. Contrary to popular opinion theft from vehicles is in fact more associated with older men. Stealing from vehicles would seem to start relatively later and is certainly a crime committed by large numbers of 16 to 21 year olds. There is sustained involvement continuing along the 'older over 25' age groups and a substantial number of older offenders. However, the age profile of those arrested for *theft from* vehicles in 2001/2 does vary between Police Areas, and this is the subject of the final part of the analysis of alleged offenders.

Figure 5.

AGES BY GENDER AND POLICE AREA FOR ALLEGED OFFENDERS
Theft from Vehicle

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	J	L	M	TOTAL
Under 12	**M**	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
	F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
	TOTAL	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**
12 - 15	**M**	17	6	8	37	8	6	12	14	12	6	**126**
	F	9	0	2	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	**17**
	TOTAL	**26**	**6**	**10**	**37**	**8**	**11**	**12**	**15**	**12**	**6**	**143**
16 - 18	**M**	20	28	75	183	75	25	40	37	54	17	**554**
	F	0	1	0	0	2	0	12	0	3	3	**21**
	TOTAL	**20**	**29**	**75**	**183**	**77**	**25**	**52**	**37**	**57**	**20**	**575**
19 - 21	**M**	12	16	111	67	119	39	30	36	68	15	**513**
	F	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	**6**
	TOTAL	**13**	**16**	**113**	**69**	**120**	**39**	**30**	**36**	**68**	**15**	**519**
22 - 24	**M**	4	105	15	16	35	9	9	12	46	19	**270**
	F	2	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**8**
	TOTAL	**6**	**109**	**17**	**16**	**35**	**9**	**9**	**12**	**46**	**19**	**278**
25 +	**M**	18	153	33	32	86	27	36	16	132	43	**576**
	F	1	6	0	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	**19**
	TOTAL	**19**	**159**	**33**	**35**	**88**	**29**	**37**	**17**	**133**	**45**	**595**
												2,111

Figure 6.

AGES BY GENDER AND POLICE AREA FOR ALLEGED OFFENDERS
Other Theft

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	J	L	M	TOTAL
Under 12	**M**	0	8	7	7	1	0	7	7	5	5	**55**
	F	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	**6**
	TOTAL	**0**	**9**	**9**	**7**	**1**	**0**	**8**	**7**	**6**	**5**	**61**
12 - 15	**M**	17	44	45	106	67	24	57	84	90	52	**656**
	F	9	3	6	9	17	8	19	14	27	12	**143**
	TOTAL	**26**	**47**	**51**	**115**	**84**	**32**	**76**	**98**	**117**	**64**	**799**
16 - 18	**M**	20	154	74	234	146	36	77	165	92	210	**1,190**
	F	0	18	13	5	16	11	17	13	15	13	**130**
	TOTAL	**20**	**172**	**87**	**239**	**162**	**47**	**94**	**178**	**107**	**133**	**1,320**
19 - 21	**M**	12	78	67	64	95	25	62	70	57	84	**647**
	F	1	9	8	16	15	6	4	9	11	11	**92**
	TOTAL	**13**	**87**	**75**	**80**	**110**	**31**	**66**	**79**	**68**	**95**	**739**
22 - 24	**M**	4	51	47	56	67	12	34	22	37	39	**374**
	F	2	6	4	3	18	1	14	3	2	4	**60**
	TOTAL	**6**	**57**	**51**	**59**	**85**	**13**	**47**	**25**	**39**	**43**	**434**
25 +	**M**	18	158	96	120	154	70	92	98	80	66	**982**
	F	1	23	16	11	39	7	16	16	31	17	**201**
	TOTAL	**19**	**181**	**112**	**131**	**193**	**77**	**108**	**114**	**111**	**83**	**1,183**
												4,536

Figure 7.

AGES BY GENDER AND POLICE AREA FOR ALLEGED OFFENDERS
Personal Robbery

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	J	L	M	TOTAL
Under 12	**M**	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	**3**
	F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
	TOTAL	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**3**
12 - 15	**M**	3	17	12	14	63	1	38	9	27	5	**189**
	F	3	0	1	0	5	2	0	0	6	0	**17**
	TOTAL	**6**	**17**	**13**	**14**	**68**	**3**	**38**	**9**	**33**	**5**	**206**
16 - 18	**M**	18	45	13	19	75	6	30	26	19	14	**265**
	F	1	1	2	1	7	0	0	1	1	0	**14**
	TOTAL	**19**	**46**	**15**	**20**	**82**	**6**	**30**	**27**	**20**	**14**	**279**
19 - 21	**M**	4	10	3	9	23	3	8	6	4	3	**73**
	F	0	1	1	1	8	1	0	0	0	1	**13**
	TOTAL	**4**	**11**	**4**	**10**	**31**	**4**	**8**	**6**	**4**	**4**	**86**
22 - 24	**M**	2	7	9	12	30	7	4	2	4	0	**77**
	F	1	4	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	**7**
	TOTAL	**3**	**11**	**9**	**13**	**31**	**7**	**4**	**2**	**4**	**0**	**84**
25 +	**M**	3	19	17	13	0	0	14	4	9	1	**80**
	F	0	3	2	0	19	0	2	0	0	0	**26**
	TOTAL	**3**	**22**	**19**	**13**	**19**	**0**	**16**	**4**	**9**	**1**	**106**

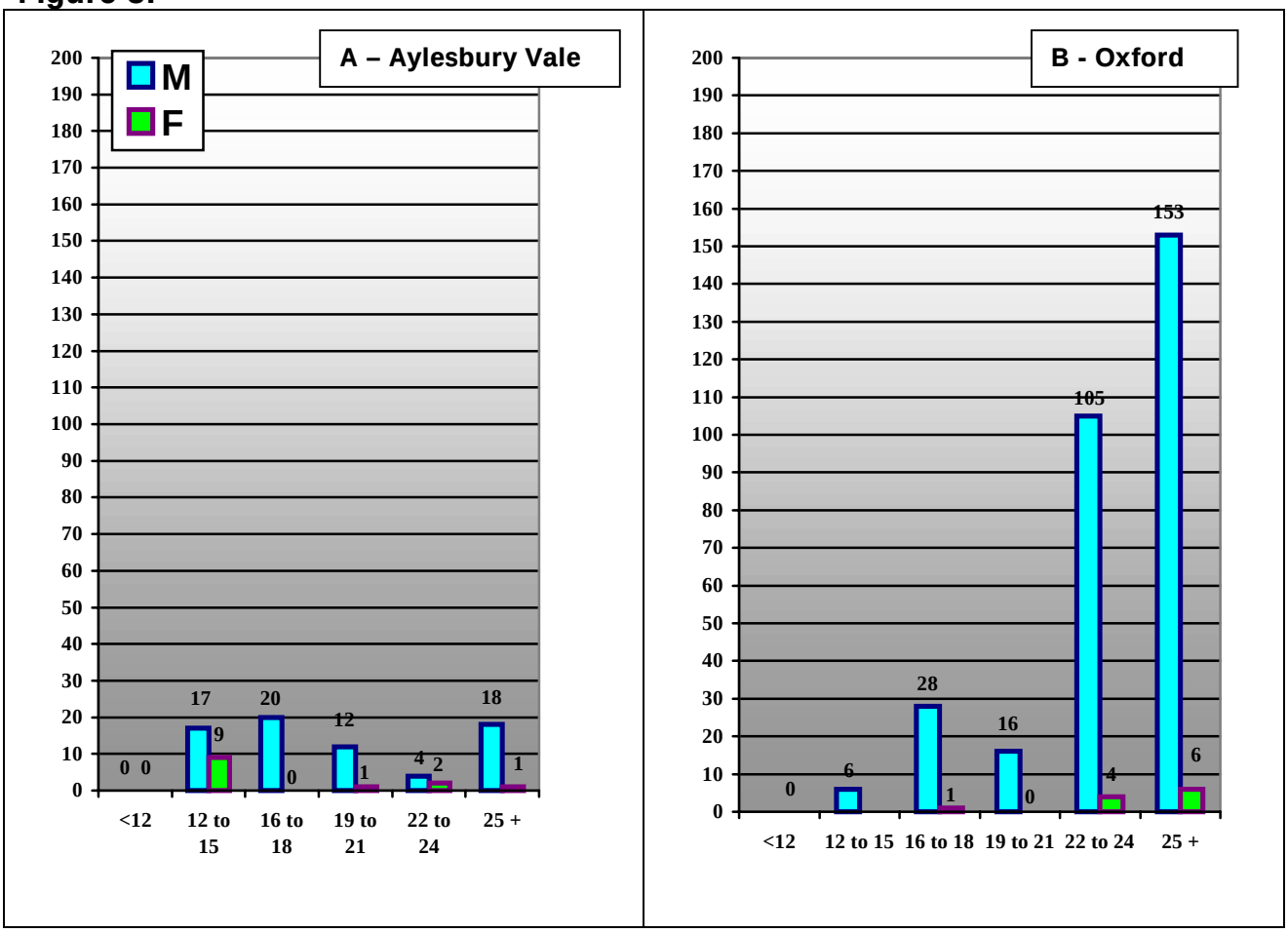
												764

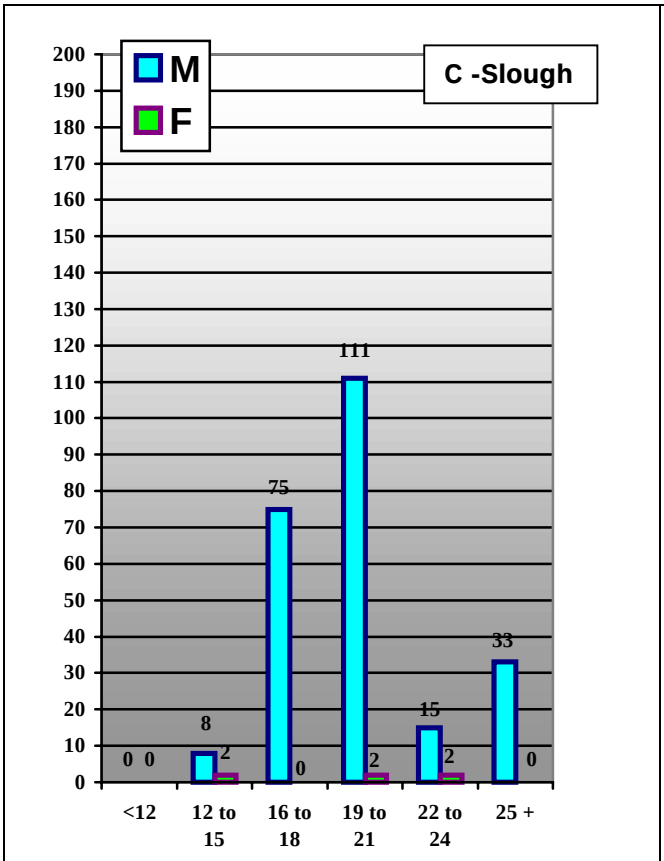
4.5 *Theft from* vehicles – age group analysis of alleged offenders by Police Area in 2001/2

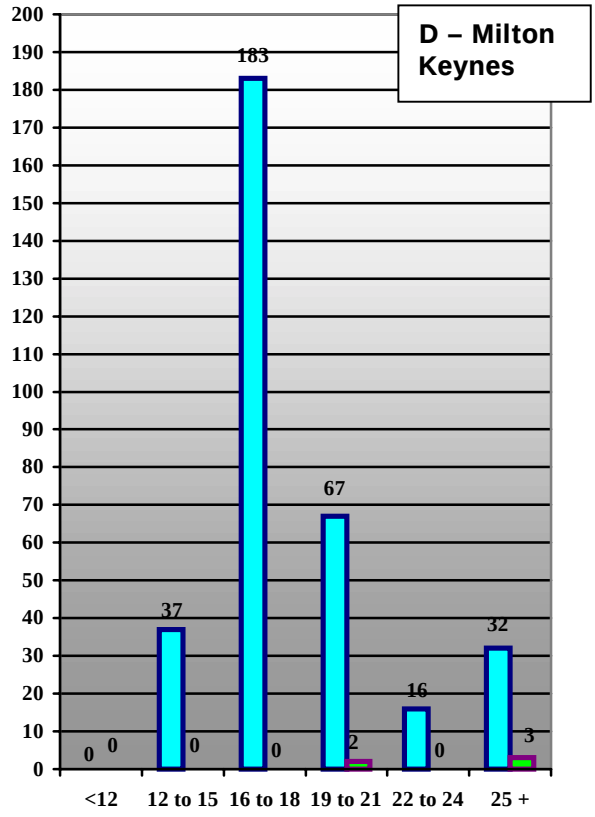
The age and gender distribution of the 2,111 offenders alleged to have stolen from vehicles is given by Police Area in the following series of bar charts, Figure 8. Significant points from the Area charts are given below.

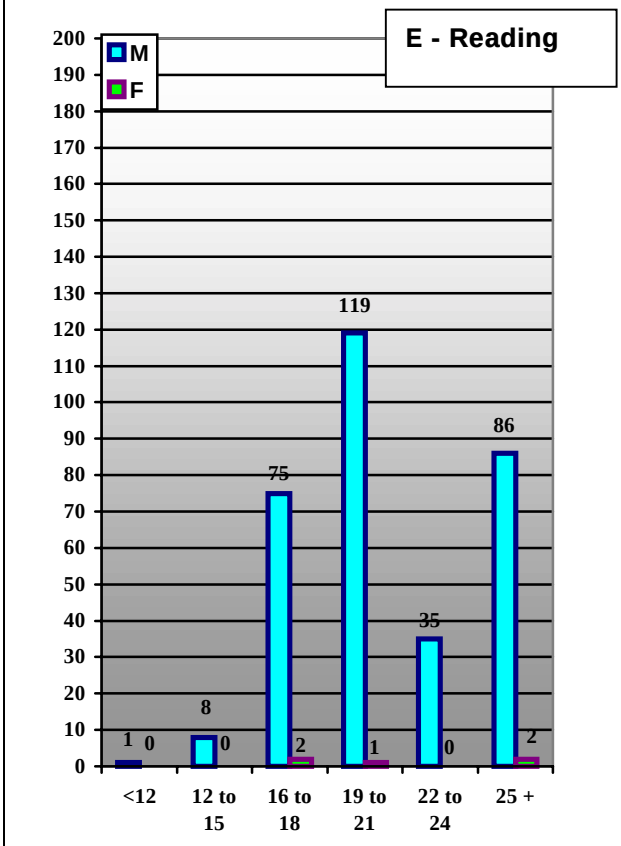
Note that a different scale is used for Areas F and J because of the smaller numbers involved.

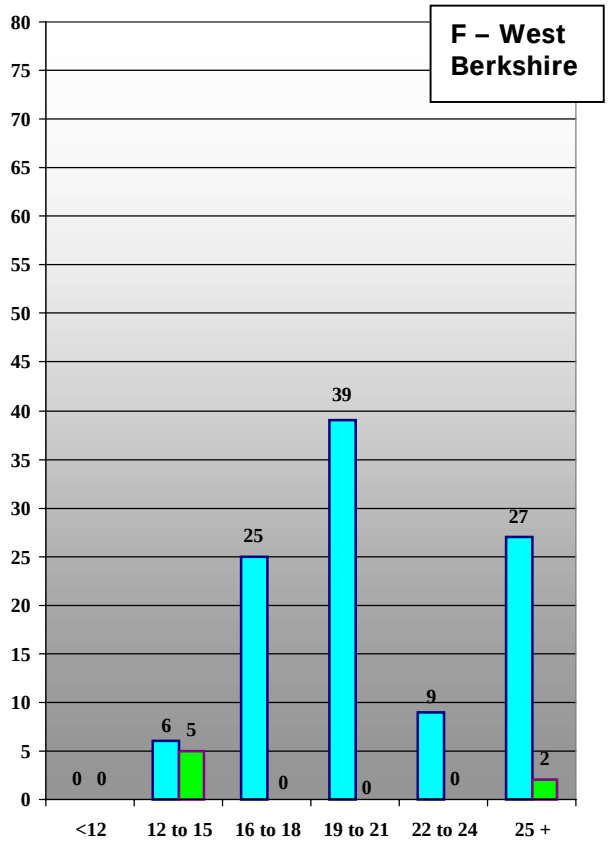
Figure 8.

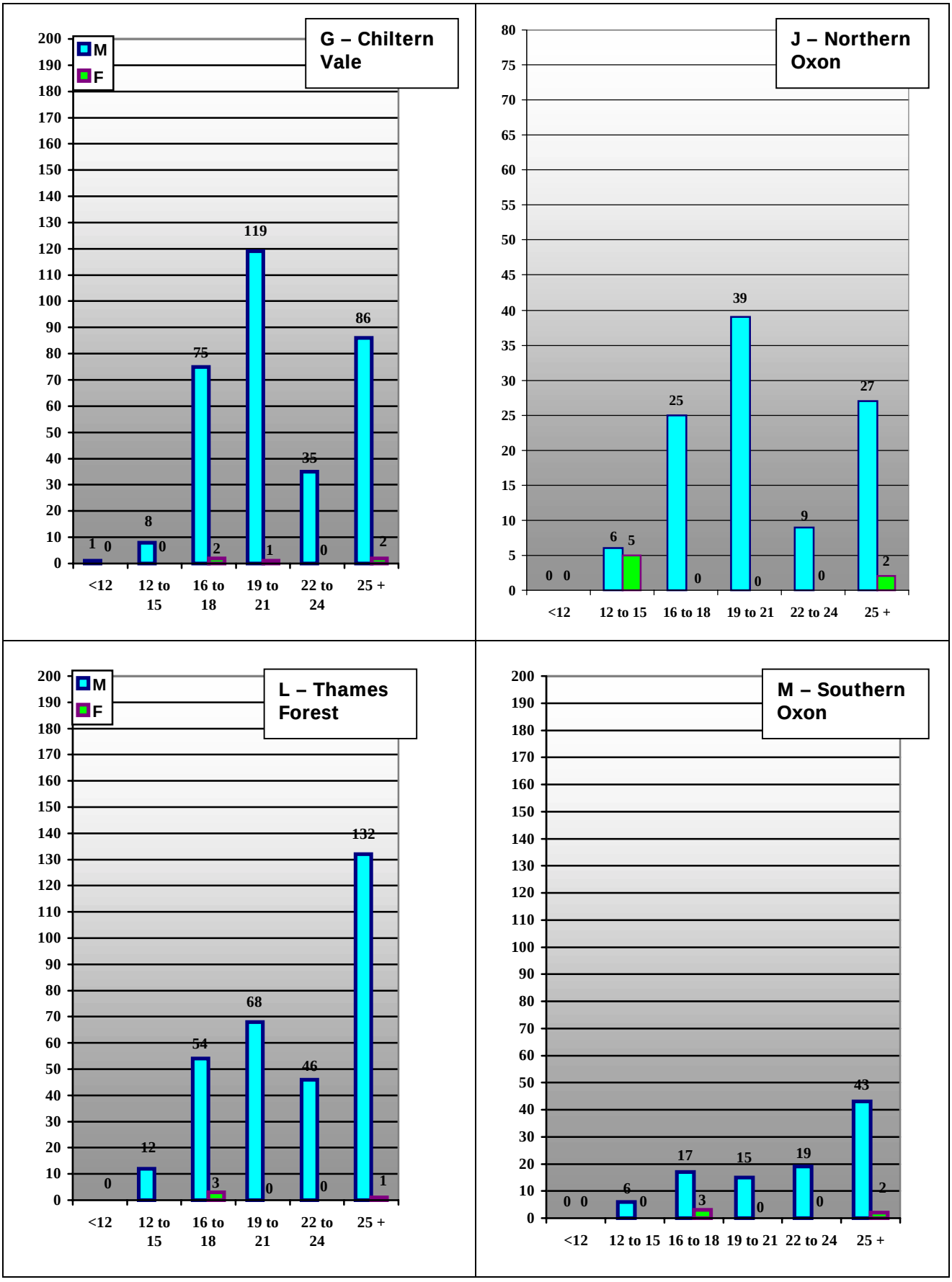



C -Slough
M
F
200
190
180
170
160
150
140
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
0 0
8
2
75
0
111
2
15
2
33
0
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +


D – Milton Keynes
200
190
180
170
160
150
140
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
0 0
37
0
183
0
67
2
16
0
32
3
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +


E - Reading
M
F
200
190
180
170
160
150
140
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1 0
8
0
75
2
119
1
35
0
86
2
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +


F – West Berkshire
80
75
70
65
60
55
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
0 0
6
5
25
0
39
0
9
0
27
2
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +


G – Chiltern Vale
M
F
200
190
180
170
160
150
140
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1 0
8 0
75 2
119 1
35 0
86 2
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +
J – Northern Oxon
80
75
70
65
60
55
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
0 0
6 5
25 0
39 0
9 0
27 2
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +
L – Thames Forest
M
F
200
190
180
170
160
150
140
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
0 12
54 3
68 0
46 0
132 1
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +
M – Southern Oxon
200
190
180
170
160
150
140
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
0 0
6 0
17 3
15 0
19 0
43 2
<12
12 to 15
16 to 18
19 to 21
22 to 24
25 +

- **A - Aylesbury Vale**

The data shows that the number of arrestees in the 12 to 15 age group was almost as high as the key 16 to 18 age range- this is not repeated in the other nine profiles. It must be borne in mind, though that the overall numbers are low, amounting to 84 arrests in a year against 1,925 reported thefts from vehicle. Expressed as an arrest over crime ratio that is just over 4%. The profile may well, therefore reflect an approach to the policing of this crime, or an atypical cluster of arrests.

