

# pontnews&views

FREE monthly magazine for Ponteland and district

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***Witness appeal  
after savage  
baseball attack***

***Popular  
Ponteland  
vicar retires  
after 12 years***

***Pollution hits  
Pont Park fish  
stocks***

***Duck race  
raises over  
£2,000 for  
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If there is an issue you are concerned about please do not hesitate to contact me. I hold constituency surgeries in Ponteland and can also be contacted through my Westminster or Constituency offices. Alternatively you can keep up to date with my latest news and send me a message by logging on to [www.peteratkinson.com](http://www.peteratkinson.com).



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Michael is presented with a painting of Holy Saviour Church, Milbourne, at the recent customary Summer Lunch.



## Sad farewell as popular village vicar retires

**Popular Ponteland vicar Reverend Canon Michael Jackson retires from St Mary's Church at the end of the month.**

Revd Jackson has been at St Mary's for 12 years, having arrived from St Mark's in Houghton-le-Spring.

The father-of-four is retiring to Hexham with wife Janet, who is chaplain at St Oswald's Hospice.

Church warden Rosemary Rhodes paid tribute. She said: "He's going to be very much missed. He's been a very popular figure and will be very difficult to replace. It's going to be a very sad day for us when he goes.

"The church is undoubtedly in better shape than when he came. We have stable congregation numbers, a bigger variety of services and more involvement of lay

people. There's much more co-operation between the churches in Ponteland now.

"Hopefully he will enjoy his new life, and it's a new start for everybody."

Revd Jackson, writing on the church website, said: "My time here in Ponteland is just about over and our new life in Hexham, though ready for us, hasn't started yet. I want to thank all those people who have worked with me to do God's work.

"I hope that you will want to talk about the good things we have shared. This has been a good time for me."

Revd Jackson will be given a send-off at a party at Richard Coates Middle School on Saturday 29 September at 7pm, followed by a special service at St Mary's on Sunday 30 September at 10am.

### News in brief...

#### Alpine Garden Society's Autumn show

The North East Group of the Alpine Garden Society are holding their Autumn Show of Alpines, Rock Plants & Bulbs. It is to be held on Saturday 29th September at The Memorial Hall, Darras Road, Ponteland.

The show is open from Noon till 4pm. Plant sales open from 10.30am. There are six specialist stalls as well as the members' stall. Home made refreshments are available all day. Admission is £2.

As a group we hold our monthly meetings at St Mary's Hall, Ponteland, on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm and have a variety of speakers illustrating their talks on all aspects of Alpine plants. Anyone is welcome to attend (there is a small charge for non members).

**If you need any further information on the show please do not hesitate to contact me - Mala Janes - on (01207) 545558 or the show managers Pearl and Mike Dale on (01670) 787714.**

## Duck race raises over £2,000 for charity

By Eric Marshall



**The 20th Annual Duck Race held in Ponteland Park on September 2 was a most successful event that raised over £2,000 for Rotary Charities.**

There was a good turnout from the village, entertained not only with the races but also with displays from the Fire Brigade, Army and Northumberland National Park Search & Rescue Team.

The bouncy castle and ice cream van provided for both young and old. The star turn was the fairground organ, bigger and better than last year, playing lively music throughout the afternoon.

The Rotary Club wishes to thank all those local businesses that donated generous prizes and sponsored boats for the two boat races. Their support made the whole event worthwhile.

#### The winning numbers are:

1st Adult Race - 247 Burn  
2nd Adult Race - 19 Forster  
3rd Adult Race - 212 Muir

1st Children's Race - 194 Ohara  
2nd Children's Race - 15 Morris

1st Boat Race - JR Adams Ltd  
2nd Boat Race - Cramlington Ford

NEWCASTLE UNITED

# Pont pupils ballboys at **St James' Park**



By Gemma Clarke

**PONTELAND youngsters were given the chance to be pitchside ballboys at a Newcastle United match thanks to two local restaurateurs.**

The boys from Ponteland Middle School and Richard Coates Middle School were given the opportunity by Fabrizio Saba and Paul Bernardelli, co-owners of the soon-to-be-

opened Fratelli restaurant in Ponteland.

