

**As safe as**

**houses...**

**farmhouses?**

HOW SECURE ARE OUR RURAL HOMES?

A 1985  
Kellogg Rural Leadership Course  
Project.

by  
Sue Lane

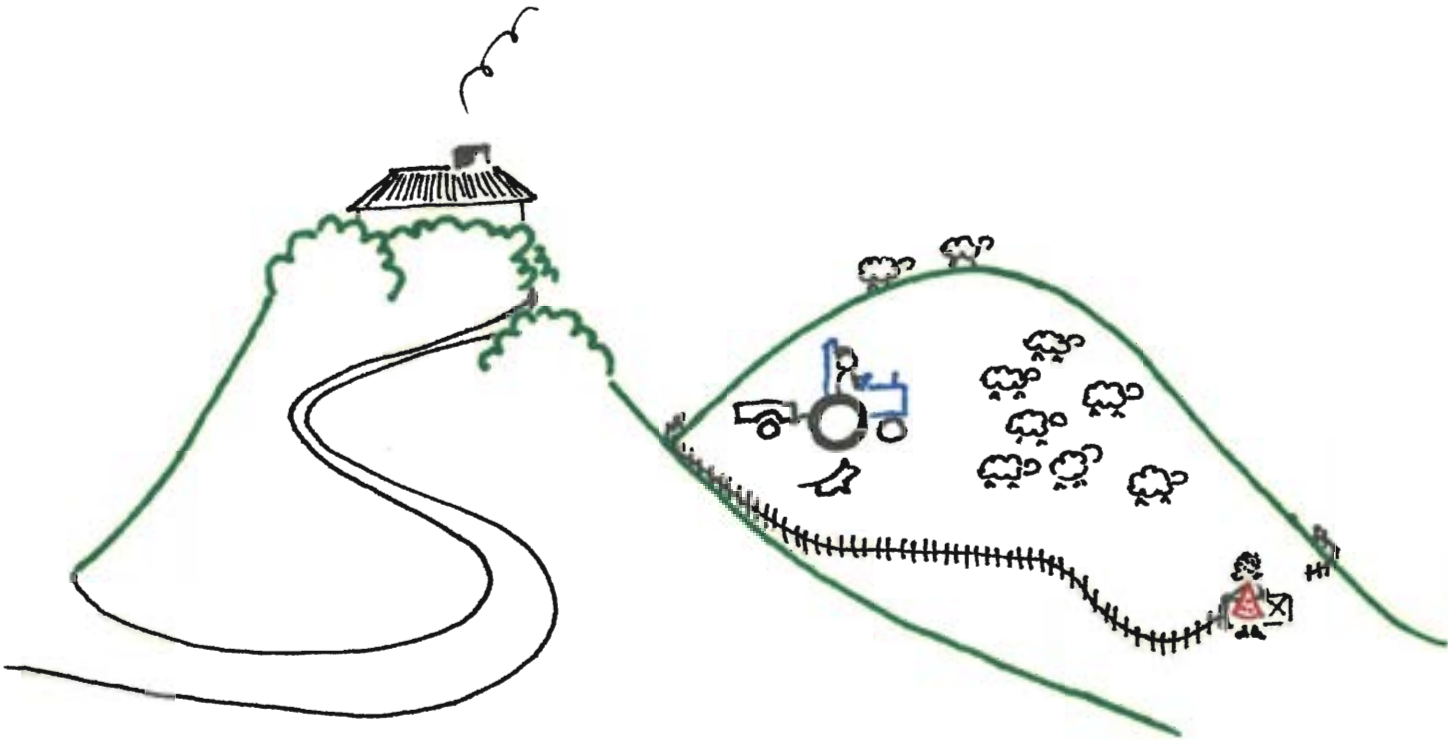