- **B - Oxford**

Oxford is one of only two police areas where the number of 25 plus arrests is the largest age range. 268 of the 319 arrestees (84% of the total) were over 22. The arrest over crime ratio* is much higher in Oxford at just over 14%. More detailed investigation would be needed to come to firmer conclusions about the issues in this area. The earlier section on the nature of goods stolen indicated a low level of computer thefts with higher losses of audio equipment. It may be that the effect of preventive work, plus deterrence from focused policing, may have altered the age profile so that there is less opportunistic activity by younger people. As will be seen in the next chapter on motives and markets Oxford is a high level location for Class A drugs misuse. The previously cited work by Huggins et al (Heroin, Crack and Crime - the Oxford perspective, Brooks University 2000) suggested a gradual lowering of the age of first Class A experience, but that post- 19 those with a developing habit were heavily involved in acquisitive crime. One hypothesis to explain the Oxford profile may therefore be that *theft from* vehicles could be either a specialised and/ or opportunistic activity of established addicts.

- **C – Slough**

For the year 2001/2 the ratio of arrests to crimes was similar to that in Aylesbury at 4%, and therefore some caution is necessary about the implications of the age profile, though the overall numbers are higher. In common, interestingly, with two other Berkshire areas, Reading with Wokingham and West Berkshire, the biggest single age group is 19 to 21. In Slough they constitute just over 44% of arrests for *theft from* vehicles. Taken together the 16 to 18 and 19 to 21 age ranges constitute 75% of those arrested for *theft from* vehicles. Does this confirm the notion that, as suggested in the aggregate figures for the Thames Valley, the onset of *theft from* cars is relatively later than for other forms of theft? This seems to be a feature of all the Area profiles, including Slough. However, would a higher detection rate yield, as with Oxford, higher proportions of older offenders? Since 2002 there has been an effective campaign in Slough on *theft from* vehicles and it will be important to contrast these figures with those for 2002/3 when available.

- **D - Milton Keynes**

Of the four Police Areas where offenders were concentrated in the 16 to 18 age range, the most marked in size and relative proportion was Milton Keynes, and this age range constitutes a striking proportion of those arrested for *theft from* vehicles in that Area. The

*The numbers of arrests expressed as a percentage proportion of crimes committed.

arrest over offence ratio in Milton Keynes is relatively high at just under 12%. The 16 to 18 group represented just under 54% of those arrested in the year for *theft from* vehicles - compared with 20% for the 19 to 21 age group.

This does seem to be a distinctive age distribution, and may represent different issues relating to motive, local delinquent sub-cultures, and opportunity. The analysis of stolen goods suggested that audio equipment was a high volume loss in Milton Keynes. Although computer losses were significant, the figures were lower than for a number of other areas. Sports equipment and theft of vehicle documents were high, notably for golf equipment. The audio losses may suggest that Milton Keynes represents a more traditional model of *theft from* vehicles with a high proportion of theft of audio equipment and car parts taken by a relatively young population. This may be supported by the fact that *theft of* vehicles still constituted 17% of all thefts in Milton Keynes in 2001/2 - a higher ratio than elsewhere in the Thames Valley. If this is the case then the young vehicle taker who removes audio systems and parts from the vehicles taken remains a bigger part of the Milton Keynes picture than elsewhere. If this is the case then, on the basis of most epidemiological work on drug use theft of goods specifically for sale for drug or alcohol misuse is not likely to be a major factor in Milton Keynes.

- **E - Reading with Wokingham**

As noted in earlier sections Reading with Wokingham is the largest of the police areas in terms of its volume of crime. The ratio of offenders arrested to thefts from vehicles is 5% in Reading. As with Slough, (and West Berkshire) the 19 to 21 age group is the largest of those charged with *theft from* vehicles, 120 of the 329 arrests, (36%). Young offender involvement is certainly substantial. The combined 16 to 21 ranges constitute together 60% of those arrested. In number terms, however, significant numbers of over 25s were also arrested in Reading amounting to 88 of 329 or 27%. This is the third highest rate of 'older' arrests in the Thames Valley, behind Oxford and Thames Forest. In Reading the analysis of goods taken showed a very high volume of audio equipment and very high figures also for laptop theft. One hypothesis meriting further investigation is that in the 'Berkshire/South Bucks corridor' where laptop thefts are very high there is an association between older and more experienced thieves and laptop theft from cars.

- **F - West Berkshire**

Though a much smaller police area than Reading in terms of crime volume, the West Berkshire profile and bar chart have very similar proportions. The offender to crime ratio is higher at just under 8%, but the largest single age group (19 to 21) is the same as Reading with Wokingham, and their proportion of the total area arrests for *theft from* vehicles (34.5%) is very close to the Reading figure. Similarly the total of cases between the ages of 16 to 21 cases in West Berkshire add to 57% of the total arrests - very close to the Reading figure. The final parallel is the significant proportion of 'older' thieves - 29/113 or 26%. The analysis of goods taken from vehicles in the police area did showed a large amount of laptop theft for the size of area, and the hypothesis relating to a Berkshire/South Bucks corridor and the place of older thieves in laptop theft is as relevant as it is in Reading, notwithstanding the different nature and demography of West Berkshire.

- **G - Chiltern Vale**

The arrest to crime ratio in Chiltern Vale is low at just over 4%, and therefore the usual caveat is necessary about the low overall numbers in relation to crime volume. Nonetheless some interesting issues emerge. Chiltern Vale is one of the four areas where offenders seem to be younger and the largest age group is the 16 to 18s, though it is only in Milton Keynes where this is a very marked. A hypothetical connection was made in the Milton Keynes analysis between the age profile of thieves from vehicles and a higher percentage than average (17%) of *theft of* vehicles within total thefts. This does not hold for Aylesbury (12%) but interestingly does apply to Chiltern Vale and North Oxfordshire - where the *theft of* cars as a proportion of total thefts is 16% and 17% respectively. The 16 to 18 age group constitutes 37% of all those arrested for *theft from* vehicles in the area, and unusually 12/40 were female. The whole age range from 16 to 21 constituted 59% of those charged, and from this point on the profile begins to fit the emerging evidence for a Berkshire/South Bucks 'corridor'. There is the usual dip in numbers between the ages of 22 and 24, with a relatively high number of over 25 offenders- 26%, comparable to 27% in Reading and 26% in West Berkshire. On the figures for 2001/2 it would seem that only Slough is an exception and the local reasons for this would justify further examination, particularly in the context of more recent figures. The items analysis showed high audio and money losses in Chiltern Vale, and very high computer and laptop losses.

- **J - Northern Oxfordshire**

Northern Oxfordshire has an interesting and distinctive profile in respect of those charged with *theft from* vehicles. The ratio of people charged against offences committed is 8%. The distribution across the age ranges is more even than in any other area, and this is the lowest area of all 10 for female involvement- only two charges out of 126. The 16 to 18 and 19 to 21 age ranges are almost identical at 29% and 29%, and the proportion of 22 to 24 year olds is higher than in most areas at 17%. The proportion of 25 plus cases is 13.5%. In Northern Oxfordshire there is a high level of young people among those charged (57.5%) but the whole profile is relatively flat across age categories. The analysis of items in Northern Oxfordshire had high relative values for food and also alcohol, which it was felt might relate to commercial theft. There were also high value jewellery items. Otherwise audio and car parts were most significant. Laptop theft was lower than in the southern half of the Thames Valley.

- **L - Thames Forest**

The Thames Forest profile is very distinctive. Only Oxford has higher numbers of 'older' offenders, but in an area where the offender to crime ratio is lower than Oxford's at 9% there are also significant numbers of younger offenders.

Over 22s grouped together constitute 57% of those charged and over 25s alone account for 42%. This compares with 38.5% for the combined 16 to 21 age groups, though the 19 to 21 group is slightly larger than the 16 to 18s (21.5% to 17%). Thames Forest is the third highest crime area in numbers of thefts from vehicles with 3,629 offences, behind Reading with Wokingham (6,738) and Slough (5,921). The next highest after Thames

Forest is Chiltern Vale with 3,342 and in these two areas *theft from* vehicles exceeds 'other' thefts' by a similar proportion.

The item analysis showed that credit card theft and sports or leisure equipment were big loss categories in Thames Forest, but far and away the biggest loss area was computer equipment with a huge level of loss in laptop computers. Again the working hypothesis relating to a west/east line across the south of the Thames Valley appears to be relevant, with high computer losses associated with larger proportions of older offenders.

- **M - Southern Oxfordshire**

Southern Oxfordshire is a low crime area, and in terms of the total number charged with *theft from* vehicles only Aylesbury Vale has smaller numbers. The charge to offences ratio is 6% in Southern Oxfordshire, higher than in Aylesbury (just over 4%) and with the overall low numbers any conclusions need to be more cautiously drawn than in larger volume areas. *Theft from* vehicles exceeds 'other' theft as a proportion of all theft crime in the area.

Southern Oxfordshire's figures are distinctive in that, as with Thames Forest and Oxford the numbers of 'older' people charged are higher than for young people. 60% of those charged were over the age of 22 and 43% over the age of 25. Among the 33% of those charged who were 16 to 21 the 16 to 18 group was slightly larger with 19% of total charges.

4.6 Summary of the main issues

The overall age and gender distribution of those charged with *theft from* vehicles in the Thames Valley in 2001/2 is given in the aggregated chart, Figure 9.

As indicated in this and the previous section, there does need to be some caution about the interpretation of the raw data provided by the Police. This is caused by differential reporting practices in the various Police Areas, and the complexity of the issues and definitions involved. Nonetheless the overall numbers are sufficient to draw some tentative conclusions. These can be summarised as follows:

- On the available figures there is evidence that *theft from* vehicles is the most 'male' of all acquisitive crimes.

- It would be useful to find out more about the links between *theft of* vehicles, and *theft from* vehicles for those who steal from vehicles they have stolen, this is often a secondary motive.

- While significant numbers of young (but not very young) offenders do steal from vehicles this offence also attracts large numbers of 'older' offenders. If this is linked with the available information and research from drugs epidemiology then *theft from* vehicles by young people specifically to fund drug use does not seem very likely. Their use of the money gained from *theft from* vehicles may indeed be sometimes spent on drugs, but as part of a delinquent general lifestyle.

- The position is likely to change over time if the age pattern of serious drug involvement changes.

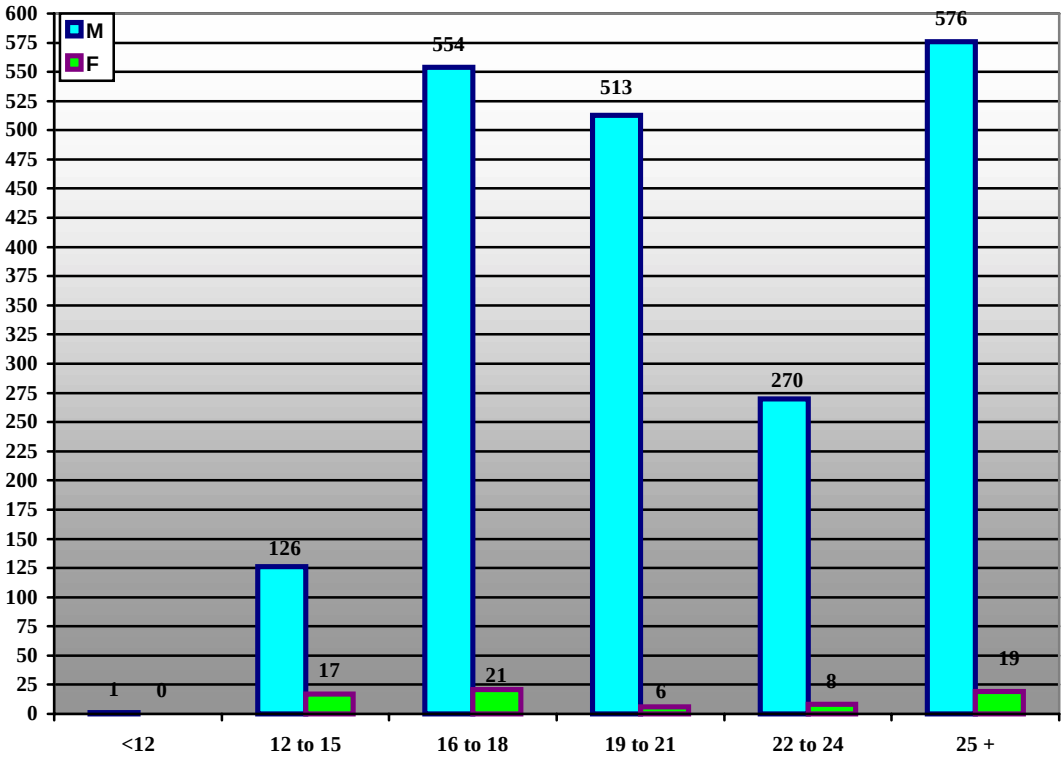
- This data cannot of itself link laptop theft with 'older' offenders, but this connection is suggested and merits further detailed investigation. There does seem to be a geographical pattern to the loss of such equipment. Targeting of locations and specific makes of vehicle is more likely for this type of item, and it is unlikely to be associated with random or 'roaming' opportunistic *theft from* vehicles.

- There are considerable differences in age distribution, and indeed nature of losses, between Police Areas. While caution is again necessary this does support the practice of detailed local analysis to inform crime prevention activity, it would be useful if data on car crime could be more fully separated from overall vehicle crime.

- Some of the difference between Areas seems to reflect Police campaigns. We do need to know more about the dynamics of such initiatives, including displacement, and relapse, once an initiative or priorities change. On the whole *theft from* vehicles has had limited attention until recently, but experience in several parts of the Thames Valley does indicate that a very marked impact can be made, particularly if 'joined-up' thinking is used. Good examples are the initiatives in Oxford and Slough. More recently poster campaigns targeted at motorists with laptop computers have been introduced at motorway service stations and it will be interesting to see what impact this has on the theft of these high value products.

Figure 9.

Totals by Age Group and Gender of Alleged Offenders charged with theft from motor vehicles in the Thames Valley 2001/1002



5. The views of staff in criminal justice and other agencies in the Thames Valley

5.1 Introduction

The main purposes of this study have been to investigate perceived connections between young people, *theft from* cars, and the sale of items taken from cars to finance drug use. Section 3 provided information about the volume and value of different types of goods taken in what remains an extremely common and still significantly under-reported form of property crime. Section 4 provided information about the age and gender of those caught for *theft from* cars. On the whole *theft from* vehicles is the most 'male' of all forms of theft and the age distribution of those caught is quite wide. While young offenders are well represented, as they are with all theft offences, *theft from* cars attracts significant numbers of older offenders whose motives and methods may be somewhat different.

The purpose of the present section is to present some of the opinions held by criminal justice and other professionals about these issues, and about the nature of both stolen goods and drugs markets within the Thames Valley. A letter explaining the research and inviting comments was sent to the heads of the following agencies:

- Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)
- National Probation Service -Thames Valley Area
- Youth and Community Services
- Crime and Disorder Partnerships (CDRPs)
- Arrest referral schemes
- Trading Standards Departments
- Drug Action Teams (DATs) and Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs)

In addition to the request for written information, visits were made to a number of Probation and YOT offices in those places where confidential interviews had been arranged with young offenders, namely Oxford, Reading and Milton Keynes. On office visits the informal views of staff about the general issues proved helpful.

The response rate to the request for information from other agencies was however relatively low. While this was disappointing, sufficient material emerged to enable some overall comment to be made about agency perspectives. Where there is a significant gap in knowledge this is acknowledged in the text.

A different approach was taken to obtain police views. Meetings were held with a number of officers with differing responsibilities, both strategically and in crime management. The police meetings all provided valuable opinions and perspectives.

In the analysis that follows, I have posed a number of questions and then presented a range of responses from the different agencies. Unless there is good reason to do so I have not identified agencies or individuals. Where it is helpful to put the opinions into context, I also refer to data that became available during the course of the study. This included Thames Valley Police statistics about recent trends, statistical information gained from Probation and Youth Offending Teams, and the Home Office Statistical Bulletin of January 2003, (1) which provides British Crime Survey data on vehicle crime and recent

trends.

5.2 How involved are young people in *theft from* vehicles?

In reality the number of young people up to the age of 21 who are under the supervision of the Youth Offending Service or Probation Service specifically for offences of *theft from* motor vehicles is extremely low in the Thames Valley. For example, a trawl of Thames Valley Probation Area figures at the end of 2002 indicated only 20 cases where either *theft from* a vehicle or tampering with a vehicle was the index offence, and no individual area had more than four cases. In Reading and Oxford there were no such cases, as compared with 24 and 22 cases respectively, for index offences of theft and handling stolen goods. Though these are snapshot figures the wider context is that Thames Valley Probation Area dealt with an all ages over 18 total of 5,800 offenders in the year concerned. The low levels were similar in the Thames Valley Youth Offending Teams where interview samples were sought.

The Police staff who were interviewed for this section, however, saw the involvement of young people in *theft from* vehicles, as a considerable problem, with significant undetected involvement by young people aged 16 to 21 years. There was a general acknowledgement that the clear up rate varied considerably but was very low in some areas. A perception shared by a number of YOT staff and police was that more heavily convicted young offenders often showed both a wide range of offending repertoire and the capacity to commit very large numbers of crimes. The interview work with young people convicted for theft at least three times, which is described in the next chapter, certainly tends to confirm this. All of them had some experience of *theft from* cars, even if it was not their primary criminal activity. Even opportunistic stealing from cars could produce a high number of episodes and for those who steal vehicles as the primary activity, the taking of items or components is a regular consequence.