Fabrizio owns Sabatini's in King Street on Newcastle's Quayside and his business partner and brother-in-law owns Prima in Dean Street. Their third restaurant Ristorante Fratelli plans to open in early October at Bell Villas, Ponteland.

The Sanbatini, Prima and Fratelli group have recently signed up as the latest sponsor for Newcastle United's Football in the Community programme and are giving away ballboy places with an accompanied match day ticket to every home game this season.

The boys picked for the ball boy position from Richard Coates Middle School were Lee Ryan, Paul Sanderson, Jack Smith, Matthew Rose and Matthew Adams. All five Newcastle fans were part of the Richard Coates team that won the Under-12s Wilks Northumberland County Cup.

Twin brothers Benedict and Patrick Harrison, Scott Canham and Beth Wynter were chosen from Ponteland Middle School, having this year won the Ponteland Middle School Athletes of the Year 2007 awards.

Their headteacher Dr Caroline Pryer said: "The pupils have been ambassadors for the school in almost every sport. They have shown outstanding endeavour and achievement in their chosen fields and have received colours for five, six and seven sports at our leavers sporting awards ceremony.

"We are very proud of our pupils and believe they fully deserved this unique and exciting opportunity to take part in a prestigious match such as Newcastle United versus Juventus and are delighted for them, their parents, families and the sporting community."

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## Ponteland bowling ladies win the league

By Muriel Sobo

**The ladies of Ponteland Bowling Club are celebrating their win in the Northumberland Collins & Shipley League.**

They defeated six clubs from around the county to take the title by the narrowest of margins - only two points.

Pictured are:

(back row l-r) Anne Rutter, Nancy Cauldwell, Elizabeth French, Liz Emmerson, Lorna Telfer, Di MacDonell, Jenifer Nixon, Pam Varley, Margaret Cowan.

(front row l-r) Betty Nesbit, Marina Catchpole, Sylvia Ridley, June Nichol, Jean Marshall, Margaret Bryson and Doreen Walwyn-James.

## Inheritance Tax...

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Roy Jenkins

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# October event celebrates history of Ponteland scouting

but new leaders needed to safeguard future



By J Michael Taylor

**Ponteland Scouts are celebrating the founding of the movement 100 years ago, as are 28 million Scouts worldwide.**

Ponteland has some early connections with Scouting - on June 16th 1909 the children at Coates School were granted a holiday because Col. Baden Powell, the founder of the movement, was reviewing the Northumberland Hussars (territorials) in camp at Ponteland.

Gavin Wade, headmaster of Coates School, who lived in Bell Villas, started Boy Scouts (as they were at the time) in 1918, becoming scoutmaster of a troop of 30 Scouts. There is no doubt that the movement was very popular with Ponteland boys and by 1922 the Troop had 70 members.

A history of Scouting in Ponteland appears in the latest edition of the Ponteland Local History Society's publication Pont Island News.



The Ponteland Scouts and Ponteland History Society are marking the Centenary of Scouting with a celebration event to be held at Ponteland Memorial Hall on Saturday 13th October. The associated exhibition will give the whole community the opportunity to see many items of historical significance as well as demonstrating the relevance of the movement today.

The project has been generously supported by Ponteland Parish Council, which has funded the hire of the Memorial Hall. The event will be open free to the public from 10.30am until 4.30pm.



## Reunion campfire

Ponteland Scout Group held a reunion campfire in Ponteland Park on July 14. The weather was unusually kind when past and present members of the Scout Group, with their families, came together for a traditional campfire followed by a barbecue. Everyone enjoyed joining in with the well known songs, which could be heard all around the Park.

Today there are over 150 young people enjoying the benefits that Scouting has to offer. They develop a range of personal skills through a fun programme of activities predominantly in the outdoors.