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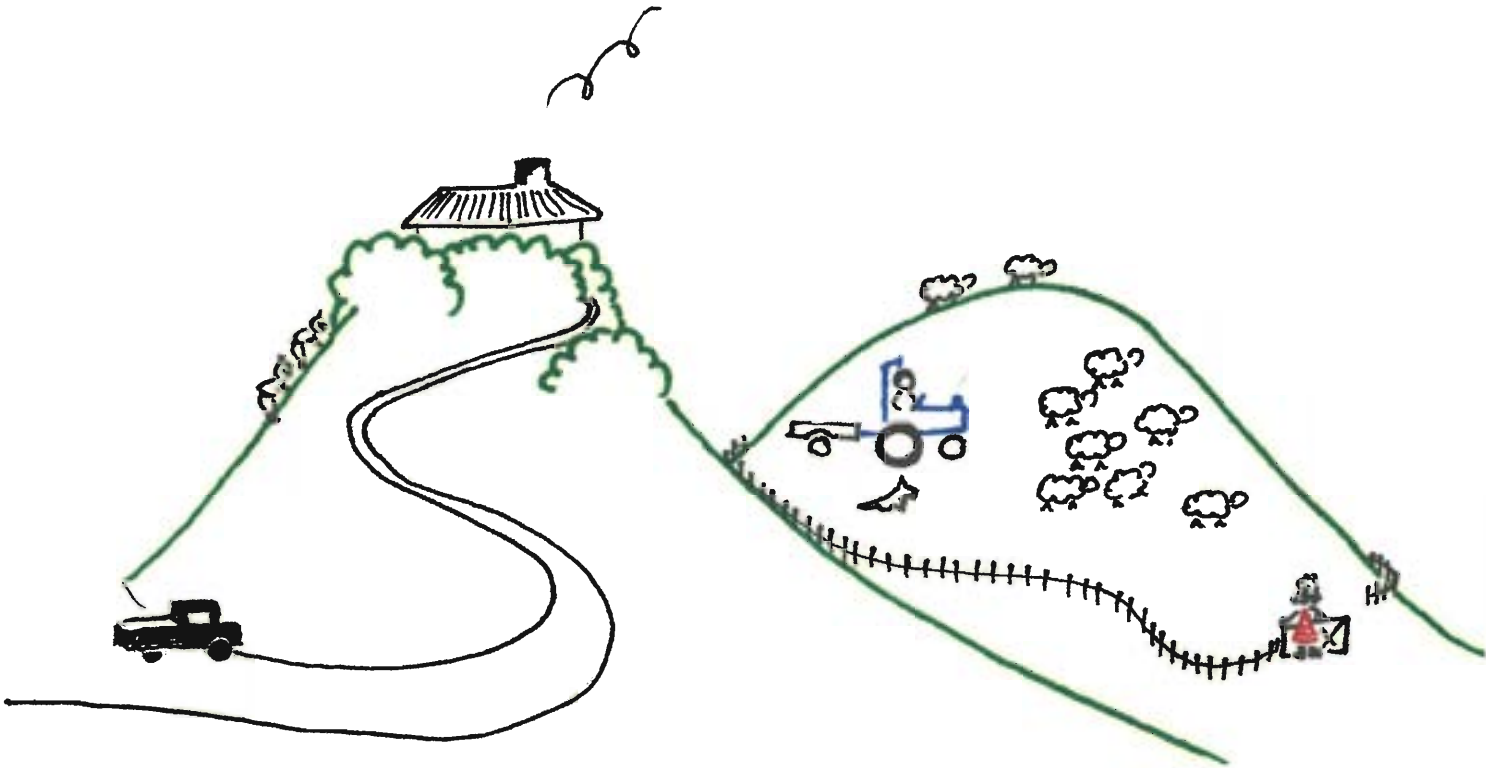
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### Introduction