The rate of undetected involvement of Persistent Young Offenders* in *theft from* vehicles is therefore likely to be considerable. Programmes of intensive supervision targeted at them should take the issue of *theft from* vehicles into account, and the introduction of equivalent measures for those young offenders age 18 to 21 being dealt with by the Probation Service would also be appropriate. *

The victim impact of *theft from* vehicles and the scale of vehicle crime generally are better recognised by the police than other criminal justice agencies.

A number of other Criminal Justice workers, particularly in Probation and Youth Offending Teams tended to show less awareness of *theft from* vehicles and its place in the criminal development of offenders. There is a tendency to see this form of offending as of low seriousness and low impact. In fact the financial implications and sense of personal loss can be very great indeed for the victim. For young victims a vehicle and its contents are often their most prized and personal possessions. These issues need more attention from

*A Persistent Young Offender is defined by the Youth Justice Board as a person aged 10 to 17 years of age who has been convicted of a recordable offence on three or more occasions and commits another offence within three years.

sentencers and those carrying out offence focused work with offenders than seems generally to be the case. Certainly those Community Safety Managers who responded to the survey stressed the significance of vehicle crime in local audits and plans.

Police in Oxford, and more recently Slough, have shown that much can be achieved by a planned intervention over time, although it was suggested in Oxford that a consequence of further targeted work on burglary may well have been a displacement to *theft from* vehicles. This was seen as a drug related development.

There was some recognition among police that a number of older offenders were involved with *theft from* vehicles and the statistical survey in the previous chapter suggests that this is in fact more common than was generally recognised.

5.3 What are the reasons people steal from cars and to what extent are drugs involved in motivation?

A wide range of views was expressed about the nature of young people's motivation to steal from cars. Views from Drug (and Alcohol) Action Team co-ordinators indicated scepticism about the extent to which getting money for drugs specifically was a serious motivating factor for many young people.

Views from YOT staff, dealing with offenders up to the age of 18, were more mixed. A number pointed out that the drug experience of many young offenders was relatively limited and centred around cannabis, alcohol, and opportunistic experimental use of other substances. In West Berkshire, for example, YOT staff felt that there was not much stealing from cars to fund drug use and that the most common drug usage was self-funded cannabis. The few higher-level drug users were more likely to steal from shops or commit burglary, it was felt, than steal from vehicles. In Slough, however, at the other end of the Thames Valley M4 corridor, YOT staff perceived clear links, suggesting that thefts from vehicles to fund drug habits were at a high level.

It would certainly seem that geography, opportunity and levels of police activity, including the rate of detection, will influence the extent of young people's involvement in *theft from* vehicles. The level of association with drug use is much harder to gauge from the data currently available. While a range of views was expressed by Police staff in specialist and main stream roles, there was a general consensus that drugs were a high level motivator, but that this was more likely to be associated with offenders who had developed serious addiction from the age of 19 or 20. Many felt, though, from their own experience, that addiction was affecting people at a younger age. There is certainly some evidence of this from the previously cited local research in Oxford and Reading.

There was general agreement from all sources that those young people who were offending frequently were more likely to be involved in both *theft from* vehicles and use of illegal drugs. There was much support from a range of agencies for the view, mentioned in the earlier section on research findings, that these young people were attracted by a risk taking and delinquent life style in which enjoyment was gained by spending money on goods and on activities, of which drug taking was one element rather than the central focus. The risk of such young people going on to have major addiction problems, funded by stealing is obviously high. But their offending is across a wide range of dishonesty and

while we could expect them to continue stealing from cars, they are, once faced with the need for substantial daily funding, likely to go for the most cost effective option. While this may be *theft from* cars in areas with low risk of detection, *theft from* vehicles is less certain in terms of reliable gain than theft from shops. Probation staff in particular stressed these issues.

Throughout this research issues relating to laptop computers have been raised and, as previous chapters show, the volume and value involved are both very high. They are clearly high value, they are in demand, and are easily carried and easily removable. If the usual stolen goods market ratio of ¼ retail value is applied to laptops then each laptop is worth around £250 to the thief. Clearly this would be very attractive to a heroin and crack user and to other thieves. The high level of incidence in the Thames Valley motorway corridor suggests a level of targeting, and locations (including service stations, hotels and retail outlets), that are less likely to be accessed by younger people. It would seem likely that thieves aged 18 or older, a proportion of whom are drug addicts, are more likely to be involved. As noted earlier there are sizeable numbers of older thieves involved in *theft from* vehicles. Since the prevailing wisdom, across all the agencies consulted, is that drug addicts do not travel far to offend because of the life-style they lead, they will be engaged in laptop theft in larger numbers where the opportunities are greater - the kind of locations described above.

Responses overall to the issue of young people and motivation suggest an outline typology of motive as follows:

- Adolescent, opportunistic theft committed by 'roaming' young people often with other young people. Goods are likely to be kept for personal use or sold to friends. Drugs is not a central issue.

- Persistent Young Offenders aged 16 to 18 (PYOs) who commit a range of acquisitive and other crime, including *theft from* vehicles, but this is not the focus of their offending. Drug use is likely to be part of an overall offending lifestyle, but not dominant.

- PYOs for whom cars form a central interest in their lives. Taking of vehicles may be a primary motive, with associated theft. They are likely to have acquired information from others about access to different makes of cars, and may pass those skills on. They will be actively involved in theft of car equipment, typically audio equipment, but other status items may be involved. Drug use likely to be part of an overall offending lifestyle, but not dominant.

- Offenders who avoid major drug involvement but continue after the age of 18 with a vehicle crime focused offending pattern.

- Offenders who begin to use Category A drugs where motivation is to raise funds for drug use through crime. Typically they are 19 to 20 onwards. Some of them will continue with *theft from* cars, but the choice of crime type will be more to do with reliability of funding, issues of deterrence and local opportunity. Those who had not previously stolen to a great extent from cars were not thought likely to begin at this stage, unless displaced from other forms of acquisitive crime. Crime patterns are likely to be as long as the drug-taking career, though offset by health problems and

harm minimisation work.

- 'Older' offenders who steal from cars opportunistically, with no drug connection.

- 'Older' offenders who are stealing regularly and who may focus particularly on cars if the risks and rewards make this advantageous.

It needs to be remembered that in addressing issues of *theft from* cars we are almost entirely dealing with males. Skill acquisition and the development of a vehicle crime career are felt to be a particular issue. This connects strongly with the attractions which cars represent to a large proportion of young men, delinquent or otherwise. Speed, power and technical ability are important components, but high quality components, and the possession of the best 'kit' are powerful factors as well. In the Thames Valley all agencies agreed that the illegal market among young men for audio equipment remained as strong as all previous research has suggested.

This type of *theft from* vehicles is important to our thinking about interventions with offenders. Diversion, access to legal driving and focused offending behaviour work all need harnessing.

The links between drug use and *theft from* vehicles is therefore complex. As with all acquisitive crime the need for funding drug use has become a more significant motive in recent years, but there is no clear evidence that *theft from* cars is disproportionately associated with drug use. As noted previously the uncertainty of results compared with shop lifting, for example, may if anything mean that addicted thieves are less likely to steal from cars as a chosen method.

More detailed information is now being gathered as a result of the national pilot schemes on drug testing in custody, one of which is in Oxford. Nine locations around the country are involved in all and the pilot is running from late 2002 to May 2004. Those charged with trigger offences (acquisitive crimes excluding handling) and other offences where drugs are believed to be involved, are tested for cocaine and heroin by means of a saliva swab. Information about those tested for the Home Office enables data to be analysed by gender, age, ethnicity, employment, accommodation and address. In Oxford additional information is being sought about nature of use, nature of supply, and income sources. In due course this data will enable many questions to be answered more accurately, but initial figures have suggested over 50% positive tests, and two thirds of the offences involved were theft from shops. Housing problems, a high level of use of prescribed medication, and a high incidence of crack use were also evident.

The most up to date national data comes from the research undertaken by Hammersley et al (2) who examined the prevalence of substance misuse and offending amongst a sample of 293 young people who were clients of Youth Offending Teams in England and Wales. The research was conducted between the summer of 2001 and summer 2002. The main findings are summarised as follows:

- They noted that the group was highly delinquent. Most had committed multiple types of offence repeatedly.

- Substance use was also very high and over 85% had used cannabis, alcohol and tobacco. However, less than 20% had used heroin or crack cocaine. All but one of those interviewed were under 18 and the authors point out that 20% is relatively high for this young age group.

- Alcohol, tobacco and cannabis were more strongly related to offending than other drugs, and the shift towards the use of heroin, and/or cocaine and/or injecting observed in the 1980s amongst delinquents was not evident.

- Some key factors were related to both substance use and offending; life difficulties and events; disliking and being excluded from school; lack of positive coping mechanisms; and expecting to get into trouble again. However, growing up with one parent was not related to offending or drug use.

A number of these conclusions are echoed in the Thames Valley interviews reported in the next section.

On the whole it seems unlikely that most thefts from cars are motivated primarily by the need for drug money, at least up to the age of 19 or 20. For those young men who have gone on to become seriously addicted the extent to which stealing from cars is part of their illegal fundraising will depend on their prior experience and local opportunity. They are unlikely, it was generally said, to start from scratch.

5.4 How are goods taken from cars disposed of, and what illegal markets are involved? Is there scope for market reduction?

Discussion with a number of experienced police staff provided some useful assessments of the overall position on markets for both illegal drugs and illegal goods. Initially it may be helpful to consider the markets and participants separately, beginning with the stolen goods market.

5.4.1 Stolen Goods Markets

It was suggested to me by a number of Police respondents that in each of the bigger Thames Valley locations there are generally eight to 10 larger scale handlers, who tend now to operate extremely carefully in terms of storage and contacts. There continues to be a generally consistent ratio of prices offered to the thief against retail price. In summary this is as follows:

- Audio goods – 1/4 retail price
- Boxed goods, including electrical goods – 1/3 retail price
- New clothes -1/3 retail price

It was suggested to me by several officers that the bigger handlers were significantly involved in laptop theft to order, and that in some respects the heroin and crack user might represent an attractive supplier to the handler because of their need for a quicker, and therefore lower, return.

Major types of goods include computer equipment, quality clothes, electrical goods, and

power tools. The market in credit cards is said to be reducing, probably in response to improved security measures. Clarke's 'Hot Products' model outlined earlier does help identify both present and emerging goods at risk. The CRAVED categories (concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable and disposable) not only indicate which goods are at risk, but which new additions are likely to be vulnerable - laptops at present with DVD players emerging as a new priority.

It was felt that a substantial network of contacts and knowledge supported handling networks, including the use of transport links to ferry goods. It was also reckoned that the bigger players, although operating a separate industry from the drugs trade, were well aware of the structures and individuals involved in drug markets.

In reality the majority of stolen goods, including goods taken from cars, are traded informally in a wide and relatively open delinquent market. Most of the young people interviewed for this research sold things on to 'mates' and 'local people', and this was so widespread that it seemed quick, easy, and low risk. As previous research cited earlier has suggested, that is effectively where the market for car audio is located - not far from home, in areas of relative need and easily justifiable because 'we all do it'. For some of the 'older' offenders certain public houses may be a likely location, but not on the whole for younger people. Car boot sales are not regarded as a normal location. More information, about these issues, obtained from the direct confidential interviews with young offenders, is given in the next section.

5.4.2 Illegal Drugs Markets

The nature of illegal drugs markets is very different. Again a number of police staff gave pictures of structures and their evolution. Prior research has concentrated on the difference between closed and open markets, typically in older established inner city locations. In the Thames Valley the overall position is that around 10 major importers are involved and not all of them are living in the Thames Valley. They supply to perhaps a dozen or so major dealers in the larger centres, who then sell to a number of street sellers, perhaps five or six each. It is a measure of the size of the illegal drugs market that this complex market structure can sustain so many people with high incomes.

In the larger centres markets are still tending to operate relatively loosely. One of the reasons for sustaining high police intervention is the danger that more participants would lead to territorial competition and an increase in violence. The balance is an extremely difficult one and there is no shortage at all of potential participants. The increase in crack use and the ready supply of both crack and cheaper heroin have also had serious implications. Several officers suggested to me that we now have a buyer's market in terms of quality for price, and that in these circumstances there is much greater use of 'introductory pricing' and targeting of new young users.

Availability of heroin is very easy in all the main Thames Valley centres, but significantly less easy in the market towns and smaller communities. Where activity has centred on small towns it has proved possible for police to intervene effectively. Further research is needed on drug markets, not only for direct policing issues, but because the visibility of drug dealing is now seen by many Crime and Disorder Partnerships as a serious anti-social behaviour priority. Responses received from several Crime and Disorder Partnerships

mentioned proposed projects to learn more about these issues.

Clearly a proportion of the money raised from the theft of goods from vehicles goes on illegal drugs purchased from front line dealers. A particular issue raised with all police and other respondents was:

a) whether handlers of stolen goods sometimes paid with drugs and
b) whether drug dealers were willing to be paid for drugs with goods rather than cash.

Both in the agency responses and individual interviews there was a small amount of evidence of handlers paying with drugs but this was seen as occasional and relatively 'quirky'. On the other hand there was a good deal of agreement that many drug dealers in current markets were sometimes willing to accept goods. They certainly preferred cash but would take a range of other commodities, of which the most frequently mentioned were high quality perfume, alcohol, electrical goods and quality new clothes. Willingness to do this was dependent on the personal approach of the dealer - some no doubt saw the advantage of cheap and good quality goods in kind from desperate vendors prepared to part with stolen goods at less than the going rate.

These cross-over issues further complicate the issues of supply and demand and the various forms of market but they are relevant to an understanding of what happens to stolen goods, including those taken from cars, as well thinking about strategies for market reduction.

5.4.3 Market reduction issues, and the Public.

What are some of the market reduction issues, which might accompany the crime prevention measures discussed in the next section? If we consider the relationship in Felson's model between the likely offender, the suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian we have a framework within which to consider the options. The following priorities emerge:

- The public appears to remain ill informed about the speed with which cars can be entered and goods taken. Current initiatives tend to stress the need for care when locking and for not leaving items visible. In reality boots are easily forced and targeting is relatively easy. Expensive removable items need to be removed from cars by owners. Employers might well make more of an issue with their staff about care of company equipment. The public should be made aware of particularly risky locations.

- The CRAVED model should help predict the risk of theft when designing new equipment. It may be that new equipment and goods intended for cars or likely to be used in cars should have information supplied by retailers as to risk of theft.

- The 'Don't Buy Crime' campaign used by some police services to change public attitudes to buying possibly "dodgy" goods has been very important but could well be refocused towards its relevance in tackling drugs misuse. 'Your buying this laptop gives him his fix for the next day' is the type of message required. Given the level of concern about the impact of drug taking and dealing on communities this is

a powerful message and could be developed in conjunction with Crimestoppers.

- Similarly, if many young offenders are selling goods to other young men, often in their own neighbourhood, more localised campaigns may be helpful. After all it is often other young men whose goods are being stolen. Such campaigns would fit well into local strategies for anti-social behaviour.

- The re-victimisation rates for goods stolen from cars are a concern. There is certainly a case for targeted follow up, a greater recognition of the impact on individuals and potentially a role for victim support schemes.

- Intensive supervision schemes for prolific offenders should pay more attention to their involvement in stealing from vehicles and also their willingness to handle stolen goods. Young offenders often feel invulnerable in this area.

- Responses from Trading Standards professionals were limited in this survey. There do seem to be opportunities nonetheless for Trading Standards to contribute to issues relating to the buying and selling of car parts and computer equipment especially. Ideally this would be in response to a cross agency co-ordinated response to vehicle crime.

5.5 Where and how are goods taken and what are the implications for further crime prevention?

In this section some of the key national findings from the British Crime Survey (1) relating to 2001/2 are placed in a Thames Valley context from survey participants.

- *Overall the risk of a vehicle owning household being a victim of vehicle related theft in the 2001/2 BCS was 11% (down from 20% in the 1996 BCS which covered crime in 1995). 60% of all vehicle related thefts were thefts from vehicles, 13% were thefts of vehicles, and 27% were attempts.*

This is broadly consistent with the Thames Valley data given in earlier chapters, though the pattern varies considerably between police areas, and local crime patterns including displacement can affect the levels and proportions.

- *Households in high disorder areas; those with a head of household between 16 and 24 years old; those in flats and maisonettes; those in inner city areas and those with a single parent were amongst the highest risk demographic groups.*

Though Thames Valley has few classic inner city areas the general findings were borne out by professionals consulted and a number of the Thames Valley Crime and Disorder Partnership audits made similar points. This has significant implications for further preventative work and a more targeted approach towards work with victims.

- *Around 75% of vehicle related theft occurred in the evening or at night. This was very similar for both thefts of and from vehicles. There was a fairly even likelihood of thefts from vehicles occurring at the weekend or during the week, but a higher proportion of thefts of vehicles occurred at the weekend.*

The perception of many professionals was that thefts from vehicles was more evenly distributed during the day, afternoon and evening than the BCS finding suggests, though there was certainly an overall view that the majority of offences occurred from the afternoon onwards. Ease of opportunity, access to large numbers of vehicles, a lower risk of being disturbed and easy escape routes all seem be significant factors, as to both when and where thefts take place.

- *A consistent finding of the BCS is that most vehicle related thefts occur in the area around the home. The street outside the home is where the highest volume of incidents occur, with around 40% of offences of each type of vehicle related crime occurring there in the 2001/2002 BCS sweep. The proportion of vehicle related thefts that take place in non-work car parks has fallen from 17% of all thefts in the 1998 BCS to 13% in 2001/2. The BCS cannot establish the reasons for this fall, but suggest the Secured Car Park Scheme, aimed at hot spots, as possibly having an impact. If thefts during the day are considered separately, however, nearly half were from car parks, either at work or elsewhere.*

Many professionals and particularly Police staff, pointed to the importance of car park security initiatives, with examples of the considerable progress made in the Thames Valley. Design, ease of observation, CCTV and on-site staffing were all seen as significant factors. In terms of computer equipment and laptops the Thames Valley motorway corridor does seem to be particularly important and a number of observers suggested motorway service areas and facilities including licensed premises near junctions, as needing more attention in conjunction with business. Similarly high volume open air single level car parking, such as park and ride facilities need to be a particularly high priority given the easy access and escape routes. As most police observers point out many of the lessons learnt now need to be built in to design and operation as a matter of routine. Police have also sustained a highly visible public information and signing campaign in Thames Valley, which has also been used in amenity sites and beauty spots.

So far as thefts from near or outside the home are concerned, there is clearly a particular issue about extending campaigns to the younger and relatively deprived car owners who are victimised disproportionately and live in the more deprived areas described earlier.

Many contributors indicated that there was an overall problem relating to public awareness about the risk of items left in cars, especially car boots.

- *BCS comment that the most frequent method of entry for thefts from vehicles was the breaking of a window, whereas for thefts of vehicles it was forcing a lock. In fact there is more similarity in the proportions of methods to gain entry in thefts from vehicles than this suggests. The actual figures are as follows:*

Method	Percentage of incidents

Offender broke the window	45%
Offender forced the lock	37%
Door was not locked	12%
Offender used a key	2%
Window was left open	1%
Other	6%

- BCS point out that there has been a rise in the proportion of BCS thefts from vehicle since the 1998 survey (32% to 37%) and suggest that this may be to do with better immobilisers resulting in offenders failing to complete thefts of vehicles, but stealing from them without driving away.