We are very fortunate to have some of the best facilities available in the county with our own headquarters building, a safe outdoor location in Ponteland Park and a wide range of camping and activity equipment.



The July celebration at Ponteland Park and images from the village's long Scouting history.

Our continued success depends on our volunteer leaders who are unfortunately in short supply. One of our two Scout Troops closed a year ago and one of our three Beaver Colonies is about to close – both for the lack of adults prepared to volunteer to help.

**Can you help? No previous experience is necessary as we offer extensive**

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# Update from



**Pontland  
Community  
Partnership**



area of 200 square miles with a population of 307,000 and a budget of £400m.

It will probably have an elected council of 67 members plus an elected leader and cabinet of eight members. This will replace the existing 306 district and county councillors.

The senior management team will consist of a chief executive and 10 divisional directors. This will replace the current seven chief executives and 37 senior directors.

## Timetable

The ambitious programme for implementing the change is to have shadow elections in 2008 with the new council taking over in 2009. It is also likely that Parish elections will be held in 2009 in order that such elections will be in step with the four year election cycle.

This timetable represents an enormous amount of work in harmonising policies, ensuring continuity of service provision,

reallocating staff and many other matters. At present consultations are still ongoing as to the arrangements for the change.

## Organisation

The authority will be based in Morpeth but the proposals include some decentralisation. This is to meet local communities' concerns that they will be very remote from the new authority. The current plans envisage three committees covering West, North and South East. Pontland will form part of the West Committee so we probably will be in an area based on Hexham. The Parish Council will remain as at present but working through and with the West committee and the local strategic partnerships based on such committees.

## Comments

The proposal for two unitary authorities from the District Councils, with considerable local support, was rejected by the Government. Currently several District Councils are seeking a judicial review as to the legality of these proposals. These proposals are subject to Parliament receiving and passing the legislation but it would appear that the Government are fairly confident that such approval will be forthcoming!

There are benefits in having a single council responsible for most council services, not least that there is a single point of contact for residents' complaints or even compliments.

However there are many dissenting views with regard to the need for such re-organisation and the method of achieving reorganisation. This note is merely to outline the probable changes. As matters develop further information will be provided.

The new authority will have a daunting task to achieve a step change in services that will justify such drastic changes.

*Coun Robin Ramsay*



## The full draft of the Pontland village regeneration design brief has been seen by the sub-group.

Subject to amendments this document will be put before the PCP Main Body at the next meeting for approval, with the recommendation that it be taken forward to the Local Strategic Partnership, Castle Morpeth Borough Council and Northumberland County Council for their endorsement.

Hopefully this will enable the proposed programme set out in last month's Pont News & Views to be maintained so that the public consultation can proceed, starting with articles in the next issue.

It should be noted that the Design Brief is non-prescriptive and does not set out definitive plans for the site, merely setting out the objectives, principals and criteria that will be applied to all proposals put forward by interested developers.

To ensure that the Developers have an understanding and a measure of the wishes of the people of Pontland with respect to any possible village regeneration, the results of the Pontland Regeneration Survey are included for information in this document.

*Raymond Sproul*

## Council Reorganisation What is it?

**The Government has decided that your local councils will be re-organised. The six district councils and the county council will be merged into a single unitary authority responsible for a wide range of services for the whole of Northumberland.**

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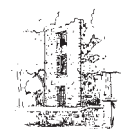
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## Latest NEWS from Ponteland Parish Council



*This report is based on the minutes of the Parish Council meeting on August 15.*

### PLANNING

#### Report on recent planning decisions:

The following decisions were reported:

Restaurant at 4 – 6 Main Street  
**Refused**

Rebuild at 11 Linden Way **Granted**, subject to balcony being removed and additional landscaping provided

Rebuild at 30 Western Way  
**Granted**

Alterations to Restaurant – Bell Villas **Deferred for site visit**

Conversion of units – Sainsburys  
**Deferred for site visit**

### GRANT APPLICATIONS

Joint application from 1st Ponteland Scout Group and Ponteland Local History Society – Celebrating the History of Ponteland Scouting:

A grant of £250 will be made to the 1st Ponteland Scout Group/Ponteland Local History Society.

