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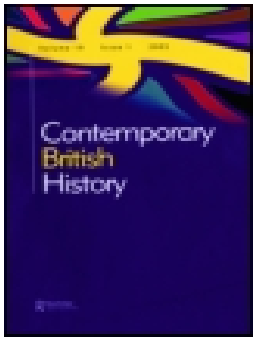
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Thatcher's troops? Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the search for 'ordinary' Thatcherism in 1980s Britain

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ABSTRACT

The spread of Neighbourhood Watch schemes in Britain during the 1980s was remarkable, eventually amounting to 130,000 schemes covering more than 2.5 million households. Neighbourhood Watch's signs, stickers and high-profile television marketing campaigns made the threat of crime and the need for vigilance a highly visible part of everyday experience across 1980s Britain which can still be seen 30 years later. This article examines the values embodied and transmitted by such initiatives and assesses the anxieties and aspirations of schemes' memberships and those reacting to the schemes assessing the extent to which they were manifestation of an 'ordinary' form of Thatcherism.

KEYWORDS

Neighbourhood Watch;
Thatcherism; 1980s Britain;
crime; activism

When visiting her Parliamentary constituency of Finchley in March 1989, Margaret Thatcher addressed a local Neighbourhood Watch scheme and praised its work. Discussing crime prevention, she commented that 'much of the work must come from citizens themselves. There comes a point when the government can't do anything more'. The Prime Minister added that, 'a general can't fight a battle without troops'.¹ Thatcher was not the sole conservative politician that enthused about the Neighbourhood Watch. Douglas Hurd, often representative of conservative traditions distinct from those associated with Thatcher, promoted such schemes while Home Secretary.² In 1988, to mark the bicentenary of the birth of his distant predecessor in the Home Office Robert Peel, Hurd advocated the use of 'Victorian' techniques and instruments which 'reach parts of our society which will always be beyond statutory schemes'; one such initiative was the Neighbourhood Watch.³ As part of its 1987 General Election Manifesto, the Conservative Party took credit for the creation of Neighbourhood Watch and offered continued support to the 'popular anti-crime movement'.⁴

Although Thatcher described 'Neighbourhood Watchers' as her 'troops', working to support the forces of law and order, Hurd suggested that they represented a form of 'active citizenship' which he wished to promote. Tentatively, he indicated that such a form of citizenship might be an organizing concept for a post-Thatcher Conservative project and, more

than that, for a post-Thatcher Britain. Writing to a presumably sceptical readership of the *New Statesman*, Hurd explained that the Conservative Party was 'moving forward from its justified concern with the motor of wealth creation towards a redefinition of how the individual citizen, business and voluntary group can use resources and leisure to help the community'.⁵ When searching for an example of what 'active citizenship' actually meant in practice, both Hurd and John Patten, his Under-Secretary at the Home Office, suggested the Neighbourhood Watch.⁶

The association of Neighbourhood Watch schemes with citizenship was viewed sceptically by the government's critics. This was, supposedly, a form of citizenship overwhelmingly associated with property ownership and wealth, built around the 'successful, self-reliant, enterprising, consuming and property-owning'.⁷ *The New Statesman* wrote that, when defined in such a manner, citizenship became 'a mutual self-protection club' featuring an apparently 'illogical' combination of acquisitive individualism and community spirit. It mockingly observed that Hurd's prime example of 'good citizenship'—the Neighbourhood Watch—was 'a mostly middle-class self-defence league'.⁸ Sociologists and criminologists also challenged the rationale of 'active citizenship' in general as well as the Neighbourhood Watch specifically. Within the *New Times* essays, Stuart Hall and David Held, for example, noted that Hurd's vision of the 'active citizen' presented a highly 'Thatcherite' solution to a lack of cohesion within society which, they suggested, was itself partly a product of the Conservative Government's commitment to individualism and competition. Because of this, they accused the government of peddling an ahistorically defined 'Victorian' notion of charity and self-help that was now 'decked out in the pious homilies of Thatcherism's New Testament'.⁹ Likewise, criminologists objected to the Neighbourhood Watch as it exemplified a form of 'administrative criminology', encouraging an individualistic analysis of crime, retreating from the discussion of causality in favour of foregrounding preventative methods.¹⁰ Alongside such objectors, were civil libertarians and organizations that sought to monitor the conduct of the police and, in the context of a period marked by highly divisive police and community relations, regarded the schemes with, at best, scepticism but more often outright hostility.¹¹

This article makes three linked arguments. First, it demonstrates the shared affinities between Neighbourhood Watch and different forms of conservatism in the 1980s. Neighbourhood Watch could be reconciled with traditional conservative enthusiasm for apolitical voluntary life, long-standing interests in the value of 'little platoons' and new forms of neoliberal governance. Second, it shows that Neighbourhood Watch was just one part of a broader shift in policing methods available during the 1980s which were often associated with conservative and business interests. Third, it assesses why Neighbourhood Watch proved popular but controversial by analysing the types of crime that were emphasised and the communities that were imagined within the schemes.

While there may be good reasons for seeing the Neighbourhood Watch as 'Thatcher's Troops', this was by no means a straightforward process of conscription. In fact, the article exposes the complexity of the schemes. These simultaneously evoked individualism and community, sought to bond communities as well as draw distinctions and limits within and between them. Neighbourhood Watch schemes provided platforms for 'law and order' advocates to share a platform with less combative, community activists eager to go beyond the security of their property and to improve the areas in which they lived. If participants of the Neighbourhood Watch were not quite, as their critics viewed them, straightforward stooges

to a Thatcherite project, neither did they function as the police or government hoped. In communities and streets, initiatives took on much more haphazard forms than their designers imagined while continuing to evocate assumptions with which their promoters were largely, if not entirely, comfortable.¹² Moreover, while pervasive, there was a thinness to the forms of activism associated with the Neighbourhood Watch which, in part, explains their persistence. Nonetheless, even the tacit acceptance of such schemes and a range of other non-state security initiatives reshaped homes and streets. Drawing attention to this 'ordinary' feature of British life suggests a period which was not just about ideological transformation but was also a time where certain assumptions, implied understandings and lukewarm endorsements can be glimpsed within the everyday even if when they were not wholeheartedly embraced.

Neighbourhood Watch and Thatcherism

As this article shows, there was something in both the aspirations of the Watch's enthusiasts and the criticisms of its sceptics. What was apparent, nonetheless, was the dramatic expansion of the Neighbourhood Watch during the 1980s and early 1990s. That the emergence and early operation of the Neighbourhood Watch was, as this article demonstrates, highly controversial and relatively divisive, contrasts with the banality and omnipresence of the schemes on the streets of Britain today. Quantitatively Neighbourhood Watch was enormously successful.¹³ The first Neighbourhood Watch scheme, called Home Watch, was established in Mollington, a small village in Cheshire, in 1982. By 1987 there were 42,000 schemes (each required at least two houses, but often included more) covering 2.5 million households; the British Crime Survey of 1992 reported that 20 per cent of UK households were enrolled in the schemes.¹⁴ An entire sub-genre of 'self-help' community watchdog organisation including Vehicle Watch, Taxi Watch, Pub Watch, Boat Watch, Shop Watch, Caravan Watch and even Sheep Watch were all created during the 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁵ *The London Illustrated News* noted the prevalence of the schemes, recording that the 'rash of orange spots spreading across the face of our streets' was one of the 'most remarkable visual changes' in London.¹⁶

Existing accounts of Neighbourhood Watch schemes have often sought to examine their effectiveness and determine accompanying policy implications.¹⁷ By contrast, this article reflects on what the Neighbourhood Watch shows about citizenship, community, values and political culture during the 1980s. Plotting the Neighbourhood Watch onto existing ways of thinking about community and politics in the 1980s is not straightforward. Certainly, the Neighbourhood Watch did, as its critics suggest, reflect and promote affinities which might be comfortably aligned with common understandings of 'Thatcherism'. In so doing, it shared qualities and assumptions with neoliberal forms of governance as well as more traditional conservatism. Although neoliberalism remains somewhat hazily defined, its developments inadequately historicized and its relationship with Thatcherism often ambiguously sketched out, Neighbourhood Watch is suggestive of its diffusion in wider spaces beyond domains strictly conceptualised as economic or financial. As criminologists interested in neoliberalism have pointed out, trends in crime prevention were shifting from a state-managed 'social service' paradigm to one of risk-management, but these were not mutually exclusive.¹⁸ Neighbourhood Watch was a site where neoliberal thinking about crime prevention combined with more traditional forms of conservatism, permeating, albeit unevenly, into everyday life. It incorporated a hypersensitivity about crime and a desire for

'law and order' characteristic of populist zealots eager to restore the 'little platoons' of Edmund Burke, but was equally demonstrative of an expanded concern for management and control of 'risk' during the late twentieth century.¹⁹