As will be seen in the next chapter, choice of entry method is to some extent dictated by primary motive and *theft from* cars is often associated with successful or unsuccessful *theft of* the vehicle itself. However, experience, learnt skills and the type of goods sought (e.g. car parts as opposed to other items of value) will also play a major part. This was also recognised by professionals contributing to the survey. All concerned also pointed to the problem of unlocked doors and the difficulty in addressing this issue despite endless campaigns.

- *The British Crime Survey findings on security measures and their impact indicate that the proportion of vehicles fitted with security devices has increased markedly over the last decade. Central locking was reported to be fitted in 74% of vehicles in the 2001/2 BCS, up from 66% in 2000 and 35% in 1992. Electronic immobilisers were also up - 52% of vehicles in 2001/2 from 43% in the 2000 survey sweep. As has been clear in previous surveys the bulk of stolen vehicles are predominantly older ones - 87% being over five years old. Some similar considerations apply to thefts from vehicles. Car alarms and central locking were less likely to be fitted.*

It would seem that, in line with the data on victimisation, older and less well - equipped vehicles were more likely to be stolen or stolen from. Certainly police observers felt that design and standardisation had a huge part to play. It was felt that Honda vehicles had made considerable progress, and BMW vehicle security was improving, but Vauxhalls, particularly the cheaper and older models, were still regarded as relatively easy targets. Volkswagen were seen as generally presenting a difficult target. These opinions were shared fairly consistently by the more experienced young offenders interviewed. However there is clearly a level of personal opinion and reputation associated with these feelings. The only reliable guide to vulnerability of different types of cars is given in the Car Theft Index 2002, published by the Home Office, (and available for downloading from the named website). This uses police and DVLA records and estimates the risk of theft per thousand vehicles on the road for each make and model of car in Great Britain in 2001, by year of registration.

This data is highly relevant in terms of risk prediction and the targeting of prevention. However, it must be remembered that some extremely expensive items are taken from expensive newer cars, as was evident from the area by area analysis. While the overall rate of *theft from* vehicles may be much lower than historical levels it is a much more diverse area of crime than has usually been recognised. It is differentiated by motive, target, location and method. While the archetypal victim may still be the relatively poor citizen with an older vehicle, the nature of losses and the increased use of lock forcing methods shows that some serious planned *theft of* expensive goods is now taking place.

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6. Findings from interviews with Thames Valley Young Offenders.

Introduction

The aim of this final component of the research was to capture something of the experience, offending history and concerns of young offenders in the Thames Valley, particularly with a view to obtaining direct information about any relationship between *theft from* cars and substance misuse. The interviews also provided an opportunity to check some of the emerging findings.

The intention from the beginning was to undertake sufficient extended interviews to give an insight into the main issues, rather than attempt a larger scale and statistically representative exercise, which was beyond the resources available for the project. Nonetheless it was decided to seek participants from a selection of areas in the Thames Valley to achieve a broad picture, and as a more realistic way of obtaining a reasonable number of participants. The areas chosen were Milton Keynes, Oxford and Reading. Where local factors were raised in a significant way by participants, this is mentioned in the analysis.

Methodology

Initial consultation with the Thames Valley Probation Area and Youth Offending Teams indicated that very few young offenders were being supervised by those agencies specifically because of offences of *theft from* vehicles. It was decided, therefore, to identify individuals within a 16 to 21 year age range who had three or more convictions for theft. The reasoning was that *theft from* vehicles was under-represented in caseloads because of the low clear-up rate, but that persistent young thieves would be likely to have committed the offence without being caught, and would also have a sufficient length of criminal history that information would be available about offending progression. The survey, therefore, covers the views and involvement in *theft from* cars of a very active offending group.

Each of the YOT and Probation Teams was asked to produce a list of young offenders who met the age and offending criteria. A sample with broadly equivalent numbers for each area was then randomly selected. A letter to the young people was agreed with the agencies involved, as well as a letter to parents for offenders under the supervision of Youth Offending Teams. The letters outlined the independent nature of the research, its purpose, and the fact that participants would be asked about undetected criminal behaviour on a fully confidential basis. The agencies concerned undertook to post or deliver by hand the letters, so that I was not made aware of individual addresses. Prior to the commencement of the survey workers in the participating agencies were given an information sheet about the project, so that they could advise young people if asked. The information for workers asked workers to reassure participants that no identifying personal details would be recorded and that no other information sources such as files or discussion with workers would take place. It was indicated that on the basis of an initial trial each interview would take 45 minutes to an hour, and this proved to be the case in practice.

As those who have undertaken research of this kind will confirm a number of problems inevitably crop up in trying to attain a reasonable level of response. These include basic lack of response from invited participants; variable levels of support from agencies and teams; changes of circumstance which render contact impracticable, and the general feel that research demands are now too frequent and too demanding!

I decided, for better or worse, not to follow the normal current practice of offering inducement or reward in kind, but did make it clear that travelling expenses would be paid. I also decided that I would not interview young people in custody, not only because of the complexity of arrangements in such circumstances, but also because, in most of the cases in the selected sample which had recently gone into custody, there were still outstanding sentencing issues, and I did not think it appropriate to be asking young people about undetected crime in those circumstances.

Of the 56 individuals selected overall I achieved an interview in 15 cases. In the circumstances a ratio of just better than one in four is reasonable, and I am indebted to those staff who encouraged participation, facilitated arrangements, and used the information provided to encourage young people to take part. I undertook all the interviews personally, using a standardised format and a questionnaire, which was filled in with the participant as we went along. Each interview started with an explanation about the purpose of the research and the way information given would be recorded and used, without any form of individual identification. All but one of the interviews took place in the office concerned, in a private one-to-one interview. In one case the interview was undertaken at the young person's home, again on a one-to one basis. Two young people decided very early in the interview that they did not wish to participate further, and by agreement I have not made use of their preliminary information. Accordingly the analysis is based on 13 extended interviews.

Age, gender and locality of the participants.

Of the 15 young people who attended, six were from Reading, four from Oxford and five from Milton Keynes. All but one was male - this ratio is roughly proportional to the male/female split in the original invited sample of 56.

So far as age distribution is concerned there was one 15 year-old, three 16 year-olds, two 17 year-olds, three 18 year-olds, four 19 year-olds, and two 20 year-olds.

Though the 15 year-old was outside the original targeted group he met the conviction criteria, and so was included. The relatively high proportion of 18 to 20 year-olds, though, does reflect the sampling criteria for previous convictions. This has the twin advantages that they have already acquired quite long criminal careers, and also fall into the recognised 'gateway' period for commencement of class A drug use. Both these characteristics are relevant to the concerns of the study.

Issues covered in the structured interviews.

The topics covered asked questions in the following areas:

a) Background and general life issues.

- Education experience including problems, recollection of drugs and health education at school, and areas of satisfaction or dissatisfaction at school.

- Experience, if relevant of employment to date, and levels of satisfaction with employment.

- Issues about growing up and family life, including whether parents had substance misuse or mental health problems.

- Current accommodation arrangements and degree of satisfaction with them.

- Legal activities or interests.

- Aspirations three years and 10 years from now.

b) Overall Criminal Experience.

All participants were asked about the number of times they had committed specific crimes in their lives and how many times they had been caught. They were then asked the same questions for the preceding 12 months. The categories were taken from the British Crime Survey study on the criminal activity of young people. The offences concerned were as follows:

- Causing damage on purpose or recklessly.
- Setting fire to something on purpose or recklessly.
- Theft from meter, telephone, video or fruit machine.
- Theft from shop, supermarket or department store.
- Theft from school or work worth more than £5.00.
- Taking of a motorbike or moped.
- Taking of a car.
- *Theft out of* or from a car.
- Entry of a dwelling with intent to steal.
- Entry of any other kind of building.
- Purchase of stolen goods.
- Selling of stolen goods.
- Selling of cheque- book, credit card or cash-point card
- Personal use of stolen cheque- book, credit card or cash-point card.
- Snatching of purse bag or similar.
- Snatching of a mobile phone.
- Threatening with a weapon or beating someone up.
- Fighting in a public place.
- Beating someone outside the family to the extent that they needed medical attention.
- Beating someone within the family so that they needed medical attention.
- Hitting someone with a knife, stick or other weapon.

c) Personal involvement in theft from cars.

All 13 participants had been involved in *theft from* cars to some extent, and the level of activity ranged from a single claimed experience to many hundreds of offences. All were therefore asked a series of more detailed questions about motivation and method as follows:

- Was stealing from cars usually done on an intentionally planned basis- going out to do it?
- Normal location of thefts from cars- e.g. car park or street.
- Normal time of day (or night) for *theft from* cars.
- Anxieties or deterrent issues.
- Normal method of access.
- Were there specific items targeted or looked out for?
- Normal type of thing actually taken, with examples.
- What was done usually with the things taken? If taken to sell how were sales carried out?
- How was the money raised by *theft from* cars spent- what kind of things.
- If drugs were wanted did you sell the goods for money then pay for drugs in cash, or would the dealer sometimes take goods for the drugs?
- Was *theft from* cars a regular money raising source and if so why this type of theft?
- How often were you stealing from cars?
- What do you the think the likely impact was on the people stolen from?
- Questions about risk and efficiency of this form of theft against other thefts.

d) Personal experience of illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

This series of questions were asked subsequent to the crime questions so as to avoid "planting" the connection if any. Secondly, because of the difficulty of obtaining accurate answers on these subjects, even under an assurance of anonymity, these questions were asked after the interview was well under way, and some rapport had usually been established. Questions about alcohol and tobacco were included because many studies have suggested that for younger offenders they may also constitute motivating factors for theft. Questions were asked as follows:

- First age of illegal drug use.
- List of drugs tried or used to date.
- Preferred drug if any.
- Estimated weekly spend.
- How is money for drugs raised?
- Importance of drugs to your life style.
- Are you in control of your drug taking do you think?
- Who would you go to (or have gone to) for help if you need it?
- First age of alcohol use.
- Drinking pattern.
- Weekly alcohol spend.
- If you steal alcohol where from?
- Do you think alcohol is linked to your offending?
- Do you use drugs and alcohol? Which is more important to you?

- Do you smoke tobacco and when did you start?
- Weekly intake and spend.
- Is crime committed to get money tobacco?
- If you steal tobacco where from?

e) Experience to date of the Criminal Justice system.

Participants were asked the following:

- Personal experience of each of the whole list of possible Youth Court and Adult Court options and cautioning- numbers of occasions and any comments about their view of the impact on them of the different options.
- Any other comments about the Criminal Justice system.

The analysis which forms the rest of this chapter begins with a focus on the nature and quantity of *theft from* cars by this group of young people, and then places that experience in the context of their backgrounds, wider offending, life-style perceptions, use of drugs, and contact with the Criminal Justice system.

Stealing from cars.

a) Incidence and Detection.

Prolific

Four of the 13 young people aged 18 or over estimated very high 'career' levels of *theft from* cars, three of them giving figures of 200 to 300, and one 20 year old claiming an earlier three year period when he had taken from cars at a rate of 300 to 400 incidents per year, with an overall total in excess of 1,000 episodes. For these young men, for whom *theft from* cars was a major but not exclusive part of their offending, the detection rate was very low indeed, with the more prolific offender indicating only one arrest. One 18 year old in this group responded by indicating that he had been caught 10 times but not by Police - and he said that he had been beaten up or chased by owners on a number of occasions. Of this high prevalence group, two claimed considerably higher numbers of car stealing offences than the others, and it was clear from a range of answers that this was the main issue and pre-occupation for them. The highest claimer also recorded very high levels of car theft, and in his case there was some clear indication of a car crime career, which had progressed from stealing cars to targeted *theft from* cars. three of the four denied recent activity.

Middle Level

Six of the remaining nine young offenders claimed overall total thefts from cars of 10 to 20 incidents, and more of them (4/6) had been caught for the offence at least once. They were more likely also to claim that their offending had continued in the last 12 months. As we will see later in the analysis these young offenders had a wide repertoire of acquisitive crime, in which *theft from* cars was one element, but all six had also undertaken *theft of* cars and in all cases they had committed more thefts of cars than *theft from* them.

Lower Level

Of the remaining three individuals the youngest had stolen from cars on five occasions without detection, but had significantly more experience of stealing cars themselves. One 19 year-old had committed four thefts from cars without detection and had not taken away vehicles at all. His offending was primarily around theft from shops. The only female young offender claimed one undetected case of *theft from* a car- opportunistic stealing of cigarettes from an unattended vehicle. Her main offending had been shoplifting associated with major drug dependency, and she had not been involved at all in the *theft of* vehicles.

b) Planning, and Location

So far as the four most prolific offenders were concerned two associated their *theft from* cars closely with *theft of* vehicles, and a third had considerable experience of car theft, though they had committed more *thefts from* cars. A fourth seemed to specialise in *theft from* cars. Two members of this high offending group specifically associated their offending with drug and alcohol funding motivation, but a third denied any drug use at all.

Of the six middle range offenders, all but one indicated a close connection with involvement in *theft of* vehicles, often with others.

Of the three lower level offenders two also indicated a similar link.

So far as planning and pre-meditation was concerned this was, not surprisingly, a characteristic more mentioned by the prolific offenders, though they all admitted to impulse or opportunistic theft when the opportunity arose. The middle- level offenders were more likely to describe offences committed on an opportunistic basis, and as noted above the more prominent motivation was to take the vehicle, or be involved in its theft. For the lower level offenders this crime *theft from* cars was seen primarily in opportunistic terms.

In the group as a whole most of the young people spoke of *theft from* cars, and *theft of* cars as an activity most likely to be committed with other 'mates'. These were not seen as solitary offences. There was only evidence of offending on your own (from the most prolific offenders). It seemed that as you did more of this offending there was both more pre-meditation and possibly a greater tendency to operate on your own.

As to preferred location and time side - streets and unsecured car parks were most frequently mentioned. These offenders usually committed their crime in their home-town, though not normally their part of it. There were several mentions of specific garages, and industrial estates, as either good or bad options, as well as observations about the deterrent impact of bright lights and CCTV. However, in line with the strong opportunistic approach, which characterised the motivation of many of these young offenders, the majority said that they took the chance wherever the possibility presented itself. The prolific offending group were somewhat more explicit about location targeting and risk of detection, but even for them opportunity could present itself almost anywhere apart from well controlled car parks.

As to time of offending there was an interesting difference between the four prolific offenders and the other nine. For the more active group choice of day or night was less relevant than the nature of the opportunity. For the nine others most spoke of night time or early hours prowling activity, where you could try many vehicles, possibly with others and detection was perceived as less likely.

c) Factors which scared or acted as a deterrent to stealing from cars.

Some young people mentioned more than one fear or concern and altogether there were 19 mentions, the most frequent being fear of being caught by the owner (seven mentions). For several of those who mentioned this, the fear included the danger of physical reprisals if caught. As one young man said 'if I caught someone doing it to my car I'd go spare'. Alarms and security systems were another significant deterrent (six mentions) and several of the more experienced offenders said that they avoided sophisticated security systems, or systems they did not know. Fear of being caught by the Police received three mentions. CCTV and controlled car parks were mentioned as a deterrent factor only once, and as noted in the previous section this group of offenders on the whole did not look to car parks as a likely place to steal cars or their contents from. One of the very prolific offenders spoke of a fear of invading the territory of other known car and contents thieves, but this was not mentioned elsewhere.

d) Method of entry.

This group of young offenders together made 25 mentions of method. The more experienced tended to mention a repertoire of options whereas opportunistic or less experienced offenders tended to use one method only- mainly simple force.

There were six mentions of accessing property through unlocked vehicles or open windows, and this clearly continues to be quite a common option. Use of a screwdriver, normally a flat- topped screwdriver, received seven mentions. This is usually applied to locks or windows, and the more experienced would choose a point of entry from knowledge of different car types. Eight mentions were made of smashing windows, most frequently quarter- lights, or the window nearest visible goods. A single mention was made of use of a glass hammer by a more experienced offender, and the same young man spoke of using half tennis balls as a suction device for some locking systems. It seemed clear that removable fascias and clearly labelled coded radios were seen as less likely targets.

As was clear from the earlier section the young offenders interviewed included a number whose primary motivation was *theft of* the vehicle itself, with *theft of* property as an attractive but secondary consideration. As a result a number of references were made to tackling steering locks and wiring vehicles. Two specific mentions were made of use of sets of car keys.

e) Goods targeted.

Responses to questioning about whether there were things they went out wanting to steal yielded 24 mentions in all from the 13 young people. As might be expected from earlier

research, and the numbers involved in vehicle theft as the primary activity, the main mentions were stereo and audio equipment (12) and opportunity/whatever turns up worth having (eight). One of the more experienced offenders specified laptop commuters, and another mentioned mobile phones, jewellery and money as well as audio equipment.

There does appear to be a difference between the more experienced and the opportunistic or less specialised thief, and there is no evidence at least from these young offenders of a general pre-meditated interest in laptop computers.

Two of the more experience offenders told me that they specifically avoided cars with baby seats or cars with toys in them, and if these turned up they would not touch them. As will be seen later there were similar 'ethical' points made when questions were asked about victims.

f) Items actually taken.

When asked about the kind of things they normally took from cars in practice there were 31 mentions from the 13 young people. As might be expected the list closely resembles the items targeted, but stereo and audio equipment predominates even more with 14 mentions, plus three mentions of C.D.s and one of a mobile C.D. Player. Money and/or handbags were mentioned four times; specifically new clothing twice; mobile phones twice; car parts once; jewellery once and cigarettes once. The theft of laptop computers was mentioned by two young men. These were two of the more experienced thieves. While one of them indicated that he had stolen more than one, the other indicated that he had come across only one laptop. He had decided to stash it in a hiding place in the town centre. When he returned the next day it had been found and taken by another thief.

g) Disposal of the goods stolen.

If the young woman who stole cigarettes in a single and opportunistic theft is excluded from the reckoning, the 12 young men interviewed described very similar practices about the goods they had taken. All 12 said that they sold the goods, though two said that they sometimes kept things they wanted themselves. There were 10 mentions of sale to friends or mates; six mentions of selling to 'people I know' or 'contacts'; one mention of selling within the family, and one mention of use of a network of contacts.

The location for selling was almost entirely local, and sales were made in their own area or community. There was only one reference to selling to a shop, and that individual claimed that he sold more often to people he knew. On being prompted about pubs and shops, there was very limited experience of selling in either, and three young men indicated in strong terms that they would never try to sell in pubs.

Within this group of young offenders at least it seems clear that their stolen goods market was on the whole informal, local, and based around groups of friends and contacts. Several of the more prolific and experienced thieves had some awareness of more organised dealers in stolen goods, but this was not generally the case. As will be seen in the next section the "prolific and experienced" young people were more likely to be involved as purchasers in illegal drugs markets

h) Spending the money and the place of drugs and alcohol

The young woman mentioned above had been a prolific thief, but not from cars, and the proceeds from her stealing had been spent predominantly on drugs. Of the 12 young men only two said that they had **not** spent money raised in *theft from* cars on drugs or alcohol, and these two mentioned a range of goods, including trainers and clothes. Three more used money for a mix of goods and alcohol or drugs, mentioning mobile phone top-ups and clothes specifically.

For the remaining seven alcohol and drugs played a more significant part in the spend derived from theft, but only in two of these cases could stealing from cars be seen as a major illegal funding source for drugs or drink. For the other five, *theft from* cars was essentially a second string activity in a repertoire of acquisitive crime only. One of the prolific drug using thieves with many claimed thefts from cars was exclusively an illegal drug user and the other primarily a drinker, also heavily engaged in *theft of* vehicles.