Rotary Club of Ponteland – Annual Duck Race (2.9.07):

A grant of £25 will be made to sponsor a duck.

Castle Morpeth Borough Council Red Squirrel Conference: The Council had received notification of the above event to be held in October, probably at Longhirst Hall. As part of the notification, the Council was asked to consider sponsoring a Red Squirrel for either £250 or £500. The Parish Council was minded to support the conference, and any local implementation arising from it, but to defer any financial support until the September Council meeting, pending further information from the Borough Council on the requirement for this.

### ENVIRONMENT WORKING PARTY MEETINGS

**Grasscutting in the Park:** The Working Party will walk the Park to view the current grass cutting arrangements, following which they would meet with the "Friends" to discuss any proposals for changes.

**Bridlepath No 42 Ponteland Park:** The condition of this bridlepath will be looked at during the planned walk in the Park.

### Northumbria in Bloom judging:

Agreed to write to the Borough Council's Green & Clean dept thanking them for their support, and in particular for cutting the river

bank, and to ensure that this remained part of the grass cutting schedule. Agreed that following the judging decisions in September to write to those businesses/organisations who had assisted in the competition to thank them.

### Hedge in front of CIU Club:

Agreed to write to the Chairman of the Club advising him of the Council's concern at what has been done to the hedge, and request the Club's suggestions as to what they propose.

### Access gate into Park from West Road:

The resident of "Pont Croft" had requested the Council consider re-locating the main gate in order to facilitate access/exit onto West Road when driving. The resident would be advised that any options on re-locating the gate would be considered during discussions on the park entrances.

**Allotments at Prestwick:** It was agreed to request the Environment Agency investigate the burn as there were concerns from tenants that it was being polluted.

### Repairs to boardwalk in Park:

Urgent repairs were required to the

boardwalk and the cost of work was estimated at £590 for materials and labour; the work to be carried out by the Council's Contractors.

### NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

**Local government re-organisation:** A letter dated 26 July 2007 had been received from the Leader of Northumberland County Council advising the Council of the Government decision regarding Northumberland. The Council agreed to write to the Leader requesting a contact person with whom Councillors can discuss the role of the parish council in the new Authority.

**Temporary road closure – C344 west of Dalton:** Notification of the above had been received (effective from 17 August 07 for three months), although it was anticipated that the road would only be closed for 10 days within that period.

### REPORTS BY PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Councillor Worth reported that the Memorial Hall kitchens were now open and functioning.

## ❖ Christmas Events 2007 ❖

We cordially invite you to join us in the festivities at our beautiful historic hall and grounds, just outside Ponteland.

### ❖ Christmas Lunches ❖

13th, 14th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th December

### ❖ Christmas Dinner & Disco ❖

13th, 14th, 20th, 22nd December

### ❖ Christmas Tea Dance ❖

Sunday 2nd December, 3pm – 6pm

### ❖ Countryside Christmas Fair ❖

Sunday 25th November, 10.30am – 4.00pm

### ❖ Christmas Panto ❖ Cinderella ❖

Sunday 16th December, 4.30pm – 6.30pm

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# Your letters...



**Letters on all issues are welcomed by Pont News & Views. The Editor reserves the right to amend any submitted letters published, for legal or other reasons. All letters submitted should include the writer's name and address, even if they wish it to be withheld from publication.**

This month's letters are led by a fascinating parallel between the problems of estate management in Darras Hall and the US 'McMansions'



## US action against 'McMansions' a lesson for Darras Hall Estate Committee

I thought the enclosed article taken from the Guardian recently might be of interest. If Americans can legislate to make the size of a house commensurate with the plot it occupies, could the Darras Hall Estate Committee not follow suit before it is too late and the nature of the estate changes for good? I am sending a copy of this letter and the article to the Darras Hall Estate Committee.