Neighbourhood Watch was suggestive of a privatization of crime prevention from state-dominated models marked by the expansive proliferation of surveillance mechanisms which, according to theorists, have characterized a shift from a 'disciplinary' to 'control' society.²⁰ The parts of the state supported by the Neighbourhood Watch—namely the police and the rule of law—were vital to traditional forms of conservatism but also remained crucial within schemes of neoliberal governance.²¹ Moreover, the emphasis on personal responsibility within the Neighbourhood Watch and its role, in a highly literal sense, as a mechanism of surveillance 'designed in' to everyday existence, suggests it shared characteristics with common markers denoting neoliberal regimes of governmentality.²² Neighbourhood Watch offered a vehicle through which the 'ethos of neoliberal politics' allowed choice, personal responsibility and control over one's fate to be articulated through arguments about collective community.²³

But at the same time, these features cannot adequately explain the attachment of individuals and communities to the Neighbourhood Watch. It appealed because it blended traditional interests in civic activism as a mechanism for strengthening communities with arguments that self-help and voluntary action imposed order, and then reduced these into a point of broad agreement—the desire to stop household burglaries—which was packaged in a form of politics that was in keeping with broader shifts in political behaviour during the late twentieth century.²⁴

Following such an argument, this was a form of neoliberal politics very much distinct from the worlds of elite academics, the galaxy of think tanks defined as part of a transnational 'new right' or even, the economic institutions of global governance typically identified as the sites crucial to the 'economic counter revolution' of the late twentieth century.²⁵ Rather, Neighbourhood Watch schemes incorporated something more hum-drum, banal, ambiguous; an 'ordinary', possibly clumsy—but nonetheless pervasive—form of Thatcherism. Schemes' self-projection of themselves as 'non-political'—a highly powerful political statement in itself—demonstrated the ways in which conservative practices could be found within indefinite political spaces beyond parties, think tanks and pressure groups and were, perhaps, more powerful but less certain because of this.²⁶ In this respect, parallels can be drawn with the ways in which associational life permeated an informal sense of conservatism during the inter-war.²⁷ To echo Alison Light's work on interwar literary culture, the Neighbourhood Watch offered a non-elitist 'common sense' and a scarcely discernible politics that sustained an informal conservatism.

While theorists of neoliberalism are mapping out its effect in 'economizing' non-economic spheres and the dissemination of financial logics into the practices of lived experience, adopting Light's approach might help explain how far and, perhaps why, British culture and society has been receptive to such initiatives.²⁸ As Joe Moran points out, Thatcherism was constructed around the creation of a normative 'everyday' whose iconic figures were 'home-owning, car-owning neo-suburbanites'.²⁹ Moran is correct to point out that we should look for the historical change in the most ordinary phenomenon, but the politics of the ordinary is also unpredictable and difficult to control. In this case, the Neighbourhood Watch did not entirely conform to the aspirations of politicians, the police or even scheme members, its embedded individualism could never quite escape a longing for community, however problematically defined.

Neighbourhood Watch did not simply regurgitate the law and order hysteria of the tabloid media. Instead, it offered a form of lower case conservatism for the ‘politically unselfconscious’ which was simultaneously recognisable through time, but also reflective of the cultural, sociological, economic and technological contours of the ‘new times’ of the 1980s.³⁰ If the Conservative Party’s enthusiasm for Neighbourhood Watch was not at all surprising—after all, it offered a form of civil society engagement embraced by both ‘old’ and ‘new’ right—it is also worth stressing that Neighbourhood Watch members were by no means necessarily members of the Conservative Party, nor were they inevitably Conservative voters.³¹ What they did demonstrate, however, were practices, behaviours, aspirations, fears and anxieties which might help understand the electoral hegemony of the Conservative Party and the broader acceptance of the increased individualisation said to characterise late twentieth and early twenty-first-century Britain.

While the prevalence of the Neighbourhood Watch was, and continues to be, very noticeable across the streets of Britain, this has not, unfortunately, been matched within the archive. This article makes use of the archives of organisations committed to the critical examination of the operation of Neighbourhood Watch schemes including the various police monitoring committees and police research groups which circulated around the Greater London Council (GLC) during the 1980s as well as the records civil liberties and police monitoring groups including the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL). In addition, it builds on the numerous police, sociological and criminological reports on the operations of schemes.

Less effectively documented in archival sources is the work of schemes on a local basis, in part because of their very banality. This is problematic, because schemes were specifically designed to allow local interpretations.³² This article does, however, draw on the sole substantial archival record of a functioning Neighbourhood Watch scheme, deposited by members of a Wolverhampton (West Midlands Police G3) steering committee. The G3 (which referenced a West Midlands Police boundary) Neighbourhood Watch Wolverhampton Steering and Coordinating committee included 204 schemes and covered 9,000 houses. According to the West Midlands Police, this represented one of the region’s most successful initiatives.³³

Neighbourhood Watch and new forms of policing

The growth of Neighbourhood Watch in Britain during the 1980s was considerable even within a context of the sustained popularity of voluntary action in twentieth-century Britain.³⁴ Across the country, co-ordinators collected money from residents for the erection of signs and placed stickers on windows and doors as the Neighbourhood Watch became ‘ordinary’.³⁵ Its logo was, arguably, as symbolic of 1980s’ activism as more radical iconography normally associated with social movement protests of the era. Demonstrative of such a point, a 1988 routine by the comedian Linda Smith observed that the two most prominent stickers on her former left-wing boyfriend’s window said ‘No to Nuclear Power’ and ‘Neighbourhood Watch’. She observed that it was the latter which was ‘was the one [sticker] we’ve all got, let’s face it, we all like Neighbourhood Watch’.³⁶

For all of Neighbourhood Watch’s novelty, it showed some continuity with earlier crime prevention methods. In terms of security guidance, it offered similar advice to that previously circulated by Crime Prevention Panels which had been a feature of British policing since the 1960s.³⁷ Guidance on home protection circulated within Neighbourhood Watch newsletters

featured material from earlier Home Office campaigns and there was a cross-fertilization of household security guidance across different prevention initiatives. Going back further, an increasingly prudential attitude to property security existed prior to the late-twentieth century 'risk' society; home security devices and insurance schemes were markedly popular during the inter-war years.³⁸ Even so, there were shifts in both the scale and the agents responsible for crime prevention during the 1980s. Crime Prevention Panels were, for example, specifically designed to work with community leaders from local organizations. They were different in scope from the Neighbourhood Watch which aspired to be a mass-member association creating new forms of associational life without piggy-backing on previously existing bodies and already visible community members.³⁹

Moreover, the identification of community and citizenship with crime prevention alongside the emergence of multiple new and distinct forms of non-state action directed towards tackling crime were indicative of changes in tempo and scale of crime prevention during the 1980s.⁴⁰ Neighbourhood Watch was part of a wave of new policing methods seeking input from different agents including communities, businesses, individuals and voluntary organisations. Many of these had links with the Conservative Party.⁴¹ These included Crimestoppers, set up by Michael Ashcroft (later Lord Ashcroft) which featured Dennis Thatcher as a trustee and Crime Concern which was run by the Conservative politician Stephen Norris.⁴² These organizations, along with the television programme *Crimewatch* (1986) offered a range of new platforms for the 'fight against crime' to manifest during the 1980s.⁴³ Somewhat predictably taking such ideas as far as they might possibly go, the Adam Smith Institute called for deregulated private security forces to take over neighbourhood policing entirely away from the state.⁴⁴ As has been well documented, the 1980s also witnessed a significant expansion of private security technologies including CCTV and burglar alarms and a substantial growth in the security industry took place during the decade.⁴⁵ In many cases, it is difficult to disentangle the interest in new forms of crime prevention from their protagonists' alternative political, cultural and economic concerns. Most obvious of all of these examples, the Adam Smith Institute was a long-standing advocate of free market economics, but Crime Concern also allowed Norris to remain politically active after he lost his Parliamentary seat in 1987, and Ashcroft was a leading shareholder in one of the UK's largest private security alarm companies. Even *Crimewatch* balanced its stated aim of solving crimes with conforming to certain broadcasting requirements by selecting cases from the 'popular end of the market' which could then be reconstructed dramatically.⁴⁶

Although Neighbourhood Watch has its own somewhat 'quaint' foundation story, which places the schemes' roots in a pilot initiative called Home Watch based in Mollington, Cheshire, it was only widely introduced after a Metropolitan Police tour observing community crime prevention schemes in Washington D.C., New York, Detroit, and Seattle which also featured discussions with police from Orlando, Florida. The idea that the Conservative Government's model of 'active citizenship' had certain roots in forms of community policing that emerged out of the civil rights movements of 1960s USA and the response to the rape and murder of Kitty Genovese in New York is somewhat surprising and perhaps reflective of some of the complex origins of neoliberalism.⁴⁷ Those schemes, which emphasised the creation of democratic checks on policing powers and forms of accountability, were, however, attached to far more radical visions of police and community relations. Downplaying such elements within the British schemes, the Metropolitan Police largely focused on the US schemes' capacity to reduce the number of burglaries taking place.⁴⁸

Neighbourhood Watch, crime and prevention

Neighbourhood Watch largely emphasised the protection of homes, promoted home security devices and advised on safe parking. It offered consumer advice on security systems.⁴⁹ Within Wolverhampton, its priorities were the reduction of domestic crime, especially burglary.⁵⁰ The G3 Group's Chairman, George Paddock, wrote that Neighbourhood Watch 'offers much corporate security and individual peace of mind from that most detestable of crimes—house burglary'.⁵¹ Its priorities can be seen in a 'checklist of suspicious persons' produced by the West Midlands Police which listed various 'suspicious scenarios'; of the 14 described, 11 related to theft.⁵²