Of the five others the picture given was the spending of money from acquisitive crime on a mix of alcohol and illegal drugs- usually cannabis and ecstasy. How this relates to the overall drug taking of this group is discussed later. The place of alcohol is clearly important.

All those interviewed who had drug taking experience were asked about the willingness of drug suppliers to take goods rather than cash in exchange for drugs. The prolific offending illegal drug user spoke of dealers preferring cash but being willing sometimes to take special goods. He said that in his case such goods had often come from other kinds of theft, but he mentioned dealer interest in very high quality audio equipment. Three others spoke of the occasional willingness of suppliers to take goods- special audio equipment was again mentioned, as were camcorders and laptop computers, but those who mentioned these latter items had not had direct experience of this.

The overall picture from this group is that there is a significant level of illegal drug use, as might be expected from a range of other studies focusing on the level of substance misuse by young offenders. However, as will be seen later, the level of involvement varied considerably and in only a small number of cases was illegal drug use the central activity in their lives. For a number of them drugs formed part of an overall offending life style. There is, within this group at least, some evidence that, as drug markets expand and diversify, front line dealers may be prepared sometimes to take goods for drugs, but only occasionally and only if high quality goods were on offer. This is a trend worth further investigation and may also relate to market conditions.

i) Frequency of theft from cars.

As noted in various of the earlier sections many of this group did not regard stealing from cars as their primary offending activity. In response to questions about frequency seven indicated that *theft from* cars was, in their minds, an occasional activity. Of the remaining six, two indicated that they had offended daily between the ages of 14 and 17 but their level of activity had subsequently reduced. Otherwise activity figures varied from between four to 20 per week for the majority, and much higher estimates for two offenders - in one case 200 claimed offences per week.

There was a general view that stealing from cars was a relatively low risk activity, but unpredictable in terms of the goods available, unless the primary motive was to take the car itself. One young man, who had offended through a major problem with drugs spoke of changing to this form of theft and away from stealing in shops. He found the shop situation stressful and preferred a solitary activity of theft from vehicles, which he saw as less risky. Another young man spoke of the need to differentiate between high security and low security shops. There is some evidence of awareness of policing priority. One young man spoke of his awareness that ' the Police got better'.

j) Attitude towards victims of theft from cars.

There were considerable differences in response. Sometimes there was awareness of the impact, as follows:

"I feel they worked hard for these things and it could have been me, but I needed the money".

"I know its bad for them".

"They worked for things and then lost them- things that matter to them".

From a young man who had previously stolen heavily from cars and then stopped:

*"If someone stole from my car I'd go ******* mad - that's why I stopped it".*

However there were those who seemed to have given victim impact either very little thought or who had specific rationalisations, as follows:

"It's not a big deal".

"They have Insurance, but I try not to think about it" – (the Insurance rationalisation was mentioned on a number of occasions).

"It might teach them to lock their car or get an alarm".

"They should take more care".

"I don't care - it's not my stuff".

A supplementary question was also asked about whether there were any types of acquisitive crime they would not commit on principle. This produced several reactions specifically relating to *theft from* cars:

"I wouldn't steal from a car with a child seat".

"I wouldn't steal from a car with toys or kids things in it".

"I wouldn't nick personal things such as a ladies handbag - there might be sentimental things in it. Shops are easy because they're insured".

Some of the answers to this question related to other forms of property crime. There was considerable anxiety about domestic burglary and going into peoples' homes, not only because of the impact on families, and perhaps old people but because of the perceived risk.

There does seem to be a need for work with many young offenders on the frequently substantial impact on victims of *theft from* vehicles, and many of these comments give an insight into the direction that work would need to take.

Drugs and Alcohol use reported by the interviewees.

a) Illegal Drugs- first experience and range of drug taking experience.

All but three of the 13 young people had used illegal drugs. Of the 10 who claimed illegal drug use all but one said their first experience had been with cannabis- the other claiming a first experience with heroin at the age of 12. Generally the age at first experience was quite low- between nine and 10 years in one case, and between 12 and 13 years in six cases. Two had a first experience between 15 and 16 years.

Most had experienced two or three types of illegal drug, though there were two young people who claimed a wider drug experience. The 10 young people who said they had used illegal drugs made 39 mentions of different drug experience. The most frequent was crack or cocaine (eight), but cannabis (seven), Ecstasy (seven) and Heroin (six) were also frequently mentioned. Amphetamines (five) were not far behind. Solvents, though, were infrequently mentioned (two) as were LSD, illegally obtained methadone, Ketamine and magic mushrooms (all mentioned once).

Three of the young people described significant dependency periods with drugs, though this continued in only one case. When asked about current drug of choice nine young people said that they continued with illegal drug use. This was almost entirely cannabis (7 cases) but one preferred Ecstasy for its association with music and social life, and another was continuing to smoke heroin and crack.

Illegal drug use clearly played an important part in the lives of these young people, and they were at risk of getting into serious trouble as a result, but in most cases it was seen as part of an overall 'outlaw' lifestyle, rather than as a central activity. Others as will be seen, combined drug taking with substantial alcohol use. The impression gained from these interviews was that much of the range of experience was experimental, and that cannabis remains the most frequently used option.

All the young people interviewed were asked to state how important drugs were to their life style on a scale of one to 10. Three replied with a zero, four with a one, four with a five, one with a six, and one with 10.

The information about overall drug experience does show, however, how commonly available to young people Class A drugs now are, and it would seem that young offenders are particularly likely to try them.

b) Spending and source of spending on illegal drugs.

Questions were asked about weekly spend on illegal drugs and the source of the money. There were nine responses. Four indicated an estimated weekly spend of £20, one a spend of £50 and three in the region of £100. Several spoke of much higher spending in the past, including one of the higher current spenders who spoke of a spend of £2,000 a week on crack two years previously. Stealing played a significant part in funding drug use in eight cases, but often the young people described a mixed economy, involving borrowing, pooling of resources with friends, help from family members and occasionally wages or benefit.

c) Are you in control of your drug taking, and if you needed help, who would you go to?

Of the nine young people who acknowledged drugs experience, (including some who had earlier had significant problems) the reaction from all but one was that they did feel in control of their drug taking - a response consistent with much of the earlier research. The remaining young man indicated that he thought he was 'getting there'.

There were seven responses to the question about who you might turn to for help, and the answers on the whole suggested that they would go back to the source they initially had turned to. Family members were mentioned three times, Hostel staff once, and YOT Team or Probation officers twice. A specific drugs agency was mentioned once only.

While the scale of this survey limits the degree to which generalisations can be made, it is clear that the agencies dealing with offending behaviour directly, that is to say YOTs and Probation are seen as a significant source of help, and that this is consistent with the generally held view that an integrated and holistic approach is needed with young offenders and their drug taking behaviour.

d) Alcohol experience and use.

Two of the 13 denied any experience of alcohol. Of the 11 who said they drank alcohol one had a first drink at six years and one at nine years, but the norm was between 12 and 14. Eight respondents said that they drank regularly. They were asked about their weekly intake. The responses were discussed and then converted into units of alcohol, with explanation when necessary.

Three said that they drank between 10 and 20 units per week, scores that are well inside the Government's Safe Drinking guidelines. Three more had unit scores of between 30 and 50. The heaviest drinker had unit scores of around 200 per week. The second heaviest estimated consumption of between 50 and 120 per week, depending on a fortnightly pay night. The 200 - unit drinker definitely associated his drinking with stealing from cars, and car crime generally, and was one of the most experienced and prolific offenders in the sample. The other very heavy drinker had been working for some time and funded his drinking entirely from work.

Estimates of the drinking spend ranged from no expenditure because of reliance on friends or theft up to £75 to £100 per week. Direct stealing of alcohol was quite common

in this group of young people, and seven had taken alcohol from supermarkets. This was seen as a much easier option than theft from off-licences, which were seen as a riskier option.

Alcohol use was therefore a significant part of the life style of five out of 13 cases, and at potentially problematic levels in two cases. Asked to assess on a one to 10 scale the place of alcohol in their lives most scored themselves below five, with one six, one seven, one eight and two 10s. In only one case was there a very obvious connection with *theft from* cars. Theft of alcohol from supermarkets often for private use, or use with friends was a very common part of offending experience. This group did not on the whole see drinking in public houses as a main part of their social or drinking lives.

e) Tobacco Use.

Nine of the 13 young people smoked. One of them had first smoked at the age of eight, but the other eight first smoked between the ages of 11 and 14 years. Estimations of expenditure on tobacco ranged from £10 to around £30 per week. There was only one case of declared theft of tobacco, however, and similarly very little sign of use of proceeds from theft to fund smoking as a conscious choice. There was a good deal of reliance on friends or family members to support smoking.

Other Offending.

All the young people interviewed were asked about a range of offences and how often they had committed them, both overall and within the last 12 months. They were also asked about the number of times they had been caught. As indicated earlier British Crime Survey categories were used.

a) Criminal Damage and Fire Setting.

i) Criminal Damage

So far as general damage or destruction of property was concerned all 13 admitted at least one prior offence. Three claimed that they had only done this once, when they were younger, and interestingly all said that they had been caught when they did it. Seven of the 13 had committed between four and 10 offences. Two of these young people had not been detected but felt they had 'grown out of it' anyway. Three of the seven said that they had committed some further offences in the last year, but again the numbers were relatively low. Four of the seven had been detected but only once, and none in the last 12 months.

Of the three young offenders who claimed more than 10 offences, one admitted 20 instances and four detections, plus four instances in the last 12 months. The other two were very much higher in their claims. A young man who claimed a career of 200 instances with two detections was also one of the highest claimers on the whole range of property crime but felt that he had moved on from criminal damage which was seen as something done when he was younger.

The highest claiming young man indicated between 400 and 500 criminal damage episodes and he quoted main examples as being damage to fences, breaking windows and graffiti. He said that he had been caught four times. He had just turned 20 and had not committed such offences for some time, and none in the last 12 months. He had committed a range of other offences, the next most frequent being entry to buildings, frequently sheds, from which he stole equipment. He was a middle level thief from cars who had also been involved in stealing cars, and stealing from shops at a similar level. In the emphasis in his offending on criminal damage his offending history differed from the others.

ii) Fire Setting.

Questions were also asked about setting fire to things on purpose or recklessly. 11 of the 13 had at least one episode. Three of them claimed a single event more than 12 months ago, and these three all said that they had been detected - in one case the offence was a major arson, setting fire to flats, and in another the setting fire was to a car which had been taken.

Six young people claimed between two and five offences, and all in this group denied involvement in the last 12 months. Only one of the six said that they had ever been caught. Several listed the things, which they had set fire to- bins, skips and cars were particularly mentioned. Within this middle group was the highest claiming criminal damage offender.

The highest claiming fire setter admitted to some 500 episodes and said that he had never been caught. He denied involvement in the last 12 months. His other offending involved only middle level criminal damage, a significant level of taking vehicles, particularly while he had been away at boarding school, and moderate levels of thefts from vehicles, mainly associated with the *theft of* cars.

Overall it seems that a high proportion of these 13 prolific young offenders were involved in criminal damage and/or fire setting. The level of involvement was not high in most cases and they tended to say that these crimes were committed when they were younger. While there were high claimers for these crimes they had always committed other serious crime as well. Interestingly, at least in this small group, there were a number of single offenders who had been detected and claimed no further offending.

The associations with anti-social behaviour need more detailed examination, but there seems to be a case for early intervention and a holistic approach to the offending behaviour range of the more prolific young offenders.

b) Violent Behaviour.

Violent behaviour is the other major facet of public disorder, and questions were asked about a range of violent behaviour including personal robbery and bag-snatching; threatening or beating to obtain goods; fighting in a public place; beating people either outside the family or within it, and use of a weapon.

All but two of the 13 claimed some episodes of violent behaviour.

Four of the 11 with violence experience claimed only to have been involved in public fighting. Three of these, including the only female in the interview group, had between four and eight episodes, with all three indicating at least one additional matter in the last 12 months. Of all episodes claimed by these three (21) there had been arrests in 10 cases - a very high ratio. The fourth who claimed only public fighting claimed no other violence but said that he had taken part in 300 fights, including several in the last 12 months, and that this was mainly associated with football trips to London. He said that he had not been detected. This young man was a prolific offender in both *theft of* and *from* cars, reporting also very high alcohol use.

For the other seven all had public fighting as the most prolific component, all indicating at least one detection.

Only one of the 11 claimed to have been involved in personal robbery or mobile phone snatching, claiming seven offences, with one detection. This young man also claimed one offence of threatening with a weapon, two beatings of people outside his family, and two offences involving use of a weapon. He was the most diverse violent offender, and possibly the most serious. He had committed a relatively wide range of other crime including property offending, and his *theft from* cars was primarily associated with *theft of* vehicles.

Most of the others with a mix of violent offending had small numbers of assaults, with occasional use of sticks or knives. The very prolific fire-setter described in the previous section claimed one offence of threatening another with a screwdriver, for which he was caught on CCTV. He admitted five other threatening for goods offences with sticks or knives, and had not been detected for any of these.

None of these young people had been identified as primarily violent offenders and even the most prolific of them (the football fighter) had more experience of acquisitive crime, with differential levels of *theft from* cars. However, some involvement in public disorder, at least, is clearly a common characteristic. This group, with its experience of theft and *theft of* and *from* cars, however, appears to have little involvement in personal robbery. This seems to be a significant characteristic of this sample.

c) Other acquisitive crime.

The young people were asked about their involvement in the full range of acquisitive crime.

i) Theft from meters, telephones, videos or slot machines.

Compared with other acquisitive crimes there was a low level of participation in this activity from most of the young people interviewed. Seven said they had never done this, and five said six times or less. The one exception was a young man who claimed 500 episodes, with six in the last year, and three detections overall. He was one of the most prolific offenders overall, returning very high figures for other forms of theft, with both illegal drugs and alcohol as a main motivating factor. The others in this group who had high patterns of current or previous drug and alcohol use did not claim this group of offences to any significant degree.

ii) Theft from shops, supermarkets or stores.

By contrast all participants had experience of this, and together claimed an overall career total of over 3,000 thefts, though one individual claimed two thirds of this.

This was the same individual who claimed high levels of meter theft and his overall offending pattern was dominated by theft from shops, matched by *theft from* vehicles. He had started stealing at the age of 13 years, and was one of the oldest in the interview group. His career was therefore a comparatively long one. In earlier years he had primarily centred on theft from shops, but felt that security systems had improved in shops and the risk was not worth it any longer. He seemed to have moved consciously into a greater emphasis on *theft from* cars. As noted above drugs and drink were a main factor, but he was clear that his drug use was primarily cannabis, and this was closely connected with heavy drinking.

Nine others, including the sole female participant, claimed to have committed more thefts from shops than thefts from cars, with drugs the major factor in her case. She said that when her drug taking had been at a very high level she had shoplifted on at least six occasions per week. This was her main delinquent activity, though as noted above she had some involvement in disorder, and as well as limited *theft from* cars experience had also been involved in two thefts of cars. Of the other eight drugs was a lesser factor in several cases. In one case the figures for shop theft and *theft from* cars
were both at a middling level, just over 10.

Two young men both returned higher figures for *theft from* cars than theft from shops. In one case both levels were relatively low, but in the second case, one of the few high level and regular Class A drug users in the group he had made a conscious move away from theft from shops and into *theft from* cars on the basis of less risk, skill with practice, and reasonable returns. This was the same individual whose value system deterred him from taking goods if the car had a child seat. He had an additional offending 'string' which was non- domestic burglary, and he voiced similar scruples about entering houses and going through people's things.

iii) Thefts from school or work.

Only two individuals claimed any thefts in these categories, and in both cases the level claimed was very low. This does not seem to feature as an issue in offending patterns, for a group of young people who were highly delinquent in almost every other respect.

iv) *Theft of* cars and motor-bikes.

By contrast one or both of these were activities claimed by all 13 young people. *Theft of* motorbikes or mopeds, was claimed by all 12 young men - six claiming up to 10 offences, and six in excess of 10 incidents. For two young men, claiming 300 offences (one detection) and 600 offences (20 detections) respectively, this was a major and pleasure associated activity. The claimer of 600 offences had in fact committed an even higher number of car thefts, and was a prolific offender across the whole range of acquisitive crime.

As noted earlier for a number of members of this group their involvement in *theft from* cars came primarily as a result of taking the cars themselves. 12 of the 13 interviewees had taken cars, and half of them had continued to do so in the previous 12 months. Eight young men claimed 30 cars taken or more. The three highest claimers, of 100, 900 and 900 indicated detection rates of two, seven and seven respectively. As might be expected these three were among the oldest of the interviewees. For the young man quoted earlier with heavy class A drug experience the taking of 100 vehicles was associated with his earlier offending, and it had given away to high levels of shoplifting, succeeded by high volume *theft from* cars, in which his earlier experience proved useful.

The other two, both claiming huge levels of car theft also returned high '*theft from*' claims, and as suggested earlier there were elements of this being both a secondary by product, and a career progression into more targeted behaviour and less joyriding. All three returned very high claims for the undetected selling of stolen goods.

v) Domestic and other burglary.

Domestic burglary was claimed by seven of the 13 interviewees, but only one claimed more than five offences. Again this was the most prolific offender on other categories. Comments were made by many about the risk both of detection by Police and/or the occupier. Of those who had tried domestic burglary five had experienced detection. A combination of higher and well known detection rates, security improvements, perceived high risk and an element of 'taboo' all seem relevant to understanding this relatively low level of involvement from an otherwise highly versatile and delinquent group of young people.

Eight had committed other kinds of burglary, but for five of them the level of participation was again at a relatively low level. Three were more heavily engaged claiming 'scores' between 50 and 300. These three were all very prolific offenders in other respects. Office premises were mentioned as a significant target, but sheds and outhouses - crimes the victim might regard as 'garden burglary' were a significant element for two of the offenders.

vi) Buying and selling of stolen goods.

All 13 had bought stolen goods and there were no detections. There were three claims of between 40 and 100 episodes, and in total there were 268 claims. This small-scale finding is relevant therefore to an understanding of market issues for stolen goods, and while a number of young people spoke of keeping some goods for themselves, they all had experience of buying things illegally - typically, as the analysis on *theft from* cars suggests, this was among a group of friends or contacts, often in the neighbourhood they came from.

As to selling all 13 had experience and in all but three cases, as might be expected from a group of prolific young offenders, their claims for selling stolen goods significantly exceeded their experience of buying illegally. While most claimed 20 or less there were four claims, of between 200 and 500 or more offences. For these four selling on stolen goods was a major activity, with local contact selling predominating. One had high-level alcohol use, one serious class A use and another a mixture of cannabis and alcohol.

vii) Credit cards, cash-point cards and their use after theft.

This group of offences did not feature prominently among the 13 young people interviewed. Only four of the 13 made any claims. In one case a credit card was found in a handbag (not taken from a car), but passed on to a friend and not used personally. A second individual claimed seven uses of cards acquired from others, and a mix of goods and cash was obtained. A third claimed 15 thefts of cards, which were passed on normally to contacts. However, this individual used the card for cash once on the basis of numbers found in a wallet. The highest claiming individual for a range of offending claimed 50 offences, but said that they passed the cards on along with other stolen goods and did not use them personally.

Personal History and circumstances.

Participants were asked a range of questions about their backgrounds, current circumstances and perceived prospects for the future.

a) School.

None of the 13 young people was still at school or in any other form of education. All 13 described significant problems in their school careers, and these can be summarised as follows:

- Five described significant disciplinary problems, and all of these had experienced either exclusion or expulsion, or both.
- A further two described aggressive behaviour as the main factor behind their school problems, and both of them had been expelled and referred to specialist units.
- Seven described attendance problems and truancy at a serious level, with outside intervention.
- Three had been place in boarding school as a response to the problems they presented.