*Mrs Nancy Lawson, Eastern Way, Ponteland*

## What we need is common sense, not developers

Your correspondent "Realist and very happy resident" re-rehearses all the tired arguments advanced by our councillors for handing over the centre of the village to a profit seeking developer/speculator.

He, or she, (not having the courage of his/her convictions and hiding behind an alias – as disapproved of by the Editorial Sub-committee) suggests that our houses are the result of speculative development.

My house, for one, was built by a gentleman, for his own personal use. If one wants to see the result of uncontrolled speculative development one has only to look at Darras Hall and the nightmare properties which have been built, ruining the ambience of the estate and the environment generally.

When criticism is levelled by councillors and others about Merton Way, we should remind ourselves that it was their

predecessors who, no doubt, argued for the, then NEW development to be called Merton Way, that it was to be state of the art (which it was) and with an "Anchor Store" such as is proposed now.

It was the Anchor Store which failed first but with little knock-on for the other traders in the precinct, thereby destroying the Anchor Store argument. It would be interesting to compare the advocacy of the mid-20th century with councillors' present day effulgences. It was Santayana who wisely said: "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

As regards Merton Way, "Realist" mentions "the businesses that eventually end up there" with no indication of any regard for the businesses already there. We have seen in Morpeth how little security existing tenants have under a developer.

Of course businesses must be profitable, but how will they achieve that with the costs of a £17m development to be recovered over and above their normal trading? The money will not come from any developer, it can only come from the pockets of customers of the involved businesses.

Why "Realist" thinks that Harrogate, Southport, Hartlepool or the Newcastle Quayside have any relevance to a village like Ponteland is impossible to see. The thought of Ponteland as a tourist attraction with visitors pouring money into our coffers is wonderful to consider, but the truth is that Ponteland, tourism wise, (thanks to our lack of a bypass) is merely an inconvenient set of traffic lights on the road to Scotland.

What is needed now is, not developers, but a large dose of common sense in looking to get the maximum aesthetic improvement to the environment of Merton Way for the minimum outlay. Forget grandiose ideas of competing with Tesco or having a mini Metro Centre, there is not the demand. Let us look at what works best for the village, not developers.

*Gordon Wilkinson, Ponteland*

## Developers move in as we sleep

Have we all been asleep while entrepreneurs and their solicitors slot in planning and licence applications?

How many thought that Sainsbury's was going to be one of four retail units on

ground level with a restaurant above?

How many realised that the restaurant was seeking planning for 200 covers and then put in licence applications for live music, live dancing and alcohol to be sold on-licence and off-licence?

What was the Borough Council doing allowing such a large restaurant slap in the middle of a dense residential and conservation area?

Well, word got around and there have been more than 80 objections to the now revised licence sought by Fratelli's. Is this a record number of objections? These include objections from the Parish Council, the Civic Society, the Methodist Minister and the



licensee of the Tandoori and Rialto restaurants on Main Street.

Many residents of Cecil Court and Mayfair Gardens have made their individual statements as well as concerned people of Ponteland. The main points of these are to do with late night noise and disturbance, parking and traffic problems, youth disorder and illegal activities. The licensing application is being heard on September 11.

The latest planning application is for a 'totem sign' 20 feet high and 6 feet wide, constantly lit, at the entrance to Sainsbury's, with the signage Bella Villas Retail Park and the names of the two occupants.

This, opposite a conservation area!

*Muriel Sobo, Beech Court, Ponteland*

**What do you think?  
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## October deadline

The October magazine will be delivered the week beginning October 15. Deadline for all copy/adverts is Friday September 28.

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# Ponteland staff spy age fraudster in local Newcastle Building Society branch!



This age fraudster went to great lengths to try and get his hands on a Newcastle Building Society account passbook!

With such a generous rate for Newcastle Building Society's new savings account, exclusively for the over 50s, people are going to great lengths to open an account. A cleverly disguised young man was recently spotted by the vigilant Ponteland branch advisers trying to pass himself off as over 50 years of age!