The typical New Zealand farmhouse is set back from the road, not too close to any nearby houses. Surrounded by paddocks, it usually has a garden of flowers and shrubs, and often some screening with bigger trees or hedging.



Such a scene adds to the attractiveness of our green and pleasant land, but it can also be very attractive to anyone contemplating the possibility of criminal activity out of sight - or sound - of neighbours.



The establishment of neighbourhood watch schemes and neighbourhood support groups in our local urban areas is seen by the law enforcement agencies to be a very positive step towards the prevention of crime in residential areas; but will this encourage the criminal into the countryside?

Should rural people be taking similar measures toward their own protection? Do rural dwellers feel that any such precautions are necessary; do they believe themselves to be at risk from the threat of criminal activity?

There seemed to be very few answers available to any of these questions, and so I have set about finding some of this information myself.

I sought data from Police Headquarters in Wellington, and am grateful for the co-operation with which both they and the Tokoroa Police station staff have answered my questions. Full information from this source is tabulated in appendix 2.

I also designed a questionnaire for rural people to fill in, giving me their own information and perceptions of the security of our rural households. I am grateful to Federated Farmers, Women's Division and many private individuals in our district who gave me their time to fill in these forms. A complete analysis of the questionnaire answers is set out in appendix 1.

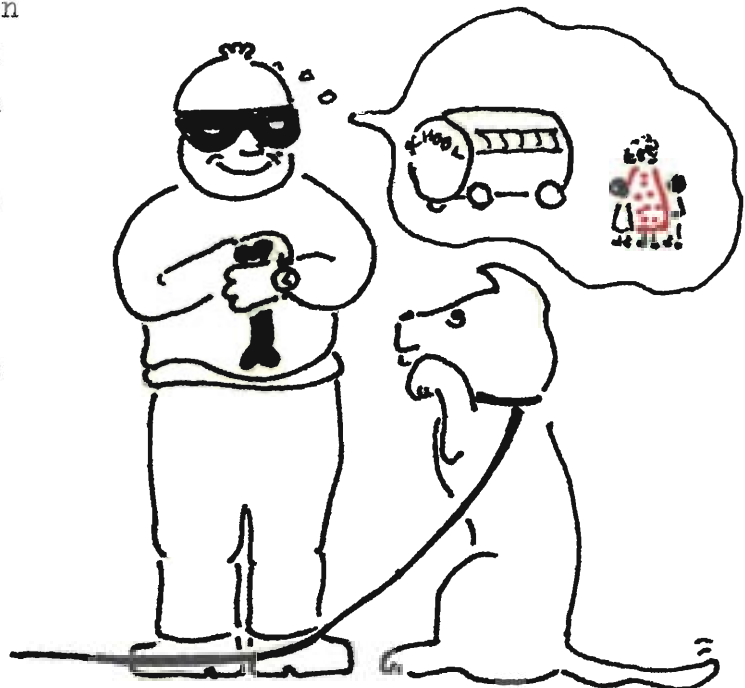
### Burglary

As a part of the questionnaire, rural people were asked how they perceive their own risk of being burgled, compared to that of urban residents. The majority of those responding see their risk as being the same or greater than that of town dwellers.

But this perception of risk is not reflected by precautions taken, or even in the day-to-day rural routine. Only one third of the households have any form of security system, and the most popular of these is 'a watchdog'. While in no way questioning the value of watchdogs, there must be some doubt as to their real effectiveness in the rural situation. A clearly audible mutter of 'well, he's really the farm dog, but I suppose he would bark' could be heard during questionnaire answering sessions, and most farm dogs - when not out on the farm - are tied or kennelled outside the house section, thus severely limiting their ability to deter a would-be intruder.

Only half the people questioned routinely lock their homes when leaving the property for short periods (a day or less), and a much smaller proportion (18%) lock the house when it is left empty while the occupants are out on the farm.

So the majority of rural homes are left unattended, unlocked, for significant periods of time during the day.



And to anyone interested in knowing - or finding out - exactly when those times might be, it would be a very simple matter to determine routines such as milking, lambing beats or the school bus service.

The times of 'availability' would vary little from day to day for significant periods over the seasons.

It was interesting to note that in general conversation on the topic of burglary, the only mention of theft of home freezer contents was made by urban residents, and this was at times expressed as a significant concern. Yet many rural households have well stocked freezers - especially in the high value items such as meat. And in most cases, the freezer is not within that part of the house which would be routinely locked.

The reactions so far noted from rural people would tend to indicate that there seems little cause for concern, that rural people are more trusting, or have not been exposed to the level of criminal activity that is apparent in cities and urban areas.

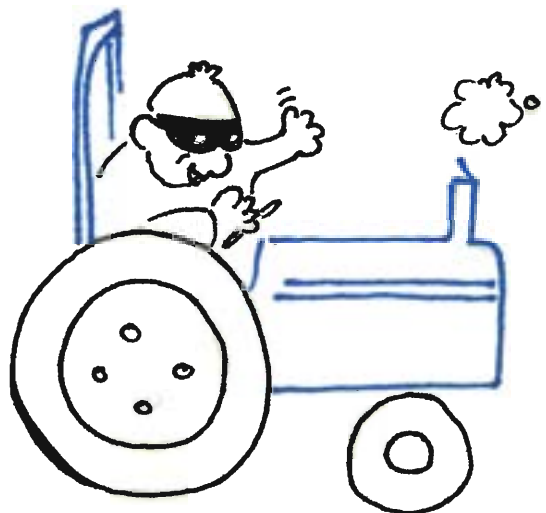
It is surprising then - even shocking - to look at the answers to the question 'Have you ever had a theft from your property?'.  
62% answered 'Yes'.

Police figures over the last five years indicate that the expected rate would be around 30% in the rural area and 20% in town, but of course these cover only those offences that were reported, and taken up as a police enquiry.

And add to this the response to the question 'Do you believe you are more, or less, at risk of being burgled than people who live in town?'.  
31% believed the risk for rural people to be greater, 38% the same, and only 18% believed rural dwellers to be less at risk.

It is hard to reconcile this perception and experience of risk with the lack of security precautions taken. Even after experiencing some form of theft from the property, only half that number had established any form of security system (including the somewhat questionable 'watchdog'). Of those answering 'Yes' to the question on property theft, 48% have some form of security system; 52% have not.

Do we poor farmers really believe that we do not possess the high value items most attractive to intruders? Or does the security system come in the category of 'Yes, once we've finished upgrading the shed, and paid off the new tractor .....