Moreover, Neighbourhood Watch schemes emphasised personal responsibility for crime prevention. A steering committee member, Eileen Ward-Birch, wrote in Wolverhampton's *Express and Star* that 'there is so much we can do to help ourselves, without too much expense'.⁵³ Schemes arranged for property marking, the etching of vehicle registrations onto car number plates, they organized Crime Prevention Officers' surveys and circulated ultra-violet pens to post-code household items.⁵⁴ Evocative of an ethos of consumerism embedded within schemes, they sought to secure homes from conmen or 'bogus officials' by circulating lists of recommended roofers, carpenters, plumbers, brick layers, decorators and repairman.⁵⁵

A Home Office advertising campaign costing over £1.5 million promoting crime prevention initiatives launched in 1984 exemplified the focus on property, privacy and possession.⁵⁶ The award-winning advert featured a number of magpies breaking into an affluent-looking, semi-detached home which was well stocked with consumer goods including electronics, clothing, jewellery and perfume.⁵⁷ Having ransacked the house, the magpies ignored such items, eventually pilfering a couple of items of women's underwear. This was, then, as symbolic of a fear of lost possession as an invasion of privacy and disruption of domesticity brought about by criminality. Criminals were depicted as non-human, less motivated by material need and more interested in mischief or, even, perversion.⁵⁸ The advert's conclusion suggested that home security measures and membership of the Neighbourhood Watch would have stopped the magpie-criminals and emphasised that responsibility for crime prevention should come as much from those owning such possessions as from the police. This was a subtle but significance departure in emphasis from the arguments embedded in the earlier Crime Prevention Panels which stressed that crime prevention meant 'the removal of causes of crime and the conditions in which crime can flourish'.⁵⁹

Because of such an emphasis, Neighbourhood Watch did little to accommodate alternative, more holistic models of community policing that were being discussed during the 1980s. A Crime Prevention Unit established by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) in 1979, for example, offered a more expansive conceptualisation of crime prevention. Across 30 estates, NACRO developed community action plans aiming to improve physical and environmental conditions. These tackled amenities, services and emphasised the construction of communication channels between councils and residents.⁶⁰ Encouraging interventions from teachers, architects and planners, housing managers, doctors, health visitors and employers, NACRO wished, in contrast to the Neighbourhood Watch, to foreground the role of professionals in reducing crime.⁶¹ Although many NACRO recommendations appeared in the Home Office's Crime Prevention circular of 1984 and it was consulted widely on crime prevention during the 1970s and 1980s, there is no evidence to

suggest its endeavours were incorporated or entered into the planning and thinking about the Neighbourhood Watch.⁶²

Similar limitations fed into the arguments mustered against Neighbourhood Watch by its critics, especially those within inner-city London. The Community Alliance for Police Accountability in Tower Hamlets commented that any 'bars and bolts' strategy had to be pursued alongside the provision of greater resource to local government as well as the deployment of grants which might allow householders to improve their own personal security.⁶³ Such a position was shared by both NACRO and the GLC.⁶⁴ Islington Council even went as far as starting a 'Crimewatch scheme' deliberately conceptualised as an alternative to Neighbourhood Watch. Emphasising self-help, community policing and improved home security, while simultaneously demanding greater state resource for lighting improvements, neighbourhood arbitration mechanisms for negotiating with police and government, as well as investment in youth facilities, this alternative was more aligned with the spirit of activist local government and was, subsequently, to be structured around a form of elected, community leadership.⁶⁵ In contrast with Thatcher's suggestion that 'much of the work must come from citizens themselves', those operating around the GLC argued that it was the government that was ultimately responsible for crime prevention. This meant the provision of community improvement funds and, in contrast with the geographic distribution of the Neighbourhood Watch, required a sharper focus on high-crime areas.

It is understandable that concerns about Neighbourhood Watch were raised by those sceptical about the Thatcher governments and the police. As suggested above, both in Wolverhampton, and elsewhere, it emphasised the personal protection of property while a consumerist element became embedded into the operation of schemes. Members could receive reductions in insurance premiums; one company offered a plan called 'Familyguard' advertised as 'The Insurance Policy for Neighbourhood Watch'. This was designed to reward members for 'their extra vigilance and community spirit'.⁶⁶ Many of the crime prevention initiatives of the 1980s, including Neighbourhood Watch, were associated with, and funded by insurance companies while the advertisements of these and home security companies commonly featured in its newsletters.⁶⁷ When a National Neighbourhood Watch Association was eventually created during the 1990s, it was sponsored by Norwich Union which was at that point one of the UK's largest insurance providers.⁶⁸ At times, it was these agents which seemed to lavish the most attention on the Neighbourhood Watch. In Wolverhampton, co-ordinators were, in the words of Ward-Birch, frequently 'targeted by a load of commercial people wanting to fix our locks'. Sales representatives would assemble at bigger meetings, seeking a captive audience of individuals concerned with home security. New crime prevention schemes went hand-in-hand with new marketing and sales opportunities of often individualised, property protection technologies including locks and alarms as well as innovations like 'smart water' or etching schemes, which allowed possessions to be discretely marked with post-codes.⁶⁹

In London, the Neighbourhood Watch's association with insurance schemes and private security companies added to the GLC's Police Support Unit and other police monitoring organisations' hostility. To these critics, the influence of insurance companies suggested a prioritisation of the types of crime covered by standard household protection policies. This, they argued, implied that the Neighbourhood Watch excluded householders from inner cities who were less likely to afford private security devices who might, to make matters worse, also receive increased insurance premiums because of the absence of schemes.⁷⁰ An

Independent Police Committee in Haringey noted that ‘Neighbourhood Watch is not designed to combat the types of crime which most put people in fear, i.e. ‘mugging’, attacks on women and racist attacks.’⁷¹ Such scepticism was valid; many types of criminal behaviour went unmentioned within Neighbourhood Watch publicity and critics were especially concerned with the absence of discussion on domestic abuse and racist attacks, for example.

Despite Thatcher’s suggestion that the Neighbourhood Watch was designed to allow ‘citizens to do the work themselves’ and that the government ‘could only do so much’, it also created a consumerist effect on state resources, complicating its association with a supposed Thatcherite retreat from the state. Its protagonists claimed a type of ‘local expert’ status which bolstered their capacity to make special demands on the police service, almost as a reward for involvement.⁷² At the first nationwide conference of Neighbourhood Watch Associations in 1986, complaints were made about inadequate police involvement. Its London coordinator commented on members’ tendency to ‘nag and nag until we have got something done.’⁷³ In Wolverhampton, Neighbourhood Watch demanded extra beat officers, funding for newsletters and increased communication with the force as well as use of the police station club for social functions which were justified through using the rhetoric of the ‘tax payer.’⁷⁴

As such, Neighbourhood Watch followed a trend for consumers to make demands not just about goods but also public services.⁷⁵ Because of this, the London Borough of Camden warned that schemes’ consumerist approaches potentially excluded ‘working class areas’ in favour of ‘articulate and organised’ communities with the necessary social, cultural, economic and political capital to comfortably engage with the police force.⁷⁶ Despite this, members struggled to create productive relationships with the police. In attempting this, Eileen Ward-Birch, the Secretary of the G3 group in Wolverhampton, became frustrated by the police’s lack of interest. She complained about an absence of communication, commenting that the police showed scant interest in listening to members, that schemes were forgotten, observing that ‘they [the police] promise you this and that, but they are all pie-crust promises as my mother used to say—easily broken.’⁷⁷

Part of the problem was that in broadening the parameters of the schemes, members ended up demanding greater resources from the state. The Home Office did not respond favourably to such requests, writing to the Wolverhampton group ‘that the Government does not provide funds for Neighbourhood Watch schemes or their projects. This is because they are voluntary, and as such the local community should be encouraged to make sure that they have the commitment and resources—necessary for their success’. It suggested schemes should obtain ‘private sponsorship from local businesses.’⁷⁸ In contrast with the ideas behind the initiatives, the ‘active citizen’ continued to make demands on the state for funding and intervention. If Neighbourhood Watch members were troops to Thatcher’s general, they also exemplified the trend for foot soldiers to question the strategies of their commanding officers.