Well actually, he was the teenage star of a TV advert for the Newcastle's 50+ Savings Account, offering a special rate of 6.4% Gross/AER. The advert will be screening on Tyne Tees TV throughout the month.

The recently refurbished Ponteland branch provided the perfect stage for the advert, which features real branch staff. Christine Heslop, Marketing Manager, said "Our staff kindly gave up their August bank holiday so as not to disturb business and a crew was set up in branch to film the advert in which the young actor makes three amusing attempts to disguise his age with over-sized costumes, wigs and even a fake moustache!

Our advert illustrates how we provide one of the most attractive products available for customers over the age of 50 and it's not surprising that everyone wants to get their hands on one! However, we also offer a full range of savings accounts and services, and the advert concludes with both the youth and his fifty-something father opening an account that's right for them."

The Newcastle 50+ Account is available from 10th September 2007 by either visiting [www.newcastle.co.uk/50plus](http://www.newcastle.co.uk/50plus), calling 0845 606 6668 or going in to your local branch - but watch out, our staff are trained to spot those age fraudsters!

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## Ponteland in Bloom

*Photos show Thea Morrison and Mary Short in the garden of Athol House and other village displays.*

*By Muriel Sobo*

**The judges for the Village in Bloom contest were making their final assessment of Ponteland as this issue went to press.**

Interested gardeners will have made their own judgements on the various displays all around the village centre, which are pictured here.

Athol House sheltered housing has its own green-fingered ladies, who won a trophy last year for their efforts in bringing colour and bloom to their gardens.

The Ponteland Lions were so impressed by their displays that they gave them a £75 donation to help buy more plants. So Mary Short, Thea Morrison and Kathy Bailey have great expectations of another prize but have found growing conditions quite tough this year because of the weather.



# Ottering on the brink of disaster

## Road danger to cute park residents



*By Muriel Sobo*

**OTTERS are alive and well in Ponteland Park.**

**...well, they were until a dead one was found early one morning in mid-August on the West Road, probably hit by a vehicle.**

It was a large mature animal in good condition. Local resident Brenda Foxcroft often sees otters playing around the river where the recent improvements were made in the bank next to West Road and near the ox-bow lake.

Brenda confirms what we have known from evidence of spraint and scratch marks on rocks that otters regularly move up and down the Pont. Brenda is a regular dog walker in the Park.

Have any others seen otters in the river? Anyone finding a dead otter is asked to contact the Environment Agency who collect the body and send it off for post-mortem. Then the results are collated for England and Wales on a database which already shows that otter populations are expanding.

**The contact is Rachael McFarlane, biodiversity officer, based in Newcastle, and her phone number is (0191) 203 4238.**

# Environment Agency inspection proves fish numbers in Pont low

*By Margaret Stainsby*

**For some time local people who know the river well in Pont Park have been worried about the low numbers of fish present.**

This year we have had no familiar shoals of newly-hatched minnows/sticklebacks feeding in the shallows and there has been a definite shortage of invertebrates in the river bed.

It was therefore with some relief that we heard the river was shortly due for inspection by the Environment Agency. As Friends of Ponteland Park had been in contact with the Agency last year concerning three pollution episodes, we were kindly invited to attend on the afternoon the survey was to be carried out.

A 30 metre stretch of river was chosen where the water was running with adequate under-water planting where fish could feed and shelter. The operation took the three man team approximately half an hour.

The fish were temporarily stunned by an electric current, netted and put into a holding tank. At the end of the session the fish were counted, identified and measured before being returned to the river.

The numbers were as follows: minnows – 16; stickleback – 2; rock loach – 48; brown trout – 12.

Seven of the brown trout were two years old, the others younger. The familiar large

trout were missing altogether.

From these results it can be concluded that small fish numbers were far too low, considering the test was carried out on a prime stretch of river. We were reassured that the fish population would gradually increase and return to their original numbers, provided there were no further pollution incidents.

The welfare of the otter, kingfisher and heron depend upon this happening for their survival. Please report any signs of pollution to the Environment Agency immediately, as it may then be possible to trace the source of the pollution.