All were asked whether they had received health or drugs education at school, and what they thought of it. Eight either said they had not had any, or could remember nothing about it. Three recollected some input about basic drug information, but were generally dismissive of it. One individual said that he had received some teaching on puberty, drugs and other issues, and found this helpful at the age of 12 – 13 years. This occurred while he was at boarding school. Overall the response highlighted quotations about this aspect of education and how it is delivered to less engaged and offending young people.

Participants were asked to identify three things they had liked, and three they disliked at school. Friends and sport were most frequently mentioned, and two of the boarding school pupils said they had appreciated the structure and overall school life while they were there.

Several claimed to hate everything about school. Four felt they had been the particular target, unfairly, of teachers. Two said that they felt they were seen as ‘thick’ and that they had very low self-esteem at school, with several describing victimisation from bullies. Two of the 13 described problems with dyslexia, and one of these said that he had been helped

greatly by going to boarding school.

While these findings may present no surprise they paint a depressing picture of the school lives of prolific young offenders.

b) Family difficulties.

There was a high incidence of reported family disruption, as follows:

- Four mentioned separation of parents as a factor on its own.
- Six others mentioned separation in association with another problem. This included in one case the traumatic death of a sibling, and in another the suicide of a close family member.
- The parent or carer having serious alcohol problems was mentioned in five cases.
- Mental health problems of a parent were mentioned in three cases.
- Domestic violence was a factor mentioned in one case.
- As a result of multiple problems one of the young people had been taken into care.

Only one young person mentioned no background problems. Interestingly the two young men who reported alcohol-abusing fathers specifically both mentioned their fear that they might 'catch' the condition themselves - for one this was a significant fear.

Much research, on a larger scale, has indicated the high vulnerability of young people from problematic backgrounds to offending as well as other risk taking behaviours, including drink and drugs. This small-scale survey suggests similar findings with family problems compounded by problematic school experience and young offenders often living an outlaw life style from a very early age.

c) Employment issues.

Of the 13 young people only two were in employment at the time of their interview.

Of the 11 who were unemployed, the only female interviewee was heavily pregnant, and did not anticipate resuming work until some time after the birth, when she planned to have her grandmother look after the baby during the day.

Two young men said that they had not so far had employment of any kind. The other had been in at least one job, and most had changed jobs a number of times, with short periods of unemployment in between. However there were several who had been unemployed for longer- in one case for a period of 12 months or more.

All participants were asked to rate their current or most recent job on a one to 10 satisfaction- rating. Interestingly of the 11 who gave a rating, seven gave a rating of seven or more, Only one rated his last job as less than five. It would appear that having organised employment, (even if it is uncertain and unskilled) is valued more highly, at least by this group of young people, than one might think.

When asked about their ideal employment and what they needed to do to get it there was considerable recognition of the need for training, and frustration at not being organised enough or educated enough to get this going. The young woman who responded wanted to be a beauty therapist and said she knew she needed to go to college. Five young men wanted to work with cars- and all of them indicated that they knew they needed the qualifications. As one said:

‘ I need to screw my head on and get an education’.

A similar view was expressed by a young man, who wanted to be a carpenter.
Much earlier and more extensive research has commented on the issue of work opportunity and young offenders, and the Connexions service will aim to respond in a more co-ordinated way. The aspiration of many of the young people in this small interview group to work with vehicles is not surprising given their fascination, expressed though offending, with cars. It is probably correct that motor related diversionary activity is unlikely to be helpful unless it links strongly to skilled training.

d) Accommodation issues.

In this particular group of young people there was a reasonable degree of accommodation stability. The majority (9/13) still lived at home. Asked to express satisfaction ratings on a one to 10 scale, five gave scores of five or more, but the others were less content, several speaking of family tensions and a wish to have their own space. One of the younger males spoke of wanting ideally to return to boarding school, where he had been happier.

Several of the more settled ‘home-stayers’ expressed the perfectly normal tension between wanting independence, but liking the comfort and value of living at home.

Within this group one young man was living in a hostel, and although aspiring to live independently he was very positive about the support which hostel staff gave him.

Two of the older males had made the transition to independent living and expressed levels of satisfaction. The person living independently was the only young woman in the group who expressed strong dissatisfaction at having been housed by the council on her own and a long way from her family.

e) Activities and Aspirations.

Participants were asked about legal activities they liked to undertake, and whether they got the chance to do them. They were also asked about their ambitions for the future.

Asked to name three preferred legal activities most of those interviewed were able to do this. The activities and number of mentions were as follows:

Activity	Number of Mentions
Football (playing rather than watching)	5
Other participant sports	5
Cinema	3
Music	3
Tinkering with cars	3
Motor-cross/ Scrambling	3
Being with friends	3
Bike rides	2
Watching T.V	1
Clubbing	2
Pool	1
Drinking	1
Drawing	1
Fishing	1
Abseiling/Canoeing/Rock Climbing	All mentioned by one individual

It was interesting that the young man with the outward bound interests in abseiling, canoeing and rock climbing had acquired these experiences as part of a course, and wanted to continue but did not know how. This raises important questions for this type of treatment/intervention.

Otherwise the list is extremely conventional and on the whole very constructive. Interestingly most of the young people also said that they got reasonable opportunities to carry out their chosen activities, though some said they would like to do more of it.

Participants were also asked what they would like to be doing three years and 10 years from now. The responses to these questions, given the degree of early life discord and delinquency in these young lives, were reassuringly but poignantly conventional.

11 of the 13 expressed clear aspirations for three years from now. In all the responses given there was a reference to having a decent job and a house. One person, having recently come off drugs added staying off drugs and another said that he hoped to have a good life with his girl friend and their baby. There was one reference to being free of debts, but the general mood was summed up by the young man who said:

' I just want my own accommodation and a normal life'.

It is not suggested that this will be easy for them and the obstacles in their way may be considerable, but most of these young people have conventional, legal past times and aspirations which may co-exist with highly delinquent attitudes. Those who try to engage with these young people in attempts to prevent future offending need to build on these pro-social attitudes and beliefs.

The aspirations for 10 years from now mirrored the same hopes, but in this predominantly male group nine out of 12 young men added an aspiration to having their own family- the usual recipe was kids, a car, a decent job and a nice place to live.

Experience of the Criminal Justice System.

Participants were asked, finally, about the range of criminal justice penalties and orders, which they had received, and their views on the overall system. It must be remembered that although this group had committed many thefts from cars this was not generally reflected in their formal record of convictions and penalties. It was also interesting that although most of them had quite exact recollections of their personal 'real' offending history, they often had the vaguest recollections about the number of orders and sentencing occasions. There may, indeed be communication issues for YOT and Probation staff about this tendency to treat sentencing as a kind of dissociated blur. The other fact to note about this group is that in their age range they included some whose early offending preceded the range of options now available through YOTs, so the range of treatment and sentencing which was on offer varied considerably for some of those with longer offending histories.

Almost every interviewee indicated that they had been cautioned, and the younger ones had experienced Final Warnings and Action Plan Orders. All had received at least one Conditional Discharge and Fine. All had been subject to Supervision Orders, and four were now on Community Rehabilitation Orders, with several Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Orders, and five claiming experience of Community Punishment Orders (CPOs). This outscores the number of Reparation Orders, and may either reflect the relatively recent availability of this option or a tendency for Courts to opt for CPOs instead of Reparation Orders for more delinquent young offenders.

Five of the 13 young people had already had a custodial experience. Two had been on remand and three had Detention and Training Orders. This is a relatively high rate of incarceration, even allowing for the age range and level of offending.

Most of the comments, not surprisingly focused on custodial matters, and several of these were as follows:

'Prison was tiring and boring but it got my drugs sorted out' *(18 year old male).*

'I learnt a huge amount of criminal stuff in jail' *(19 year old male).*

These views are not necessarily contradictory and may apply perfectly well, even to the same establishment.

For some the Remand experience, often a first absence from home can be a real shock. As one young man said:

' I just found remand really tough, and just very difficult to get through'.

Generally the young people were positive about their supervisors. The level of contact, the personal support and the personal relationship were the main components valued. This is an issue which both Probation and Youth Offending Teams will need to remember in assessing case management models.

There would clearly seem to be more room for use of Curfew, given the degree of night time 'prowling' activity which many of the young men in this group described. There is also scope, in an area, which has had many successes with Restorative Justice ideas, for greater use of Reparation and victim-focused work.

Case Studies

These three short studies give a more extended description of three young men who participated in interviews. While they can in no way be regarded as representative, they do show up the need for a more fully developed typology of motive and behaviour in respect of theft from vehicles, along the lines proposed in the previous section.

'Danny'

Danny is aged 18 years and because of behaviour problems had attended boarding school. He had enjoyed woodwork, art and sport, but did not get on well with teachers and his behaviour continued to be difficult. His parents had separated when he was 7 years old and he had grown up with his mother, though he now had a stepfather who he got on with reasonably well. He was comfortable at home but would like his independence soon.

Keen on cars he wanted to be a mechanic, but he knew he would need more basic education before this was realistic. He had enjoyed activities with the YOT, including rock climbing, abseiling and canoeing, and would like to have done more of this. He had also enjoyed 'life skills' work.

Danny aspired mainly to settling down, and being married 10 years from now with children, a car and a nice job.

Danny had committed a very wide range of crime, much of which had been undetected. When he was much younger this had included a great deal of minor fire setting. He had stolen frequently from shops and had also had a phase when he stole many cars. Much of this had been done with three others while he was at boarding school. He had stolen from cars on a regular basis, though less than from shops, but had not done this in the last 12 months, whereas he did admit to stealing from shops during that time. He had been involved in a number of fights and had once threatened someone in a garage with a screwdriver in a garage.

Danny had mainly stolen from cars at night but sometimes, if opportunity presented itself he also stole from cars during the day. The cars he targeted were mainly parked on the street. He was deterred from cars with obvious alarms or security devices, and was scared about the potential reaction of owners if caught.

He normally got into cars using a flat topped screwdriver forced into the lock or a window, and he mainly sought stereos or speakers which he would keep or sell, usually to contacts or friends in his own neighbourhood.

Asked about the impact of stealing from cars on victims Danny said at first that owners were stupid for not being careful, but he went on to say that he would be devastated if it happened to him. Danny said that he would not take laptop computers but he knew people who did from a particular pub car park.

Danny had some drug experience and regularly drank alcohol. These activities were part of his overall lifestyle but did not dominate it.

'Barry'

Barry was 18 years old and had experienced many difficulties at school, mainly around truancy, with the result that he had gone to a Pupil Referral Unit. He said he had enjoyed practical lessons, but felt that he was 'labelled' and pressurised by teachers. He had so far had 4 jobs and 10 months unemployed. What he really wanted to be was a motor mechanic, though he recognised that his basic education was not sufficient at present.

Barry's parents had separated when he was less than five years old, and he had grown up with his mother. She had a serious problem with alcohol, and often when younger he had been left to his own devices. His ambitions were to settle down with a good job. He had a girl friend and she had had his baby. He wanted to set up home with her.

Barry had stolen extensively from shops, and had also committed a large number of car thefts. But he had committed many more thefts from cars, which had been a major activity for him. He said that this had sometimes (but not always) been to get money for drugs. Sometimes the thefts were planned and sometimes opportunistic, but he had always been 'on the look out' for opportunities. He went to unsecured car parks and side streets, both night and day. He was most scared about being caught by an angry owner, and was scared of violence, having never been involved in it himself.

He said that it was possible to learn how to get into most cars – "you picked it up and compared notes with others". He normally used a flat-topped screwdriver, on the window or boot and he could normally 'pop' a window in 10 seconds or less.

Barry said that he looked for things of value to sell on, most often stereos. He did mention laptops and these were very profitable but he did not find them very often. He was very clear that he would not steal children's things or toys. He sold mainly to people he knew in his own area and spent the money either on drugs or clothes. When it was drugs his dealer would not normally take goods but had accepted a laptop and a camcorder, (though neither of those items had been taken from cars).

Stealing from cars was for him quite an easy and relatively low risk activity. He acknowledged that the impact on victims could be considerable- 'I know they worked hard to get some of those things' but he did it because he needed the money. He preferred theft from cars to theft from shops.

He estimated that he was spending £100 per week now on drugs, but in the past it had been much higher, and most of his drug money was gained from theft. He had been in custody and said that he had received help there and also from his YOT worker, so that he felt he was now tackling his problem.

'I first started stealing from cars because I got a buzz out of it and sometimes as part of stealing the car itself. I did it with other people at first, but later on my own and for a time it was important as a way of feeding my drug habit'.

'Darren'

Darren is 19 years old. He had difficulties at school and experienced some bullying from teachers and pupils. He was expelled for violent conduct having thrown a chair.

His father had major alcohol problems. Though he had not been violent, Darren worried sometimes that he might have inherited the problem, as he too had been a very heavy drinker.

He had so far had seven jobs and had normally been in work. He liked his current job, but really wanted to be a carpenter and knew he would need to train for that. His father had left and he was now happy at home. He was interested in basketball, cars and sport. His ambition was to go to college, then start a carpentry firm, and have his own home with a wife and children.

Though Darren had stolen from shops this was some time ago and was quite limited. He had stolen huge numbers of cars, starting at 13 and peaking at 16. He had also stolen from many of those cars, but had also stolen from cars without taking the vehicle itself. He very frequently sold on stolen goods but kept some things for himself. He had been involved in much fighting, but not in his home area. It was mainly associated with football in London.

Darren's stealing from cars was primarily associated with theft of the cars themselves. He had done this, often with others both during the day and at night. He was mainly fearful of owners. He was aware of some territorial issues so that there were 'patches' where other thieves would not allow him to operate.

Darren would take anything, which was available, but stereos were particularly attractive. Other
items taken were money, new clothing, some car parts and ' anything nice'.

Darren sometimes kept goods but often sold to a network of friends, family and contacts. He did not try to sell in pubs, or shops.

He spent much of the money raised on alcohol, but he did not use illegal drugs. He did not think much about the victims, putting this out of his mind. 'Its hard to know what their reaction is- you don't actually see them and that makes it easier not to think about'.

He felt strongly, though that he would not commit domestic burglary, and seemed more understanding of the victim issues involved with someone's home.

He had certainly been a very heavy drinker, and vehicle crime paid for much of it, though his motives were also about the enjoyment of cars and driving. He was now cutting down, and felt that he was now beginning to grow out of crime.

7. Summary of Main Conclusions

This study begins with a summary of prior research into theft from vehicles, vehicle crime, market reduction approaches, and drug markets. An analysis of the nature of goods taken from vehicles in the Thames Valley is followed by an analysis of data relating to those apprehended for theft from vehicles. Comparisons are made with equivalent data for other forms of theft. Comments and perspectives from a range of professionals about both theft from vehicles, the motivation of offenders who commit this crime, and perceptions about the links with drug taking are given in the next section, and the study concludes with the findings of a series of confidential interviews with young offenders in a range of locations in the Thames Valley.

The main conclusions in summary form are as follows:

- There is no real evidence that theft from vehicles is essentially a young people's crime. Many young people do commit this offence, but not proportionately more than for other forms of theft or personal robbery. There are significant numbers of 'older' offenders.
- The proportion of males committing this form of crime is greater than for other forms of theft and personal robbery.
- Though some young people do commit theft from motor vehicles in order to fund drug taking this includes those whose drug taking is part of a risk taking lifestyle rather than a central pre-occupation. Care needs to be taken in distinguishing between the different primary motivations.
- A more developed typology of motivation is needed to understand both the offending career of thieves who steal from vehicles, and their motivation, which may well change over time. A suggested typology is included in the report.
- More attention needs to be paid by those agencies dealing with offenders to the impact of theft from motor vehicles. This may often form a hidden and undetected part of offending behaviour.
- The impact of theft from cars can be very considerable, and analogous for some victims to being burgled. This needs to be borne in mind in strategies on re-victimisation, and by those dealing with the support of victims.
- Many victims are young men for whom their vehicle is their main valued possession. Such vehicles may often be older and more vulnerable.
- The analysis of goods taken from vehicles has been relatively limited in the past, and an important priority should be to improve both the quality of data and the use made of it.
- Audio equipment continues to be a major feature of goods stolen, and technological advance means that new types of equipment are coming along all the time. Design of car security and security of the equipment itself remain major issues.
- Police campaigns have a marked effect on theft from vehicles, and need to be

conducted in an integrated way with other agencies.

- Market reduction approaches need to take into account the nature of stolen goods markets for items stolen from cars. These are usually local to the offender, and informal through a network of friends and associates. The youth and vulnerability of many victims may be useful subjects for the focus of a campaign, and campaigns may need to be targeted more precisely and in different locations.

- Maintenance of crime prevention campaigning on theft from cars needs to continue as an important priority, particularly in relation to computer and laptop theft.

- There is evidence of a geographical corridor through the southern Thames Valley, where motorway links and a high business presence are evident. This should guide market reduction approaches as well as crime prevention.

- The interaction between drug markets and stolen goods markets merits further study. There is some evidence of frontline dealers being prepared to take high quality stolen goods in exchange for drugs, notwithstanding their preference for cash. Both drug and stolen goods markets change in structure and linkage over time, and need to be monitored carefully.

- The level of laptop theft suggests a more sustained and experienced form of theft than was evident from the interviews with young people, and it may be that the profile of offenders taking these goods from cars is older and more sophisticated.

