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Police on the beat

07/02/2008

In the early years of the 19th century our streets had become so lawless that the then Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel, came up with the novel idea of a police force patrolling the streets.

In between then and now policing has changed. The beat system was killed off along with Dixon of Dock Green, we had newly merged police forces; shiny new patrol cars were introduced and a computer system. Policing has gone from prevention to detection. Prevention in my mind does not sit well with computer statistics and government driven targets; it's immeasurable.

A history lesson: In 1898 there were 4,221 violent crimes in England and Wales. Just over a century later there were 331,843. Even allowing for population increase, that is a 47-fold rise in violent crime. In 1931 there were three crimes a year for every police officer. In 2001 there were 44. According to the United Nations Britain is the most common-crime nation with 58 crimes per 100 people compared with the US at 43 and Japan at 22.

A novel idea for the 21st century would be beat officers preventing crime, squaring the circle.