Neighbourhood Watch also owed something to the need for authorities to draw appropriate boundaries delineating the public’s role in policing at a time when this seemed increasingly complicated. In particular, the police were eager to discourage vigilantism in the name of ‘community policing’. Neighbourhood Watch provided a model of community engagement which stopped potential transgressions of order which might be justified by an interest in ‘community policing.’⁷⁹ Certain Neighbourhood Watch groups had a capacity to go somewhat off-piste. An East Ham member, Alan Blows, planned to take on gangs in the street and in

Tower Hamlets one 'enthusiast', a skin-headed young man called John Tribe, became something of a poster boy for organisations concerned about the Neighbourhood Watch. Tribe who had undertaken 'self-defence training' to prepare for the role, patrolled tower blocks with a crime fighting partner and walkie-talkie.⁸⁰ Indeed, the leader of the SDP, David Owen, resigned as patron from the London Association of Neighbourhood Watch in 1989 after Blows published a booklet urging people to fight back against muggers.⁸¹ Blows' guide to the Neighbourhood Watch not only advised on policing methods 'for the streets', but also featured anecdotes about tackling criminals in the manner precisely discouraged by the police and Home Office. He wrote of members 'combing the areas looking for villains', preventing muggings of old ladies and confronting prostitutes and their prospective clients.⁸² Ward-Birch, a far less pugnacious member, warned the Chief Constable of the West Midlands Police about members' capacity to extend their activities beyond their strict areas of concern after learning about a scheme in Coventry where 'coordinators go to the victims of crime and interrogate them'.⁸³ The Wolverhampton group discussed patrolling the streets at night as part of a planned 'Operation Night Watch', although it could not ultimately secure enough volunteers for this to take place.⁸⁴

Although some transgressions did occur, Neighbourhood Watch largely served to limit certain 'law and order' tendencies by offering organisational structures with which the police and Home Office were comfortable. When a local 'Street Watch' organisation was set up in Balsall Heath, Birmingham in 1995, for example, a Neighbourhood Watch model was eventually introduced to define the parameters for this organisation which had sought to 'walk' the area with the aim of reducing the amount of sex workers in a notorious 'red light district'. After lengthy consultation, guidelines for the campaign and training sessions on personal safety and public rights were introduced.⁸⁵ Similarly, when Curtis Sliwa attempted to introduce the red-beret sporting vigilante group, The Guardian Angels to London from New York in 1989—an endeavour which ended with Sliwa getting stabbed outside a London Youth Club—the Metropolitan Police arranged a meeting at Kensington Police Station to urge 'the Angels' to follow a more orthodox path and become Special Constables instead.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the Home Office did not think the Neighbourhood Watch was an appropriate vehicle for dealing with certain types of crime when, for example, dealing with cases of domestic abuse, it sought to engage with Victims Support Units or more feminist inspired women's refuges when tackling domestic violence.⁸⁷

'For ordinary people'

Extending Neighbourhood Watch's parameters was not the norm, but even when this occurred they showed that individualism was informed by a sense of community, however problematic. Schemes offered forms of 'bonding social capital', incorporating various humdrum or banal initiatives to enrich the communities in which they were based. Ward-Birch wrote, 'we foster community spirit' and the official guide to schemes noted that groups brought neighbours together for the first time in years and tackled shared problems like fly-tipping, pollution, noise and street litter, it noted that dances, dinners and jumble sales were held to raise funds and that these 'suddenly these acquire their own impetus'.⁸⁸ The Wolverhampton scheme encouraged such banal activities as persuading a McDonalds restaurant in the city centre to provide more bins.⁸⁹

Yet, this 'bonding' had boundaries. A letter from George Paddock to the Police requesting resources in Wolverhampton demonstrated the tensions within Wolverhampton's Neighbourhood Watch. He wrote, 'it seems incredible that modest funds cannot be made available to it [his Committee] now to support efforts by the community, within the community, to reduce crime and enrich community relations ... to say we are disillusioned is nearer the mark'. But within the letter, he also articulated a vision of citizenship with which he felt comfortable:

As a married man of some 63 years of age, having shouldered my musket for 8 ½ years both in and after the 1939–1945 war (like my father before me in the Great War) as many of our contemporaries did, and having paid my whack, and having brought up two children as law abiding citizens, and never falling foul of the law myself, I look round my native town and see vast sums of money being spent on community oriented projects, which seem to abound in those areas heavily populated by ethnic groups—to what end I gently enquire and from where cometh the money? I say all this, because to my simple mind if money can be made available for such endeavours where it cannot be certain improved community relations will emerge, why not spend a little of that fund on Neighbourhood Watch where it is generally acknowledged much good in the community now arises. After all, the money comes out of the same sock.⁹⁰

Ostensibly an appeal for funds, Paddock articulated a conceptualisation of citizenship based on historic and personal military service, family-life, obeying the law and paying taxes. The letter also hinted at those excluded from his version of citizenship. The sharp contrast between his 'native town' and the 'community oriented projects' from 'areas heavily populated by ethnic groups' where tax-payers money was being wasted was indicative of such exclusions.

Paddock was not alone in suggesting that Neighbourhood Watch schemes were more appropriate for some than others. The Metropolitan Police's press release and guide to schemes announced that Neighbourhood Watch was for 'ordinary home and car owners'.⁹¹ It was significant that Neighbourhood Watch members seemingly embraced the idea of the 'ordinariness'. The use of the term 'ordinary' was, as Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite have pointed out, a deliberate and common feature of Thatcher's political language, suggesting a popular constituency grounded in a rhetorical construction of 'hard-working respectability and family-centred individualism' which had the effect of destabilising the centrality of class to political identities.⁹² Eileen Ward-Birch's comment that 'Neighbourhood Watch is a community-based organisation set up by ordinary people to help keep themselves and their neighbours safe from the criminal element without resorting to "vigilante" style tactics' fitted official conceptualisations of the schemes.⁹³ Thatcher herself described Neighbourhood Watchers as 'ordinary folk [who work] in conjunction with the police to keep close watch and see if there's anything suspicious'.⁹⁴

Claiming to represent the 'ordinary' was, however, highly problematic, creating an imagined community that did not necessarily incorporate all and encompassed various societal divisions. Sceptics, such as the Libertarian Research and Education Trust, saw great significance in the Metropolitan Police's emphasis on 'owners' and its association of the term with the 'ordinary', arguing that this implied that the Neighbourhood Watch was 'designed for those with property to protect'.⁹⁵ Moreover, the sense of the 'ordinary' had certain normative implications when projected onto the schemes' ideas of community. It was not just Paddock's vision of the community which suggested limits to the inclusivity of the community spirit at the centre of Neighbourhood Watch. A 1988 Home Office leaflet, for example, described Neighbourhood Watch schemes as appropriate for 'residential areas' while tenants'

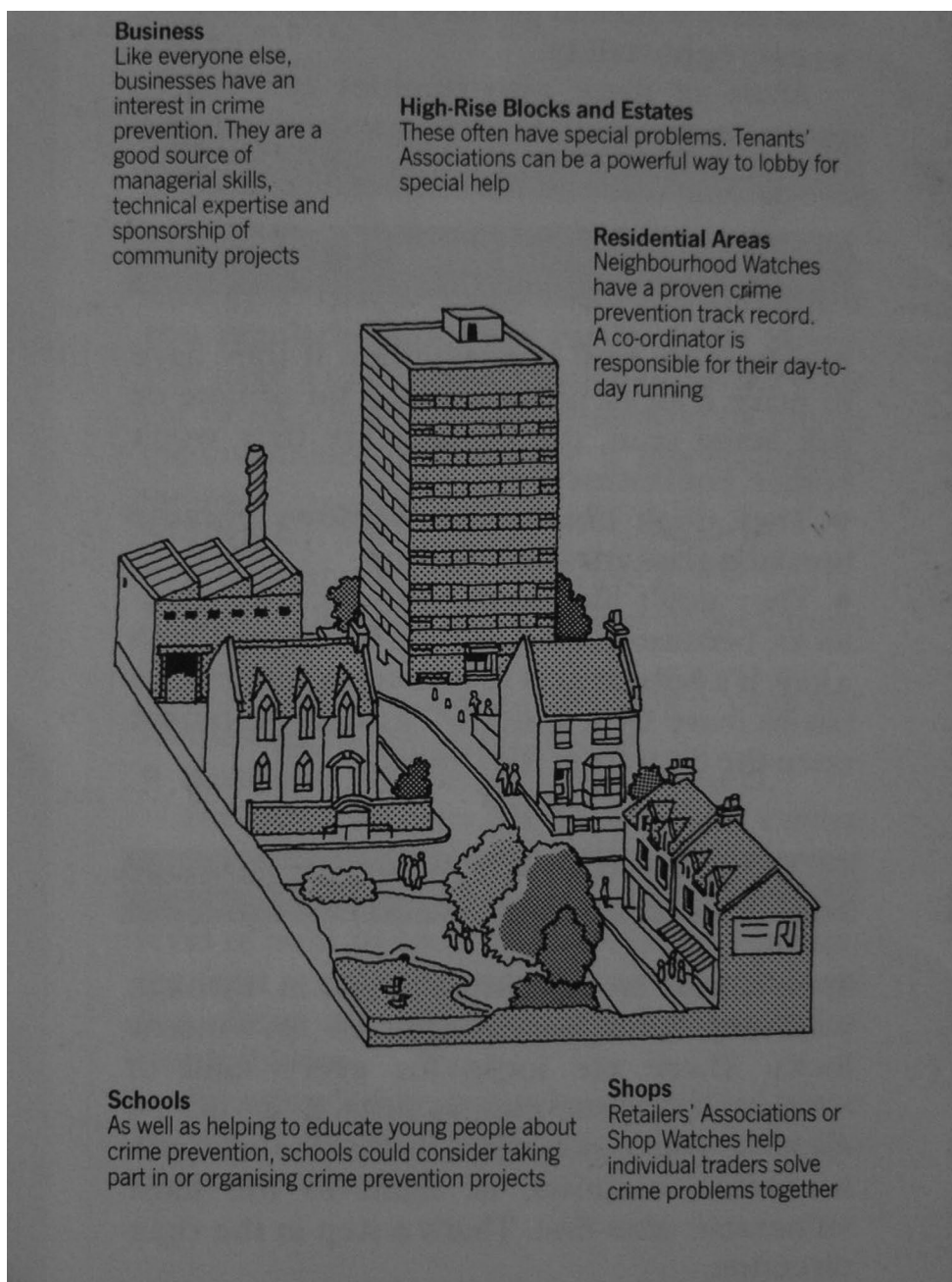


Image 1. Police advice on preventing crime (London, 1988).

