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# LIVING IT

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND JUSTICE**

Edited by Claire Lightowler, Susie Cameron and Brian Rogers





## ABERDEEN BEACH BOULEVARD AND THE BOULEY BASHERS

### Kevin Wallace gives a police officer's perspective

**ABERDEEN** has been the focus of so much of north-east Scotland's economic activity through the past century. People travelled there not only for business but also for pleasure. The region's young people followed this pattern and Union Street became the focus for those 'walking the mat', an early form of today's dating sites, while the Beach Ballroom and Beach Esplanade, became prime locations for relaxing. The Beach Boulevard ('Bouley') linked these two well known centres and became the focus in particular for those with a driving and motoring mindset.

From the 1960s different diverse subgroups evolved within those meeting at the Bouley, often overlapping, based on place of residence, age and vehicle make, model and modifications. Over time these individuals became associated with the term 'boy racer' and more specifically, became known within Aberdeen as the 'Bouley Bashers'.

Especially in evidence during evenings and over weekends, Aberdeen retained this distinct distribution of young people. While not all inclusive, the combination of young often inexperienced drivers filled with pride in their vehicles, an open road and an attentive audience often resulted in displays of inappropriate, unsafe and illegal driving and collisions in the area; frequently followed by others seeking to attain and exceed the standard 'set'.

The 1990s saw the start of a period of change. Redevelopment of the beach in particular saw new retail, leisure and especially residential developments, and this drew attention to the activities of the visiting motorists and their general behaviour. This brought new challenges for the police and local authority in how to respond to, and manage, the

daily complaints and high expectations of the existing and new communities. This resulted in regular and active police patrols which were then perceived by the drivers as targeting and persecuting them.

The north east economy was buoyant and through sustained growth, communities and businesses multiplied. At the same time, the Bouley drivers retained their same desire to congregate at traditional locations. However, affluence saw the traditional well used second-hand cars, being replaced by new high performance and highly modified cars, many equipped with tuned engines, growling exhausts and decibel bursting music systems. These only exacerbated complaints from the local community who saw the 'Bouley Bashers' as the villains of the peace, quite literally.

In 2000 Grampian Police commenced a process of restructuring whereby 'Neighbourhood officers' took responsibility for their beats, meeting the expectations of local residents and resolving local problems. This was a timely development in respect of the Beach area: residents and businesses now had a single point of contact to which to take their concerns.

This resulted in the local Neighbourhood Constable introducing a new initiative: a Problem Solving Policing plan (PSP). Initially it allowed a detailed review of the problem to be carried out, before tasks were created and allocated both internally within the organisation and externally through partner agencies, most notably the local authority, Aberdeen City Council. The PSP held a record of our efforts to resolve local concerns. This was to prove instrumental as we moved forward.

My arrival in 2003 as the Neighbourhood Sergeant provided a personal focus on the issue and as a former Traffic officer, I was able to introduce a level of knowledge within the Neighbourhood team, which had not previously been available. We further developed the PSP, pushing boundaries and looking across the country for best practice and solutions. Elected Members, road engineers, traffic management teams and legal experts were consulted, while police officers were briefed to ensure their awareness of the issues, case law and their responsibilities. Offences were also being 'fast tracked' by the Procurator Fiscals office.

We understood that the differing groups had their own opinions and brought these groups together through invited and public meetings to share their concerns. The roads were realigned, traffic lights inserted, parking restrictions put in place and policing operations run, yet the problems and complaints continued.

The following year saw the introduction of the Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004 to address antisocial behaviour across our communities. While not exclusively designed to be used in conjunction with motorists, this provided us with a tool to achieve respite for local residents if not a long term resolution. Acceptable conduct viewed not from the 'average drivers' perspective but from that of residents and communities.