## Witness appeal after savage assault



Young man attacked with baseball bats in car layby

By PC Jon Gray, Community Beat Officer, Ponteland

**Thirty-two crimes have been recorded in the Ponteland and surrounding rural area since the last column, which was written on 3rd August.**

Offences have included three shed burglaries on Darras Hall - all taking place, most likely, during the early hours of the morning, with garden tools and bicycles being stolen. Not as many when compared to the previous year's, but some people are still sneaking onto the estate during the early hours, and looking for vulnerable 'easy to get into' sheds.

The other offences which are more common to this area (that is not to say that there have been a lot reported, but that they occur more than others) still include thefts from building sites, two reported on Darras during this period, and the sporadic acts of low level damage, which tend to take place on the weekend nights, with cars, fences, garden shrubs and lights being damaged.

### Unusual thefts

**The more unusual offences have included the theft of a caravan from Kirkley Mill overnight, the caravan being found in Lemington the following day, and the theft of a quad ATV from a farm near Milbourn, which is the first of this type of offence that we've had reported since January this year.**

No house burglaries took place at all during this period. A man from Throckley was recently sentenced to two years jail, having been convicted of a house burglary on Edgehill. That took place earlier this year.

### Violent offences down

**Violent offences have remained low in comparison with other areas. The most serious incident was reported around 8.30pm on Monday 20th August, when a young man who was sitting in his car talking to some of his friends in the**

**layby on Rotary Way (the road running from the Dobbies roundabout to Callerton Lane), was attacked by at least three men of the same age, who used weapons similar to baseball bats.**

He sustained some nasty, but hopefully not permanent, injuries and his car was damaged. Any useful information in relation to that incident would be appreciated. Again, to stress, this type of offence is uncommon in our area. You may, from time to time, see loud sounding and aggressive looking behaviour from some younger people in this area, but it usually tends to stop at that.

The coverage of recent crimes involving guns in other parts of the country have understandably caused a lot of concern - the concern being that violent offences, particularly involving younger people, are rapidly increasing, with the questions as to who or what can be blamed and what can be done.

A recent editorial in one paper questioned as to whether there really has been a great increase in violent offences, but suggested that the fear of crime had perhaps increased, suggesting that the Home Office made counteracting the "fear of crime" a priority.

Fear of crime main problem

Trying to reduce the fear of crime has been a policing priority in this area for some time. It is perhaps easier for those of us who work in the public safety/criminal justice system to appreciate that violent offences, on the whole, haven't suddenly increased. What they will have is a 'ripple' type effect on communities as a whole, as they are talked about. In this immediate area, they are definitely down - we are investigating fewer assaults than, say, five years ago.

To comment on as to why violent offences happen, and as to who or what to blame, is

not really in the remit of this column. My own personal opinion is that these issues are far more complex and difficult than any Newsnight discussion, or paper editorial can put right.

Many suggestions are put forward - some of them are totally ridiculous, many are not, some cannot be implemented because we live in a very mobile, globally competitive society, some perhaps could, but it would mean an increase or change in public spending.

### Exam praise

**Finally, to end on a positive note about teenagers in this area, the 'A' level results have again been good along with the GCSE results, from Ponteland Community High School.**

**Congratulations to those of you who from the High School and schools in the city who passed. There are a number of teenagers who have taken NVQs, some of whom have started trade training or are beginning courses at local colleges, which is again a very good achievement.**

The signs are that there are a lot of younger people in this area who seem to have an idea of what they want to do. One thing to remember, if your first choice doesn't work out, don't lose heart, don't write yourselves off - there will be some other avenues to explore, there are a lot of options career or work related which you probably have never thought of.

On the same line, and very finally, a particular well done to Benjamin (Benji) Cowan, who used to 'hang around' the area a few years ago, who passed out of the Commando Training centre near Exeter as a Royal Marine this Summer, which is, as some readers will know, a very physically and mentally hard course to get through.

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