associations were more suitable sites of action in high-rise blocks and estates (see Image 1).⁹⁶ Practical, structural and architectural issues might explain why Neighbourhood Watch schemes were less useful in certain residential settings, yet its association with a government scheme for citizenship hinted at the ideal-type of citizen that was to be encouraged; active citizens, it seemed, lived in certain types of property and came from certain types of

communities. Such anxieties were not helped by the Met's initial publicity material (which included a video featuring Police Five's Shaw Taylor and pamphlet) which was printed only in English and showed only white people with the exception of one black mugger attacking an old, white woman. Shaw Taylor explained in his introductory video that the schemes were about 'caring' and creating a 'village atmosphere', which sharply contrasted with the environments that were most threatened by crime during the 1980s.⁹⁷

Such emphases were questioned in areas where relationships between police and community were fraught. The Community Alliance for Police Accountability, a GLC-funded organization based in Tower Hamlets, recommended the rejection of schemes. It wrote that 'nowhere in the police literature on NWS [Neighbourhood Watch schemes] is there any mention of protection for ethnic minorities who are suffering as the victims of crime all the time'. It added, 'because the people chosen are likely to be what the police consider "ordinary", the results will be that minority groups (e.g. black people, gays, kids, single parents, etc.. etc...) are most likely to be the subject of their reports to the police'.⁹⁸ The London Borough of Camden wrote of 'the obvious danger of NWS being used for racially motivated purposes' and that 'the scheme could be used against black tenants and their families to a disastrous degree'.⁹⁹ The NCCL observed, in words that were later directly plagiarised by the Barnet Police Monitoring Group, that 'there is no screening or evaluation of proposed members and the dangers of racists, fascists, the petty-minded and the power-hungry dominating the schemes are obvious'.¹⁰⁰ The NCCL and the Libertarian Education Research Trust also pointed out a class bias in Neighbourhood Watch. It noted that schemes were established in middle-class areas like Hurlingham in Fulham, but not in Stoke Newington or Hackney. It used a case study of Bristol where the schemes attracted owner-occupiers and professional people as further evidence of a middle-class bias.¹⁰¹ Both the Libertarian Research and Education Trust's findings and later Home Office Research suggested that schemes were overrepresented in areas of modern family housing and affluent suburbs.¹⁰²

Certainly within the Wolverhampton group, scheme coordinators were located in its more salubrious areas. The majority came from Penn, Wombourne and the suburban Merry Hill. A few members resided in the council estate Rough Hills, but they were not well represented. In part this owed something to the specific characteristics of the G3 boundary drawn by the West Midlands Police.¹⁰³ However, areas like All Saints which were of concern to the police and fell within the boundaries of the scheme had no coordinators.¹⁰⁴ Paddock viewed Blakenhall and Mayfields, areas with high-rise flats located within his district, with a degree of hostility and they had no representatives in the group from those areas.¹⁰⁵ Ward-Birch's 'patch' was, perhaps, less typical. She lived in a council estate of 'two-up, two-downs', built in the 1920s. She was also, though, a member of the new 'property-holding democracy', having purchased her council house under the right-to-buy legislation shortly before involving herself in the Neighbourhood Watch.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, Ward-Birch noticed that the schemes seemed to offer a somewhat segregated form of citizenship of a different kind. What was most noteworthy to her was the gendered division of labour within the schemes. She suggested that they were examples of a 'chauvinistic gerontocracy'; where men, who were in her experience often retired managers, 'gave orders' as they were 'the officers', yet it was women that did all of the work, serving as Treasurers, acting as Secretaries and keeping in touch with neighbours.¹⁰⁷ As with Paddock's earlier intervention, the use of military metaphors to characterise the schemes' members is striking.

It was, however, the policing of race that was more divisive than class or gender in Wolverhampton. This reflected broader difficulties between the police and the black community during the 1980s. As Paul Willis' examination of young people in Wolverhampton during the decade suggests, large sections of the black community from the area considered the police racist.¹⁰⁸ Neighbourhood Watch's close association with the police meant that it was also viewed with trepidation and there were difficulties in recruiting non-white members as the West Midlands Police urged the Wolverhampton Group to include 'more Asians'.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the Neighbourhood Watch was drawn into a conflict with black community leaders in Wolverhampton.

When an invitation was offered to a Senior Community Relations Officer of the Wolverhampton Council for Community Relations (WCCR) to speak with the Neighbourhood Watch, it became a point of tension between the different community groups.¹¹⁰ Having read a Neighbourhood Watch newsletter produced by the Staffordshire Police which circulated around nearby Wombourne, Earlston Warner of the WCCR refused to participate in a meeting between the two organisations. The newsletter stated, 'I would still like sightings of COULOURDS [sic] and their vehicle numbers please.'¹¹¹ Warner unsurprisingly objected, arguing that it was evidence that the 'police seem to be instigating racism by forming alliances with racists in the community'.¹¹² Echoing similar objections within London, the WCCR argued that Neighbourhood Watch allowed no community input on policy and that schemes were geared towards owner-occupied areas. It added that there were no checks on racists joining, that it drew attention from violence against women and racist attacks, and that its 'law and order' emphasis provoked divisiveness.¹¹³ Warner argued that the Neighbourhood Watch promised 'artificial harmony', instead of a genuine community endeavour.¹¹⁴

Paddock felt that Warner's response was a 'narrow, mistaken and parochial tirade' which made him 'wonder what holds for our community as a whole'.¹¹⁵ Annotating the WCCR's press release with a point-by-point rejection of Warner's objections, Paddock commented that the Neighbourhood Watch was not intended to offer a democratic input on the police and insisted that its members came from council estates. His response to the Wombourne newsletter was to ask, 'why worry about an incident on Staffs police patch?' and allegations of racism were challenged by asking 'why have exceptions for the ethnic minority that would like nothing better than the policing of Wolverhampton to collapse altogether anyway?'¹¹⁶ The police, it seems, sided with Paddock and Chief Superintendent David Ibbs wrote to him noting that 'I, like you, find it very sad that the WCCR stand on the sidelines and criticise the marvellous efforts of law abiding citizens'.¹¹⁷ The dispute reflected the differing assessments of the police during the 1980s. To Warner, the police was institutionally prone to racism and could not be regarded uncritically whereas Paddock viewed things differently.

Similar contrasts were present in London. The Haringey Independent Police Committee wrote that Neighbourhood Watch was a 'bogus scheme' which 'can only endanger community relations unless the police are brought under democratic control'.¹¹⁸ The London Borough of Camden and the NCCL contrasted Neighbourhood Watch with schemes in the USA and argued they lacked in opportunities for communities to influence police policy.¹¹⁹ The NCCL argued the key difference was that the British model relied on the police to structure the schemes, whereas often those in the USA were not initiated by the police but through interventions by elected politicians or community residents.¹²⁰ As such, it argued that the 'the NWs function to spread the influence of the police in the community rather than of the community over the police'.¹²¹

The social capital generated by Neighbourhood Watch in Wolverhampton served to bond together those with similar interests and backgrounds, rather than bridging across communities.¹²² Paddock wrote that 'I for one have found it most interesting to meet watchers from all areas and find out that we often have so much in common. And the more we get together the closer the bond between each other and the police will be.'¹²³ Ward-Birch recalled that Paddock was a 'lovely guy, a church-goer', but also noticed that schemes tended to rely on certain sections of the community. 'It's an old chap who retired who likes the idea', that tended to set up a scheme, but 'it's the poor old missus who does all the work ... She sees what's going on because she tends to know the neighbours.'¹²⁴

Ward-Birch also realised the limits of just emphasising burglaries, 'I feel the Neighbourhood Watch is more than crime prevention and detection' she wrote, before adding 'I believe we should be concerned about the area as a whole, and what worries our members worries us'.¹²⁵ To Ward-Birch individualised notions of crime prevention were aligned with the anxiety about community. Neighbourhood Watch was an opportunity for her to monitor, document and report the 'criminality' in her street, which was not of the sort most prominently featuring Neighbourhood Watch publicity material. She wrote:

At 53 ... the tenant was convicted of growing cannabis, while his wife appeared to be operating as a prostitute at the house. This caused much concern about their children and various people such as social services were informed. Last Friday the family moved out of their house, although they did not take any of the furniture until the Sunday. Since then the female tenant known as DT [anonymised], has returned at intervals during each evening for about 10 minutes each time, with various men, who arrived in cars with her as their passenger. My members are concerned that they may be in possession of two houses, one of which is being used for prostitution.