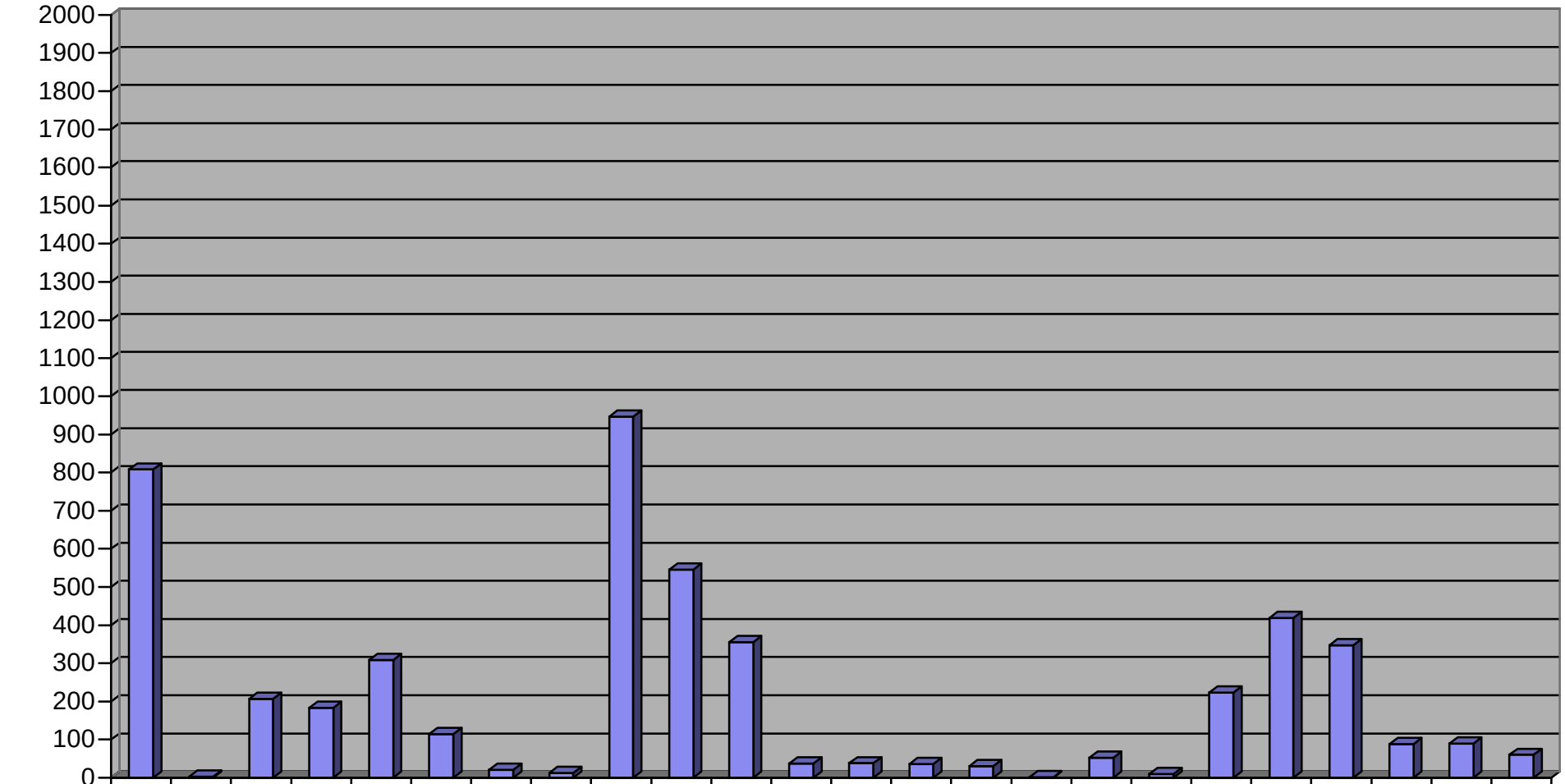
- It seems clear that the vast majority of young offenders who have committed three or more offences of theft will have had at least some experience of stealing from cars. Persistent young offenders have higher levels of family disruption and school problems, and early intervention is clearly a very important issue. Most appear to have conventional aspirations, many of which depend on improved inter-personal skills and training for employment. All these issues to be taken into account by those working with their offending behaviour.

APPENDIX

Items taken by category for each Thames Valley Police Area
Key to categories used in the Study

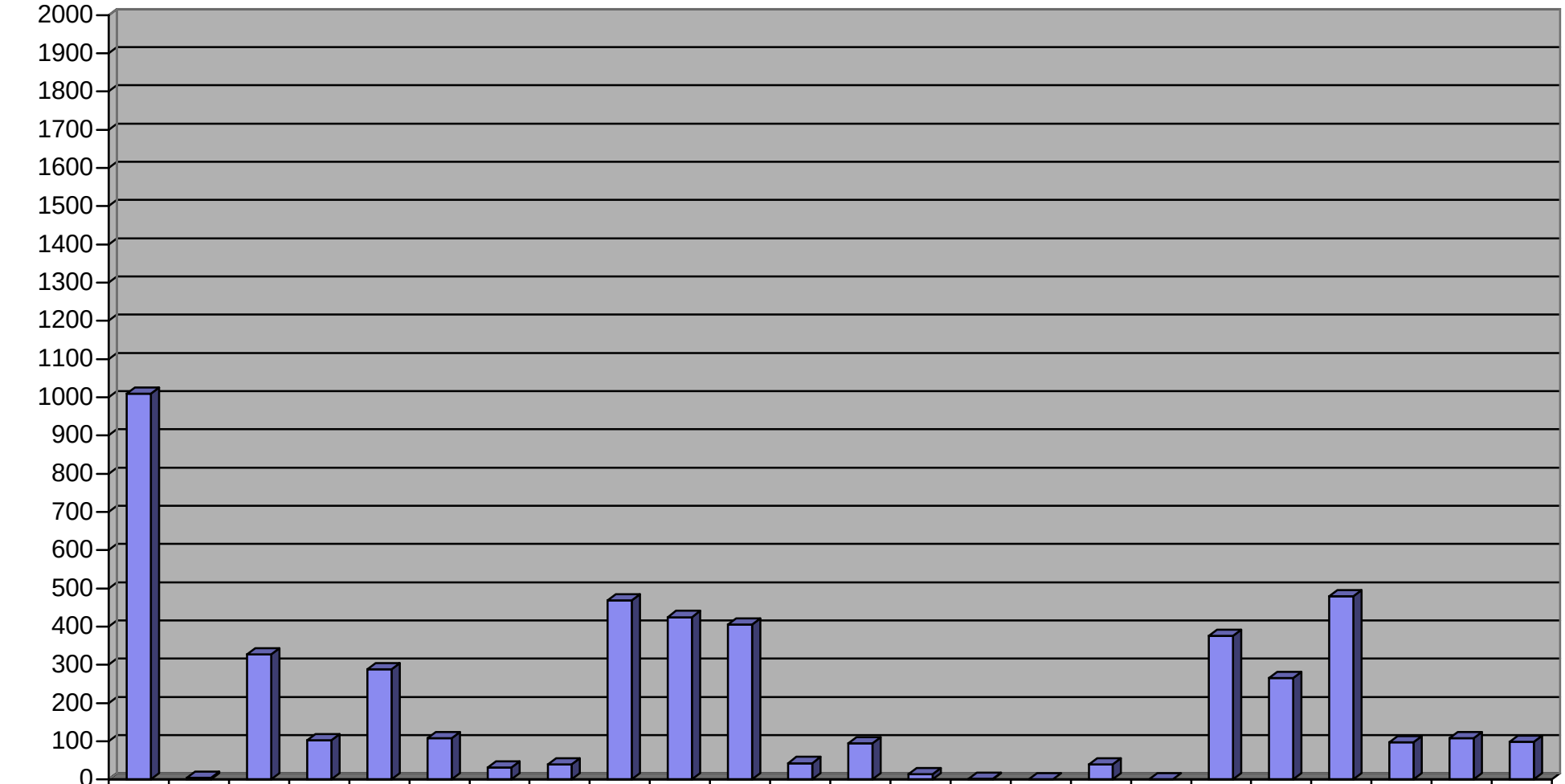
Code	Items
A	Audio
B	Building Materials
C	Clothing / Linen
D	Computer / IT Equipment
E	Communications Equipment / Non IT
F	Office Equipment / Briefcases
G	Food
H	Alcohol / Cigarettes
I	Financial Documents
J	Money
K	Other Documents
L	Domestic / Toys
M	Cosmetics
N	Fuel
O	Garden Equipment
P	Furniture
Q	Jewellery
R	Machinery
S	Sport and Leisure Equipment
T	Tools
U	Vehicle Parts
V	Visual / Photographic
W	Glasses / Sunglasses
X	Vehicle Documents / Licences

Number of Items by Category - Aylesbury Vale



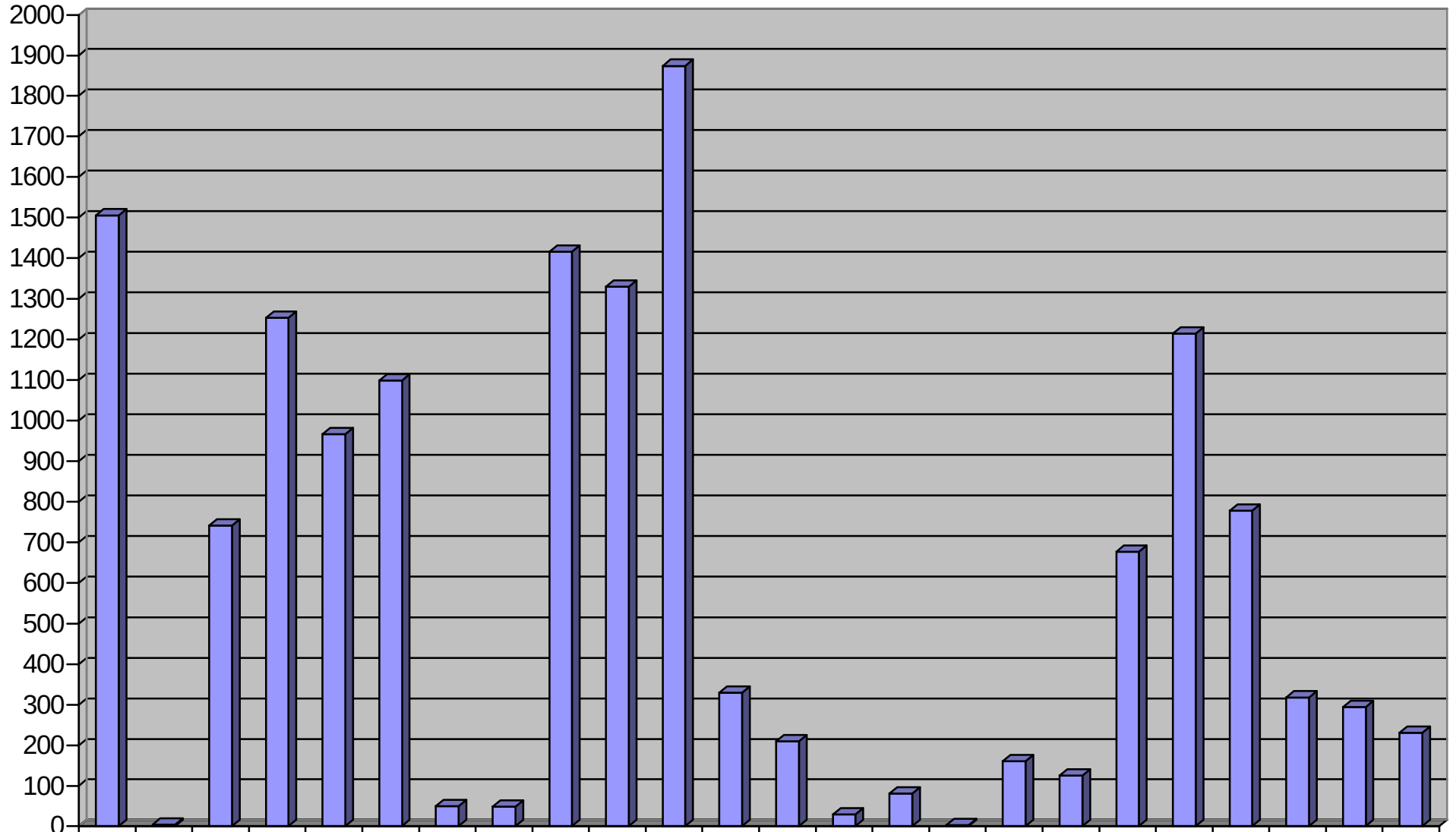
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	808	3	207	183	309	114	21	12	946	546	355	37	38	36	31	1	52	10	223	419	347	88	90	60

Number of Items by Category - Oxford



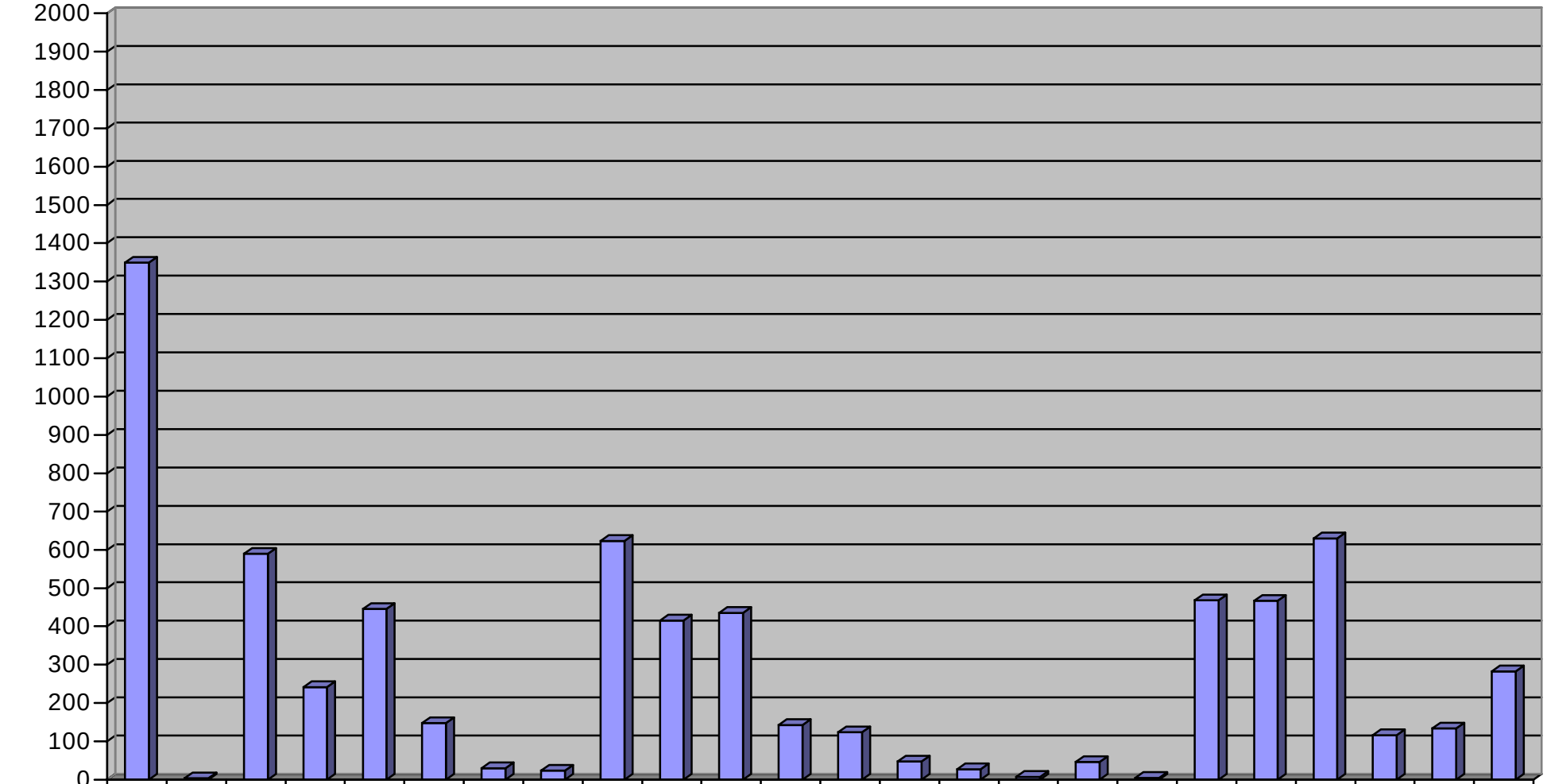
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	1009	5	328	103	289	108	32	40	469	425	405	43	95	14	2	0	40	0	376	265	480	98	108	99

Number of Items by Category - Slough



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	1506	5	742	1254	966	1099	50	49	1416	1330	1874	329	210	29	81	3	161	125	676	1214	778	318	294	231

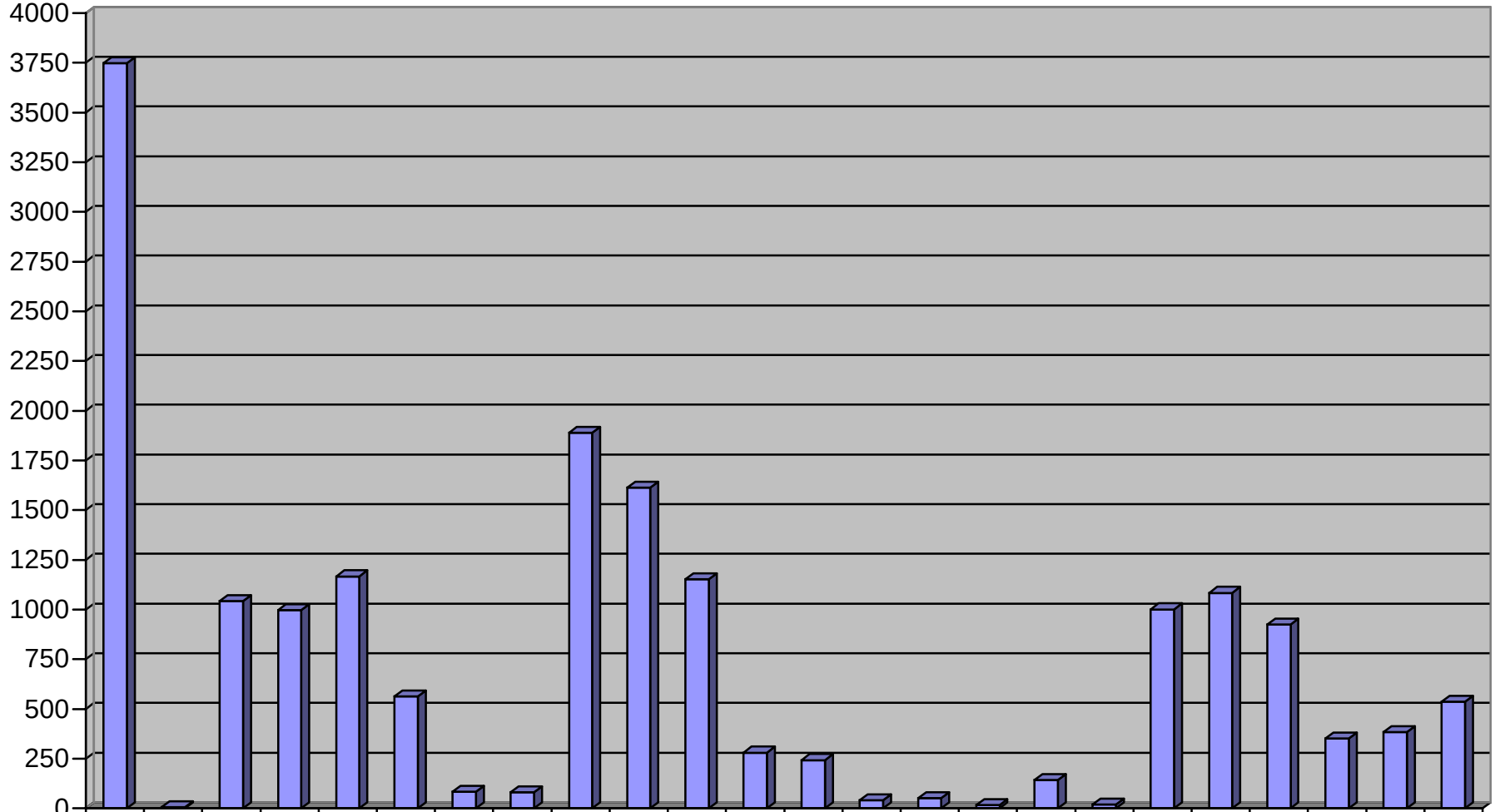
Number of Items by Category - Milton Keynes



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	1349	4	589	242	445	148	30	24	623	416	436	143	124	47	28	8	46	5	468	467	629	116	134	283