The antisocial use of vehicles was addressed within the legislation and we could now deal directly and more importantly immediately with the 'nuisance' and lower level conduct we were encountering. Under section 126 of the Act, where a vehicle was driven 'off road' or 'carelessly' within an area which was the subject of antisocial behaviour, Officers could issue a warning. This was recorded against both the car and the driver for a period of 12 months and any repetition involving either would see the vehicle seized, the owner having to pay a fee for its release. This allowed officers to bring an immediate focus to the problems, improve driver behaviour, prevent repetition and more specifically provide some respite to the community.

Section 126 proved to be a valuable tool, but it took time for officers to become familiar and confident in its use and drivers to understand its application and amend what had become traditional behaviours. Hundreds of drivers would visit the area and despite media releases, meetings and education sessions, drivers struggled to take on board the messages and implications of their actions. Complaints continued. However the Act did offer greater powers for particular places of concern, as the Beach Boulevard area had become. A detailed set of requirements had to be put in place before this last resort legislation could be used: our PSP now came into its own. Here we had a documented record of our actions, showing all options had been considered, applied and proved unsuccessful.

On 1 March 2005, following an administrative and advertising processes, the 'Beach Boulevard' became Scotland's first Dispersal Area (Part 3, Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004). Close scrutiny followed, political figures from far and near visited, media, motoring magazines and other police forces followed its progress.

The three month dispersal area was overtly policed, providing respite for local residents from constantly circling vehicles, associated music, litter and noise pollution created

by the presence of the vehicles, their use and occupants. Inappropriate vehicle use saw drivers stopped, their details noted and the concerns discussed. Issued with an information leaflet they were instructed to immediately leave the Dispersal area, prohibited from returning until the following morning. While some offered to challenge the situation, they all left the area in compliance with the legislation.

Prosecution and vehicle seizure resulted from any breach and two individuals did challenge the dispersal, returning to the area within the prohibited period. They were identified, charged and reported regarding the breach of the legislation, subsequently being convicted of the offence.

A three month extension to the Dispersal Order offered the maximum six months respite to the local Community. As such the Dispersal Order was successful, however it was never going to be sustainable and a continuation of traditional policing methods was necessary.

The work of the Neighbourhood team through the PSP had seen consultation and partnership working which pulled driver groups, residents, communities and the police together to find solutions and options, which met the needs of the enthusiasts, without creating issues for other communities. Mediation and increased communication including involvement in enthusiasts websites all played a part, however did not fully eradicate the conflicting views or behaviour.

Turning to the present day, we now see a very different situation. There is reduced 'cruising' and no associated complaints within what is still a popular area for recreation. A number of drivers do congregate within a nearby retail car park but officers are rarely called to the area.

An increased road policing establishment in Aberdeen, widespread use of the s. 126 powers across the City and beyond, and the recession, including increased fuel costs, are all credited with reducing the longstanding conflict. I suspect the most significant impact however centres on social media, which has changed the way we all communicate and manage our lives. These remove the need for traditional gatherings, essential to pooling ideas, passing the time and planning meets, These functions can now be managed at a push of a button, from a bedroom or workplace.

While the 'Bouley' has calmed, our communities seek our continued policing commitment to educate motorists within their communities using all legislation available to us.

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For an academic perspective on the Aberdeen Beach Boulevard story see:

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Lumsden, K. (2013) *Boy Racer Culture: Youth, Masculinity and Deviance* Routledge

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Lumsden, K. (2014) 'Anti-Social Behaviour Legislation and the Policing of Boy Racers: Dispersal Orders and Seizure of Vehicles', *Policing: a Journal of Policy and Practice* 8(2): 135-43.

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Karen Lumsden comments on this article on <http://scottishjusticematters.com/sjm-blog/>

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# UK Justice Policy Review:

Volume 2

6 May 2011 to 5 May 2012

# UK Justice Policy Review:

Volume 3

6 May 2012 to 5 May 2013

By Richard Garside, Arianna Silvestri  
and Helen Mills

# UK Justice Policy Review:

Volume 1

6 May 2010 to 5 May 2011

By Richard Garside and Helen Mills

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