Ward-Birch went on to list other 'criminal' activities on the street including tenants using industrial sewing machines, transferring council premises without permission, houses that had not had their gardens tended and individuals 'causing a nuisance by repairing a car for a friend'. Elsewhere, Ward-Birch documented the practice of 'kerb-crawling' on the streets of Wolverhampton suggesting that signs be put up threatening vehicle checks.¹²⁶ This echoed something of the voyeurism and 'prolonged, fascinated gaze' of the late Victorian investigators of 'outcast London' but, by way of contrast, Ward-Birch lived on the same street as those she surveyed.¹²⁷ Either way, Neighbourhood Watch seemingly legitimated an effort to police the street on which she lived and to watch the behaviour of her neighbours as well as watch out for them. Her account of the most eventful moment in the scheme's existence, involving her detecting and reporting cannabis growth in a neighbouring house, as well as monitoring and assisting the drug squad with a 'sting' operation was retold with glee. Tellingly, Ward-Birch commented that she was able to watch the arrests and operation having been tipped off about its timings as 'her reward'.¹²⁸ To Ward-Birch, then, Neighbourhood Watch was not a middle-class, self-defence league from a salubrious part of Britain, it offered a way of 'improving' and raising awareness of community problems while allowing her to observe the behaviour of her neighbours. Either way, it was a form of activism that could not be entirely controlled and shaped by the government and police.

Even if the fears of civil libertarians can be glimpsed in the correspondence of Paddock about the Wolverhampton Community Relations Council, so the endeavours of Ward-Birch suggest that the Conservative Party's enthusiasm for 'active citizenship' was not entirely groundless. Neighbourhood Watch helped make Ward-Birch an 'active citizen'. Having never worked full-time, Neighbourhood Watch was the first community organisation she joined

after her children left the home. It opened up a whole world of associational life for her. Indeed, Ward-Birch demonstrated that engagement in voluntary work led to a proliferation of interests and increased sense of individual political and social capacity.¹²⁹ Involvement in the Neighbourhood Watch was followed by an invitation to chair Police Consultative Committees, she volunteered with her husband as a lay visitor (later custody visitors) for ten years and ended up working on a Public Transport Committee after attending a voluntary sector open day in her capacity as Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator. The requirements of running a successful scheme led Ward-Birch into Adult Education, which first meant learning to type, followed by computer classes, eventually culminating in a degree from the University of Wolverhampton's Law School. Although her scheme ended, Ward-Birch might still be characterised as a 'busy-body' with an eclectic range of local social and political engagements. She runs the Wolverhampton Pensioners Committee, is Secretary to the Wolverhampton United Ex-Services Committee, has acted as a columnist for the Wolverhampton *Express and Star*, performs at local poetry readings and stood as a candidate for the Liberal Democrat Party at the 2010 local elections.¹³⁰ Neighbourhood Watch was the start of a personal trajectory towards a wide-range of civic engagements for Ward-Birch.

Yet Ward-Birch may well have been an outlier in this respect. In contrast with the anxieties of the critics and the excitement of the advocates, the biggest challenge for the Neighbourhood Watch was creating a meaningful and persistent engagement. It proved difficult to motivate scheme members to actually do anything. Ward-Birch summarised,

It all starts in a big flurry, everyone's keen, but its keeping momentum up which is difficult, I spent hours putting leaflets tough the doors and you got 'Oh you go to meetings and tell me what happened', that sort of attitude.¹³¹

As well as exposing the competing definitions of citizenship available during the 1980s, Neighbourhood Watch also suggested the sharp challenge of making the 'active' coalesce with the 'ordinary'.

'No-one can opt out' or 'we all like Neighbourhood Watch': Neighbourhood Watch, Thatcherism and 'place' in 1980s Britain

Given the criticisms articulated above, Neighbourhood Watch's endurance is striking. Although many coordinators lost interest and schemes waned (a common difficulty), their legacies lived-on, seemingly in perpetuity. Many of Neighbourhood Watch's symbols remain in place, standing as relics of long-forgotten initiatives from now departed or no-longer engaged residents. Such permanence made it difficult to avoid or critique. Thatcher herself alluded to the all-encompassing nature of crime prevention, by arguing that 'the police cannot do it alone. Every citizen has to help. No-one can opt out. If you want our country to be safe, you cannot afford not to get involved. That is why the Neighbourhood Watch schemes are being introduced'.¹³²

Neighbourhood Watch's success continued even when its initial advocates' enthusiasms diminished. By 1986, senior police officers joined their critics in offering sceptical commentaries about its effectiveness. They were worried that the Neighbourhood Watch displaced rather than prevented crime and drew resources from high-crime areas.¹³³ As early as 1985, the Home Office's Crime Prevention Unit commented that Neighbourhood Watch schemes had not transferred successfully to 'deprived inner city areas'.¹³⁴ Even the government when looking to engage in crime prevention initiatives had different choices of partners. When

the Manpower Services Commission doubled its Community Programme to 230,000 places in 1985 and worked with the Home Office to create prevention initiatives it sought to work with partner organizations.¹³⁵ Yet the NGOs involved included a range of more professional and progressive looking activists such as NACRO (who were involved in running the programme), the National Association of Victim Support Schemes, the National Council of Voluntary Organization, Age Concern and single-parent charities like Gingerbread, all with broader social remits than Neighbourhood Watch.¹³⁶ Indeed, the first draft of the Community Programme's crime prevention schemes did not mention Neighbourhood Watch at all.¹³⁷ By the publication of his biography in 2003, Hurd admitted that the 'experience shows that I placed more weight in the concept than it would carry.'¹³⁸ The Commission on Citizenship instigated by Hurd to flesh out his notion of active citizenship eventually contained just one short paragraph dedicated to Neighbourhood Watch. Puzzlingly, given the communities most interested in the schemes, it was described as representative of 'communities of adversity'. Ultimately, the Commission ended up more attentive to the burgeoning activism associated with the environmental movement and bodies working on welfare rights than the schemes which had initially been seen as the embodiment of active citizenship.¹³⁹

Observing such critiques, the continued popularity of the Neighbourhood Watch seems incongruous. But its success reflected longer term changes in politics during the second half of the twentieth century. It had more in common with the modern NGO than the 'Victorian schemes and techniques' that Hurd wished to see reintroduced to British society. Certainly, the enthusiasm for Neighbourhood Watch reflected a tendency towards a privatisation of politics described by Hilton, McKay, Crowson and Mouhet.¹⁴⁰ However, it also complicates such a narrative. In this case, privatisation was accompanied by a longing for community. In such a respect, both Paddock and Ward-Birch's activities and rhetoric are instructive. Moreover, any trend towards privatisation might then be de-coupled from the ascendancy of the centralised, modern NGO which served as its corollary, playing out on alternative pathways. Trends which pointed towards Thatcherism might not necessarily be explained just through the ascent of individualism or the continued 'fall of the public man'.

Neighbourhood Watch had no national media-savvy 'expert leader', professionalised lobbyists and campaigners, or well-networked activists.¹⁴¹ Yet as with the modern NGO, its appeal owed much to its branding and association with technological shifts; what it did have were maps, stickers and street signs.¹⁴² The latter two of these appealed despite little evidence that they reduced crime. What such measures did, however, was allow communities to create intelligible senses of 'place', offering 'fixed' and 'static' characteristics within and between communities at a time when more traditional forms of voluntary life were changing.¹⁴³ Even if this was a longing for community, it was a certain type of community. Neighbourhood Watch stood in contrast to the revolutionary and fluid types of 'spaces' offered by urban environments. It offered rituals and representations imposing order and despite its elite origins the momentum, support and energy generally came from the 'ordinary'.¹⁴⁴ Neighbourhood Watch articulated what the theorist Manuel Castells called a 'legitimizing identity', through which dominant institutions' authority was generated within and by civil society.¹⁴⁵ Both Castells and, in a different manner, Robert Putnam have suggested that late-modernity witnessed the collapse of vehicles offering 'legitimizing identities' for the nation state, but Neighbourhood Watch reflects a more complex history in which movements critiqued the institutions of the state while simultaneously endorsing its key

properties, in this case the rule of law, the preservation of order and the protection of private property.