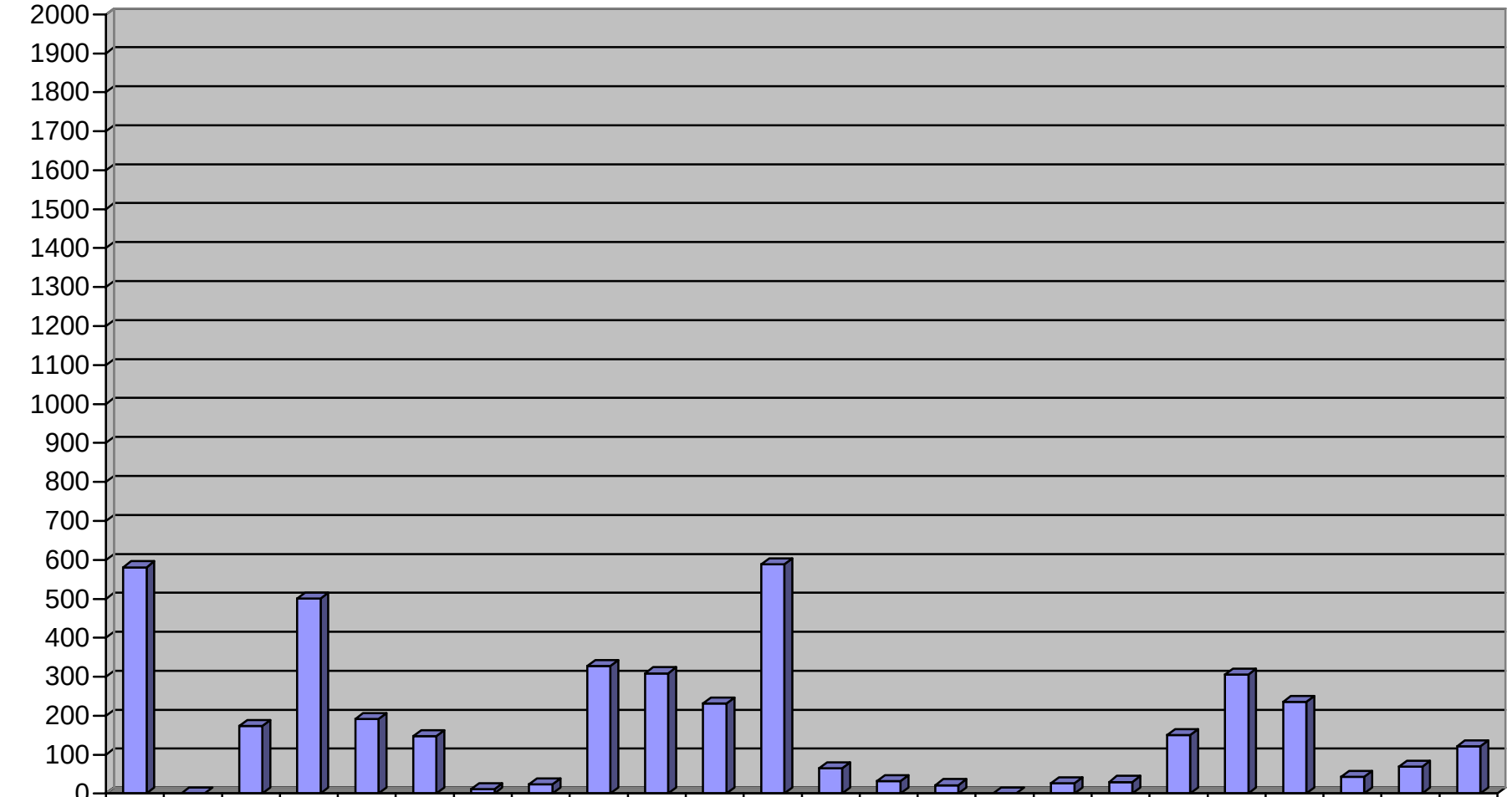
Number of Items by Category - Reading with Wokingham

NOTE DIFFERENT SCALE BECAUSE OF THE VOLUME OF OFFENCES



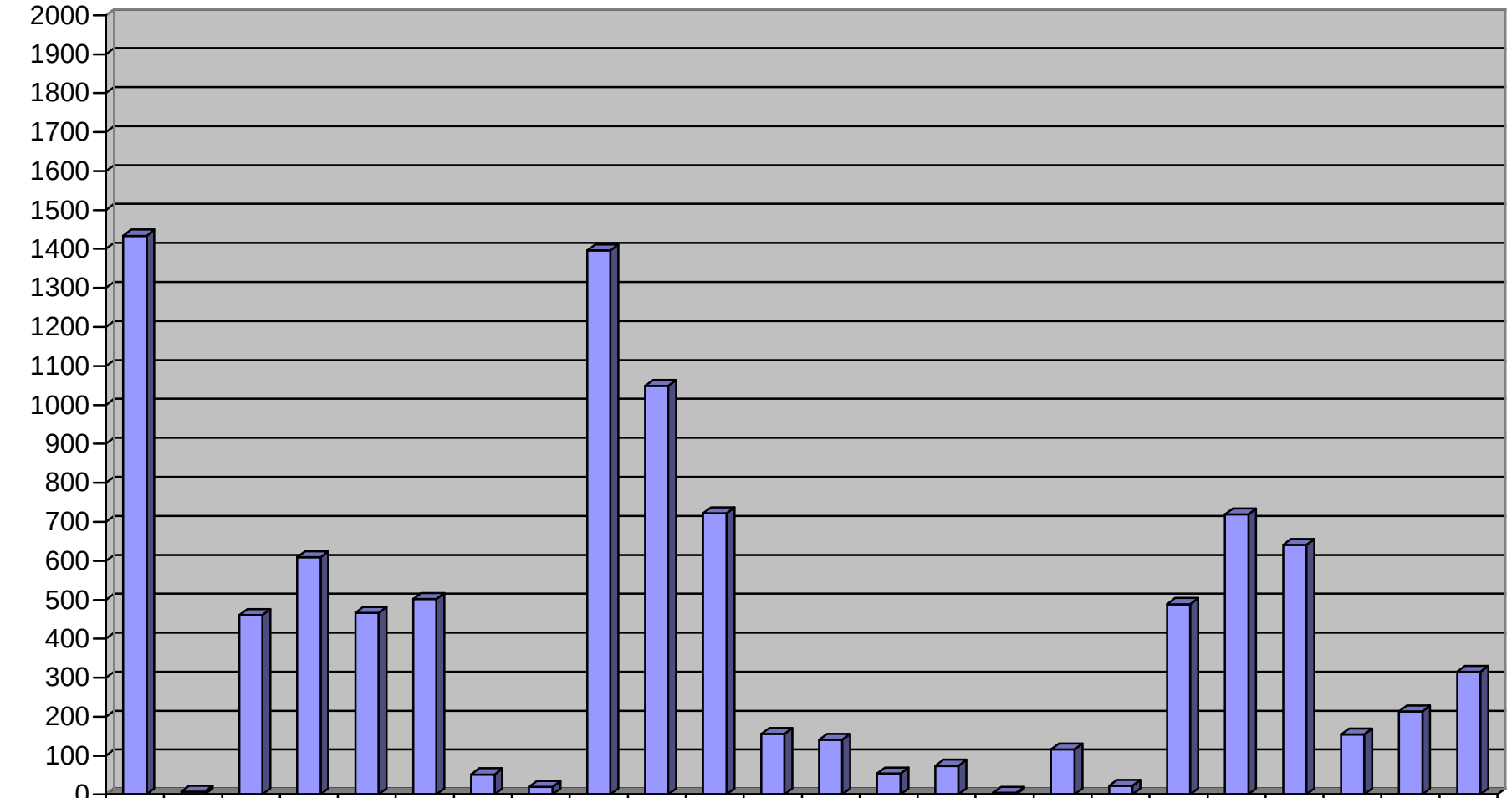
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	3748	6	1043	998	1167	563	84	82	1888	1614	1153	281	243	41	52	17	143	20	1001	1084	924	351	383	537

Number of Items by Category - West Berkshire



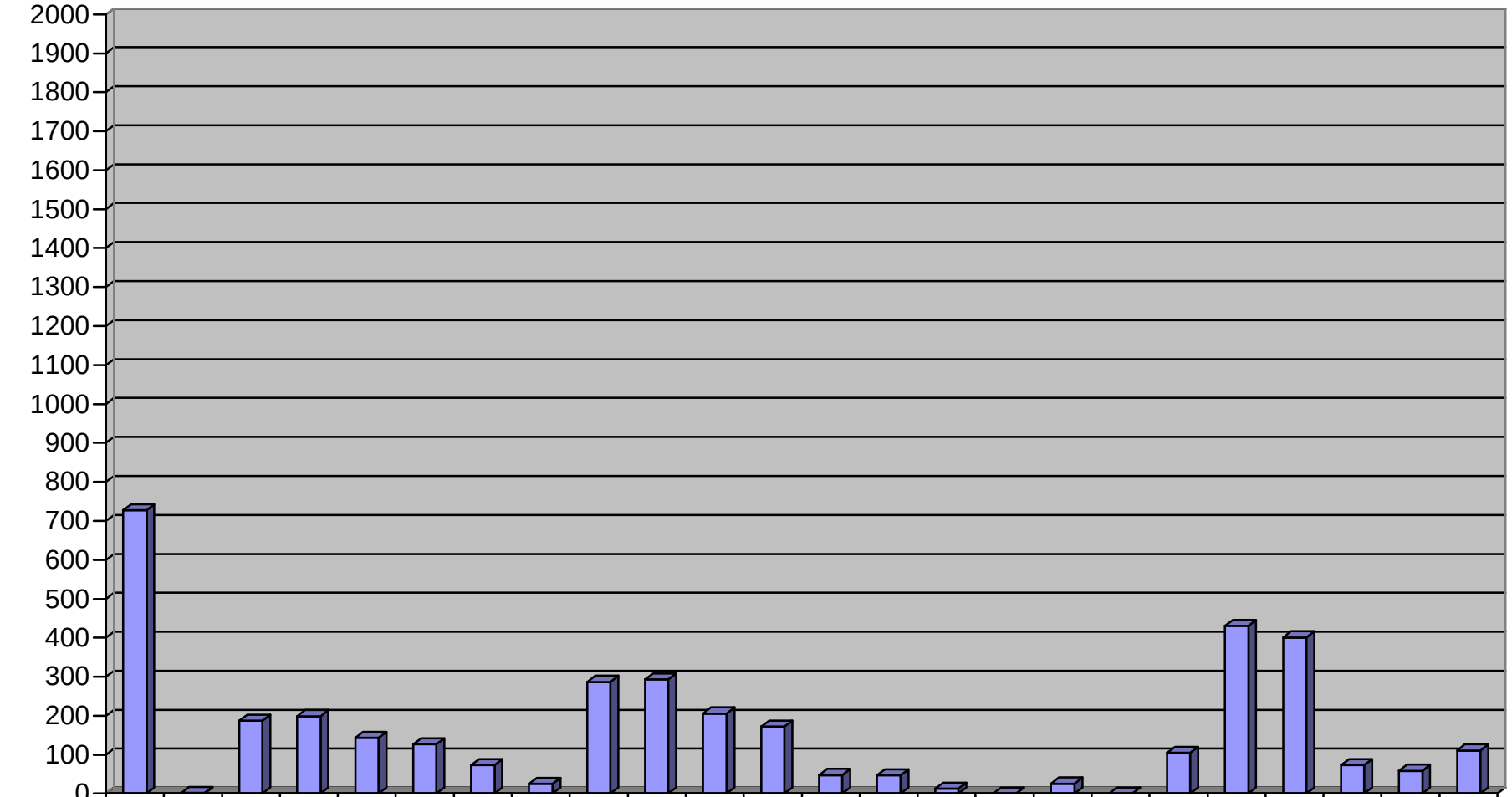
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	581	0	174	501	192	148	12	24	328	309	231	589	65	32	22	0	27	30	150	306	236	43	69	121

Number of Items by Category - Chiltern Vale



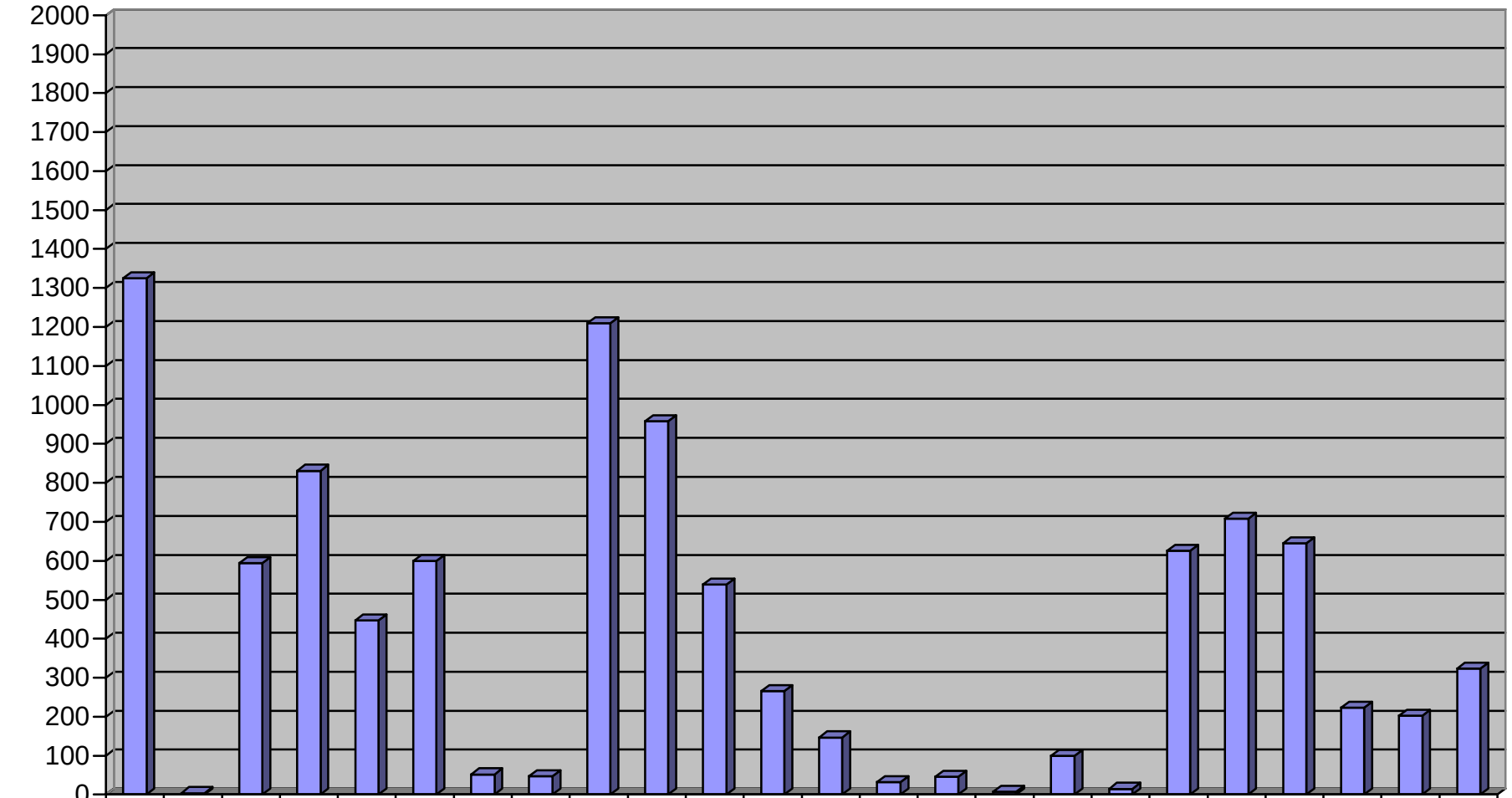
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	1434	7	461	609	466	502	52	20	1396	1049	722	156	141	54	74	5	116	23	489	719	641	154	214	315

Number of Items by Category - Northern Oxon



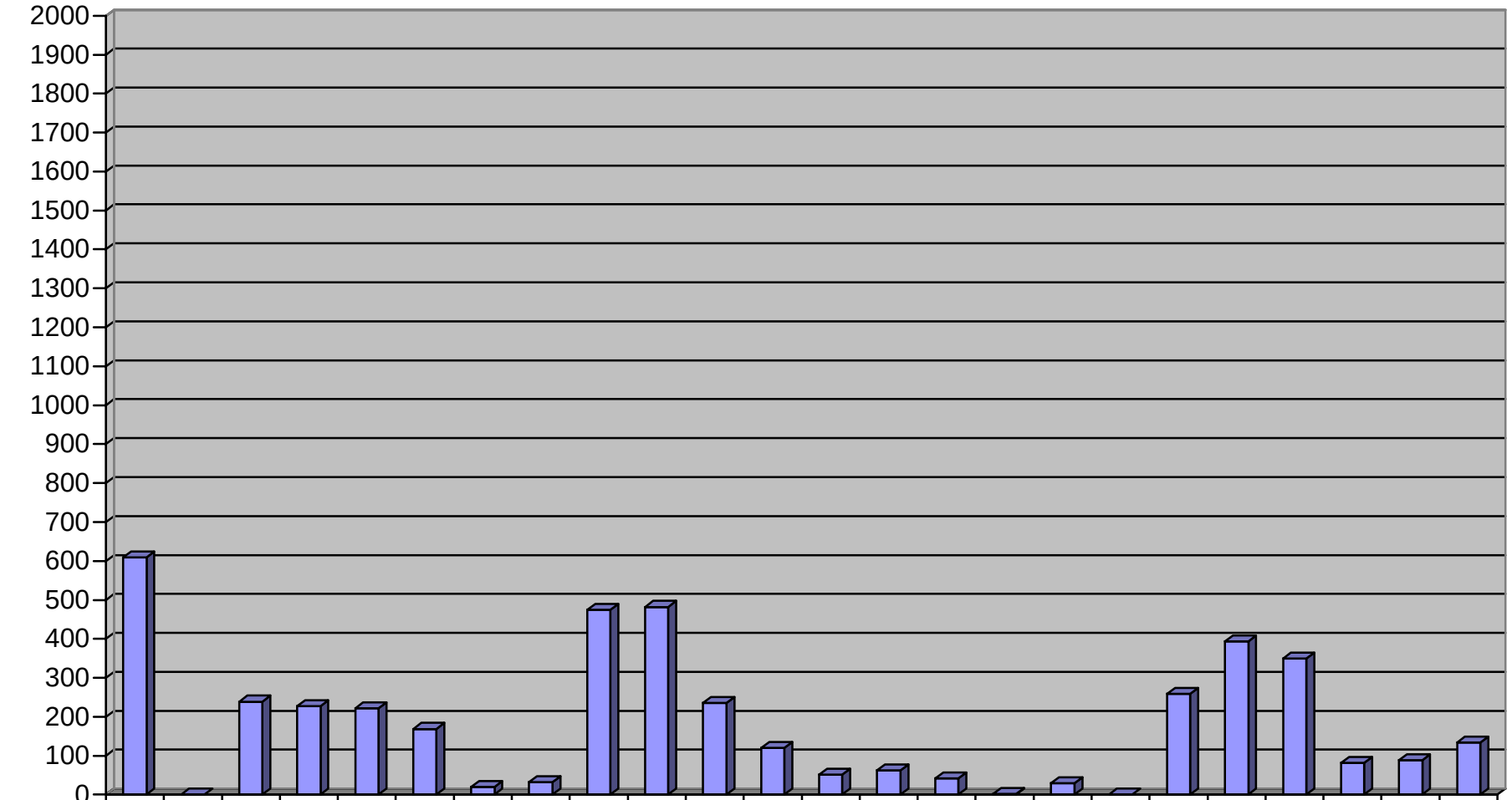
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	727	2	187	199	143	127	73	25	287	293	206	172	48	47	13	0	26	0	105	431	401	73	59	111

Number of Items by Category - Thames Forest



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	1325	4	594	831	447	600	52	47	1209	958	539	266	147	32	46	7	100	15	626	708	645	223	203	323

Number of Items by Category - Southern Oxon



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
TOTAL	609	1	239	227	222	169	20	32	474	482	236	120	51	62	42	2	29	0	259	393	349	82	88	134