It was, perhaps, because of such complexity that Neighbourhood Watch's depiction in popular culture has become synonymous with a sense of irony. As schemes, stickers and signs became a feature of the suburban landscape Neighbourhood Watch was characterised with semi-regularity on television, film and stage, often used to depict certain types of individual. In 'Home Beat', an episode of the ITV police-drama series *The Bill* broadcast in 1985 a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in the fictional East End of London urban district of Sun Hill featured prominently. The scheme's inaugural meeting included members of a Local Resident Association, bussed-in lecturers from a nearby Polytechnic College (who criticised the Neighbourhood Watch for being part of a system of Marxist class-control) and local members of an unspecified racist group which evoked the National Front. The episode was deeply ironic in tone; the Chief Inspector's fuel was siphoned out of his car while he parked outside the meeting while the episode culminated with an arson attack at the home of a recently arrived Bangladeshi family which took place while the father of the family, who had initially avoided the scheme, attended a Neighbourhood Watch meeting. The overall point of the episode is difficult to ascertain, but its main message was that effective community policing was difficult and that the police, for all of their faults, were better at it than the community (a point which was reinforced by a sub-plot featured a useful police contact who ran a youth groups for 'kids', but was actually using them to conduct minor burglaries across the estate).¹⁴⁶

Most typically, Neighbourhood Watchers came to be characterised in fiction as pathetic busybodies or authoritarian vigilantes. The neurotic, middle-aged, middle-class protagonist of *Ever Decreasing Circles*, Martin Bryce (played by Richard Briers), set up a scheme which he proceeded to run in a characteristically pompous, obsessive style with quasi-military zeal. In a fairly predictable turn of events, a conman preyed on Bryce's delusions of grandeur, enticing him and his neighbours to a fake Neighbourhood Watch function allowing him to break into all of the street's houses in one evening. The burglaries were thwarted by Bryce's antagonist Paul Ryman, who never took the scheme seriously.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, the caricature of pathetic masculinity, Alan Partridge inquired about the local Neighbourhood Watch when property hunting in the first episode of the sit-com *I'm Alan Partridge*. Reflecting Ward-Birch's complaints about members, Partridge noted, 'I'll do my stint. But only if they pay expenses though. Otherwise people start taking liberties. Before you know it you'll be mowing their lawns'.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, the efforts to become a Neighbourhood Watcher by the retired misanthrope Victor Meldrew in *One Foot in the Grave* culminated in him becoming a gun-wielding vigilante, an 'accidental' armed robber. The episode of the Jersey-based detective drama *Bergerac*, *Natural Enemies* (1989) which covered the schemes showed a shop-keeping member of the St Helier Neighbourhood Watch mistaking his son for a burglar whom he punched who then, in an unfortunate and somewhat odd series of events, tumbled off a dock, ending up hospitalised.¹⁴⁹ The comedic potential of the Neighbourhood Watch was mined in the Comic Relief Christmas book published during 1986 where the carol 'A Visit from St Nicholas' (also known as the Night Before Christmas) was reimagined so that Father Christmas and six reindeer were gunned down by an overzealous, heavily armed Neighbourhood Watch member.¹⁵⁰ Representations of the Watch, as an authoritarian front, as likely to harm as help, have become something of a cliché featuring in Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright's film *Hot Fuzz* (2007), as well as the Alan Ayckbourne play, *Neighbourhood Watch* (2011).¹⁵¹

In popular culture, then, the Neighbourhood Watch had started to take on common understandings easily grasped by wide audiences. As well as representing the 'chauvinist gerontocracy' discussed by Ward-Birch, the mild humour directed towards the Neighbourhood Watch drew on ironies implicit within the schemes themselves, the manner in which they represented individualism and community, the tension between security and surveillance, the complicated relationship between protection and enforced conformity, schemes' dual capacity to remove and increase demands on police time and resource, their association with 'active' and 'inactive' citizens and, perhaps most ironic of all, the absence of evidence that it offered a meaningful method of combating crime.

Despite this, Neighbourhood Watch's permanence meant that it remains a common frame of reference for crime prevention initiatives. There seemed little reason to oppose or challenge, or, to return to Thatcher's words, to 'opt-out'. Even if Neighbourhood Watch did not prevent crime, it required little financial support and had relatively few costs with regard to effort, time or work. It could not really make matters worse. In Tower Hamlets, where the council refused to allow Neighbourhood Watch signs during the 1980s, there is now a thriving group.¹⁵² Within the House of Commons, Labour MPs representing Manchester or inner-city London constituencies, where local government initially refused to support Neighbourhood Watch were chastised for refusing to prevent crime. This slowly changed as all mainstream parties signed up to support it.¹⁵³

Thatcher's suggestion that 'no-one can opt out' was, then, apt. Part of Neighbourhood Watch's continued perpetuation lay in its longer term resonance, lasting beyond the active participation of schemes. Symbols and stickers remained on street signs and windows of houses long after participants moved on and initiatives ceased. Although Thatcher's comments were geared to crime prevention generally, and Neighbourhood Watch specifically, her observation had a wider salience. Neighbourhood Watch was not just a British sensation. It was a global phenomenon of late twentieth century; schemes can be found all over the world, albeit with features shaped by locality. It suggests that frameworks applicable with neoliberal or conservative values and cultures were promoted not just by elites, or products of hegemonic power-structures, but were passively and symbolically endorsed in more 'ordinary' spaces in the manner of a movement. More inertly embraced than wholeheartedly welcomed, wide yet thin, the Neighbourhood Watch has mapped onto streets and households across the world. Despite the mirth directed towards the Neighbourhood Watch, when thought in such a manner, and when seen within a context of the perpetual emphasis given to law and order within politics and media, alongside the continued proliferation of technologies of surveillance, the sense that 'no-one can opt out' is a revealing statement about Britain's recent political, social and cultural history.¹⁵⁴

Notes

1. Margaret Thatcher, Remarks visiting Finchley, March 3, 1989, [subsequent references will given in the format MTF] <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107591>.
2. Hurd, *Memoirs*, 234; see also Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain*, 254.
3. John Carvel, "Restrain Greed, Tories urged," *Guardian*, February 5, 1988, 23.
4. The Conservative Party, *The Next Moves Forward*.
5. Douglas Hurd, "Citizenship in the Tory Democracy," *New Statesman*, April 29, 1988, 14.
6. John Patten, "Guardians Tomorrow," *Guardian*, July 12, 1989; John Patten, "Launching the active citizen," *Guardian*, September 28, 1988; and Hurd, *Memoirs*, 342.

7. Lister, *The Exclusive Society*, 15; and Ignatieff, "Citizenship and Moral Narcissism," 26–36.
8. "A flawed vision," *New Statesman*, April 29, 1988, 3; and "Citizen Hurd," *New Statesman*, April 15, 1988, 3.
9. Hall and Held, "Citizens and Citizenship," 174.
10. Young, "The Failure of Criminology," 4–30; and Garland, *The Culture of Control*.
11. National Council for Civil Liberties, *Rights*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Autumn 1984, 8; and NCCL Draft Policy Paper, Neighbourhood Watch, Hull History Centre, Hull, Liberty Collection (hereafter UDCL), UDCL/887/1.
12. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 384–414.
13. In both Wolverhampton and the village in of Avonside near Royal Leamington Spa, members threatened resignation over the signs.
14. Husain, *Neighbourhood Watch in England and Wales*.
15. Laycock and Tilley, *Policing and Neighbourhood Watch*, 4.
16. Pooley, "Is Your Neighbour Watching," 28.
17. Bennett, *Evaluating Neighbourhood Watch*; and McConnville and Shepherd, *Watching Police, Watching Communities*.
18. O'Malley and Hutchison, "Reinventing Prevention"; and Goddard, "Post-welfarist Risk Managers."
19. For conservative and Thatcherite ideology and law and order see Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 384–414; Furendi, *Culture of Fear*; Beck, *Risk Society*; Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 7, 8; for a statement of enthusiasm for Burkean 'little platoons' see Boyson, *Speaking My Mind*, 240–247.
20. Garland, *The Culture of Control*; and Cox, *Bad Girls in Britain*.
21. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.
22. O'Malley, "Risk and Responsibility," 189–207; and Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 234.
23. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 249; See also, Robinson, "Putting the Charity Back into the Charity Single."
24. Gough et al., *Spaces of Social Exclusion*, 154.
25. Jackson, "The Think-tank Archipelago"; and Stedman-Jones, *Masters of the Universe*.
26. Black, "The Lost World of Young Conservatism."
27. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 96–98, 202–205.
28. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*; Martin, *Financialization of Everyday Life*; and Langley, *The Everyday Life of Global Finance*. Also see essay on Financial Consumerism in this edition.
29. Moran, *Reading the Everyday*, 14.
30. Light, *Forever England*, 16–18.
31. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 240–279.
32. Laycock and Tilley, *Policing and Neighbourhood Watch*, 18.
33. Minutes to Birmingham Road Consultative Committee Meeting, 18 July 1990, Neighbourhood Watch Papers (Hereafter NWP), Wolverhampton City Archives, Wolverhampton.
34. The continued vitality of NGOs and voluntary action is quantified in Hilton et al., *A Historical Guide to NGOs in Britain*.
35. In Wolverhampton and Avonside, members threatened resignation over the signs.
36. Smith, *I Think the Nurses are Stealing My Clothes*, 37.
37. In 1969 there were over 50 Crime Prevention Panels. *Crime Prevention Newsletter*, Issue 1, March 1969, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], Metropolitan Police Archives [hereafter MEPO] MEPO 2/11485.
38. Moss, "Burglary Insurance and the Culture of Fear in Britain."
39. Keith Lauder (Deputy Town Clerk, London Borough Barking to Chief Superintendent C. Mulvehill, Undated letter), TNA, MEPO 2/11485.
40. Johnston, *The Rebirth of Private Policing*, 1–23.
41. In many ways these echoed Thatcher's greater confidence in individuals, families, businesses and neighbourhoods than the state. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 256.
42. Ashcroft, *Dirty Politics*, *Dirty Times*, 33, 27, 60. Ashcroft's enthusiasm for law and order was also associated with his business interest in home securities. For Crime Concern see Norris, *Changing Trains*, 119, 120.

43. Johnston, *The Rebirth of Private Policing*, 139.
44. Elliot, *Streets Ahead*.
45. Johnston, *The Rebirth of Private Policing*, 74.
46. Sears, "'Crimewatch' and the Rhetoric of verisimilitude," 51–58; Johnston, *The Rebirth of Private Policing*, 139; Jermyn, *Crime Watching*; and Ross, "Foreword," 14, 15.
47. For more on this see Wetherall, "Freedom Planned."
48. Turner and Baker, *Report of Study Tour to the USA*.
49. *Good Neighbour*, Summer Issue, No. 3 (undated), 9–10, WCRO, CR 3797.
50. Contribution by G3 Steering & Co-ordinating Committee, its aims and achievements so far, October 1987, NWP, Acc 2424.
51. George Paddock to Safer City Projects, 14 April 1989; NWP, Acc 2424., George Paddock to E. Warner, 24 May 1988, NWP, Acc 2424.
52. West Midlands Police, "Checklist of Suspicious Incidents," Undated information flyer; NWP, Acc 2424.
53. E. Birch to *Express and Star*, 19 April 1991, NWP, Acc 2424.
54. *News and Views*, Neighbourhood Watch newsletter, Issue 7 (Winter 1990), Neighbourhood Watch Newsletter, Wolverhampton, December 1988; West Midlands Police: Neighbourhood Watch Information Sheet (undated), NWP, Acc 2424.
55. Neighbourhood Watch, West Midlands Tradesman Scheme, undated memo; Neighbourhood Watch Steering and Co-ordinating Committee, "News and Views," Issue 4 Autumn 1989, 1; NWP, Acc 2424.
56. Stephen Cook, "TV Ads in £1.5m Drive on Crime," *The Guardian*, October 5, 1984, 2.
57. Andrew Rawnsley, "1.7m Effort on Crime," *The Guardian*, February 12, 1984, 4.
58. This can be seen on the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jr9-btgo-jY> (consulted 6 June 2016).
59. *Crime Prevention Newsletter*, June 1969, TNA, MEPO 2/11485.
60. NACRO Briefing, "Neighbourhood Approaches to Crime," UDCL/887/1; The Safe Neighbourhoods Unit, *Community Based Improvement Programmes*.
61. Ann Blaber, NACRO Discussion Document, December 1975, TNA, Home Office Papers [Hereafter HO], HO 495/3.
62. Crime Prevention, Home Officer Circular, Home Office 1984, London Metropolitan Archives [hereafter LMA], Greater London Council Archives [Hereafter GLC], GLC/DG/PR/PC/01 Box 13.
63. Community Alliance for Police Accountability in Tower Hamlets, Annual Report, 1983, GLC/DG/PR/PC/02/02 Folder 4.
64. GLC Police Support Unit to Secretary of Association of Metropolitan Authorities, 14 November 1984. GLC Archives' 7 * Report (No. 1) of the Police Committee, Home Office draft circular on crime prevention—a response—25 October 1983, GLC/DG/PR/PC Box 10.
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67. Andrew Rawnsley, "1.7m Effort on Crime," *The Guardian*, February 12, 1984, 4.
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69. Interview with Eileen Ward-Birch.
70. *Policing London*, Number 9, October 1983, 2.
71. Haringey Independent Police Committee, Annual Report 1983/1984, 12, GLC Archive; Haringey Independent Police Committee, Submission to LBH Police Sub-Committee, 2 December 1983.
72. G3 Neighbourhood Watch Steering and Coordinating Committee AGM, 24 May 1990, NWP, Acc 2424.
73. *Police Review*, Vol., 94, No. 4892 (December 1986), 2492.
74. Chairman's notes for preparation before steering committee April 1989, NWP, Acc 2424; George Paddock to Superintendent J. Carter, undated letter, NWP, Acc 2424.

75. G3 Neighbourhood Watch Steering and Coordinating Committee AGM, 24 May 1990, NWP, Acc 2424; Mort, "The Politics of Consumption," 171; Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth Century Britain*; and Mold, "Making the Patient-consumer in Margaret Thatcher's Britain," 509–528.
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80. *Police Review*, Vol. 94, No. 4892 (12 December 1986), 2492; NCCL, *Rights*, 8, No. 1 (Autumn 1984), 8.
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83. E Birch to Chief Constable Hadfield, 28 March 1991, NWP, MS 214/A/2/9.
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87. "General Information" in Edwin Shaw and Alan Blows, *Crime in Britain & Neighbourhood Watch Handbook*, 29, 30.
88. Birch to Wolverhampton Express and Star, 19 April 1991, NWP, Acc 2424; 'General Information' in Shaw & Blows, *Crime in Britain*, 29.
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101. NCCL Draft Policy Paper, Neighbourhood Watch, UDCL/887/1.
102. Husain, Neighbourhood Watch in England and Wales, 10, 11.
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104. West Midlands Police, *Annual Report of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police 1989, Annual Report of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police 1990*; and Willis, *The Social Conditions of Young People*.
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106. Interview with Ward-Birch; F.G. Laws to M. Ward-Birchm NWP Acc 2424.
107. Interview with Ward-Birch.
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113. WCCR Press Release, 10 December 1987, NWP, Acc 2424.
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115. G. Paddock to E. Warner, 24 May 1988, NWP, Acc 2424.
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123. George Paddock, Undated Speech, NWP, Acc 2424.
124. Interview with Ward-Birch.
125. Eileen Birch to Miss Smith, 5 August 1989.
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127. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 16.
128. Interview with Ward-Birch.
129. Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*.
130. Interview with Ward-Birch.
131. Interview with Ward-Birch.
132. Margaret Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Central Council, 19 March 1984. MTF—<http://bit.ly/1mUaQ7O>.
133. "Safety on the Beat," *Guardian*, January 15, 1987, 12; "The Soaring Cost of Keeping Covered," *Guardian*, March 7, 1987, 25; and Kilroy-Silk, "Watching the Watch," 1083. The Police Federation also viewed Neighbourhood Watch in such a manner, "Neighbourhood Watch "Displaces" violent crime," *Police Review*, 96, no. 4992, (23 December 1988), 2645.
134. Meeting of Permanent Secretaries, Undated Talk by Keith Neal, TNA, Records of the Employment Services Agency and Division [hereafter ET], ET 14/203.
135. Community Programme: National initiative on Crime Prevention, 10 October 1985, ET 14/203.
136. Minutes of a meeting held at the Home Office, 24 June 1985, ET 14/203; Meeting with the Home Office, 26 June 1986, ET 14/203; Community Security Unit, 25 June 1985, ET 14/203; for such groups' emergence in the 1960s see Moores, "The Progressive Professionals."
137. National Crime Prevention Initiative: An outline proposal for discussion, 27 June 1986, ET 14/203.
138. Hurd, *Memoirs*, 342.
139. Commission on Citizenship, *Encouraging Citizenship*, 28, 25–42.
140. Hilton et al., *The Politics of Expertise*.
141. Hilton, "Politics is Ordinary."
142. While this study only makes use of archival material from Neighbourhood Watch schemes other schemes with archives that demonstrate the enthusiasm for mapping can be found in other archival accounts of Neighbourhood Watch schemes including the villages of Blunham, Clifton and Houghton Conquest in Bedfordshire, see Bedford and Luton Archives and Record Service [hereafter BLARS], PC Blunham 8/12, PC Clifton 8/16, PC Houghton Conquest 9/4, for Avonside, near Lemington Spa see Warwickshire County Record Office (WCRO), Avonside Neighbourhood Watch, 1986–1990, CR 3797.

143. Indeed, organizations that can be found lobbying for the formation of a Neighbourhood Watch in the Parish Council of Blunham (in Lancaster) included the Women's Institute, Over 60s Club and Conservative Association, and other supportive civil society groups included the Rotary Club, BLARS, PC Blunham, 8/12; *Good Neighbour*, Summer Edition, 3, (undated, 1988), WCRO, CR 3797.
144. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*.
145. Castelles, *The Power of Identity*, 65.
146. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=424J9ISy1uk> (watched 11 Feb 2013).
147. *Ever Decreasing Circles: Series 4*, 'Neighbourhood Watch' (1987).
148. *I'm Alan Partridge: Series One*, "A Room with an Alan" (1997).
149. Bergerac, "Natural Enemies" (1989).
150. Relief, "The Night Before Christmas: Neighbourhood Watch Edition," 3, 4.
151. Aykbourne, *Neighbourhood Watch*.
152. http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/901-950/930_neighbourhood_watch.aspx.
153. Neil Hamilton, Speech to the House of Commons, 26 June 1986, Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol 100, c. 454-455; *The Guardian*, 19 November 1986, 23.
154. Hall, *The Hard Road To Renewal*, 8.

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