### Crimes of Violence

The traditional image of New Zealand rural life - fluffy white sheep on green paddocks, the smell of scones in the farmhouse kitchen, and life full of healthy outdoor busy-ness - contains no element of violence. This is reflected in the perception of such risk, as seen by rural people themselves; 83% believe the risk of suffering from violence is the same or less than if they lived in town, only 8% considered the risk to be greater.

Police figures for violent offences over the last five years show little difference between the two sectors - a risk of 2% for rural people and 3% for urban dwellers. The question asked of rural residents 'Have you ever been aware of a personal risk of assault while you were at home?' resulted in a 20% answer 'Yes', but many of these were not of a nature to become a police case.

What is more surprising - and of much greater concern - is that of the 20% who had had personal experience of feeling threatened, 38% were not concerned at the thought of a woman alone in the house, whether they were that woman themselves, or she was their wife. And only 13% of them had any arrangement with friends or neighbours for the security of that woman alone.

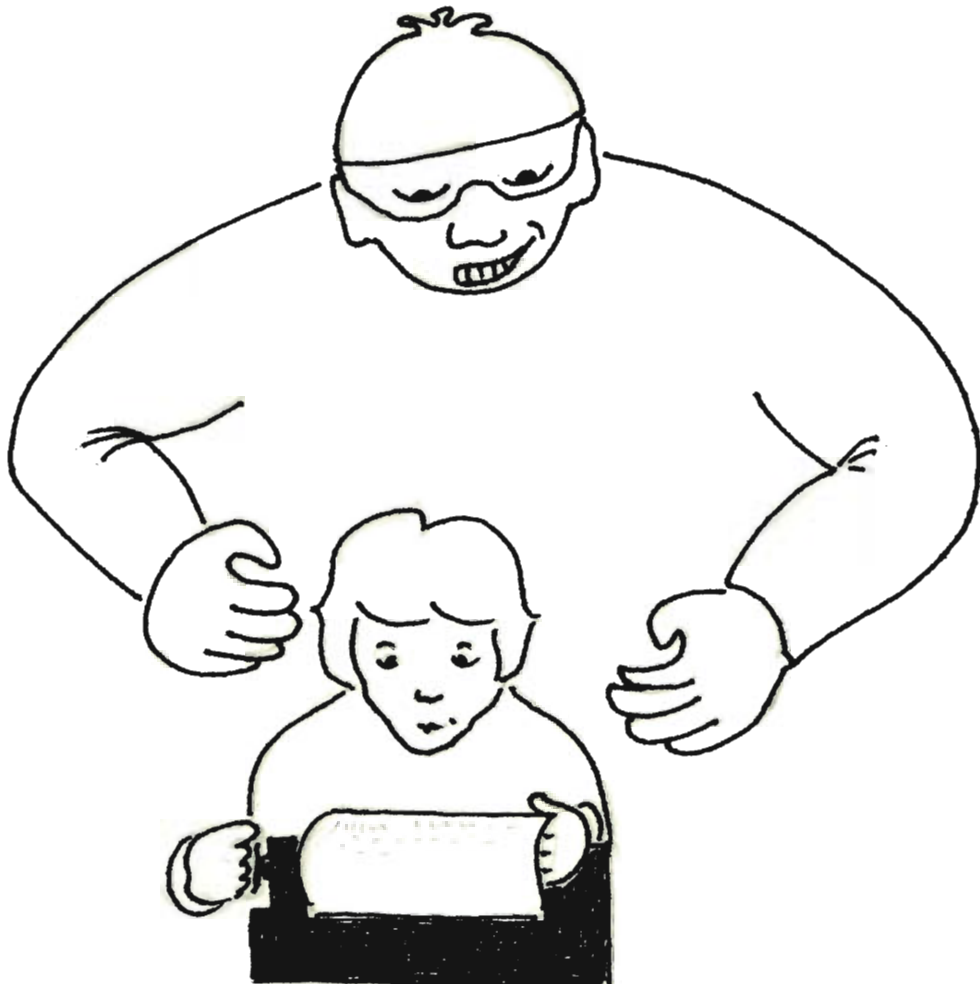
Clearly, it is much more difficult for rural dwellers to organise a system such as neighbourhood watch, or support groups. But the figures gathered on the lack of preparedness for a personally threatening emergency must be cause for concern.

All the women who filled in the questionnaire were asked if they had ever attended a self defence course. (Several have been conducted in the Tokoroa area, particularly in recent months.)

Without exception the answer was 'No'.

But again there was an audible murmur of 'I really must do that, apparently they are very good', and 'I meant to go to that last one'.

Is it really a problem of being too busy, or not wanting to acknowledge a problem by doing something about it? I am myself as guilty as anyone - I have a firm belief in the value of self defence knowledge and training, but I just haven't got around to it yet.



And when the crunch comes .....

A situation was described to all respondents to the questionnaire:

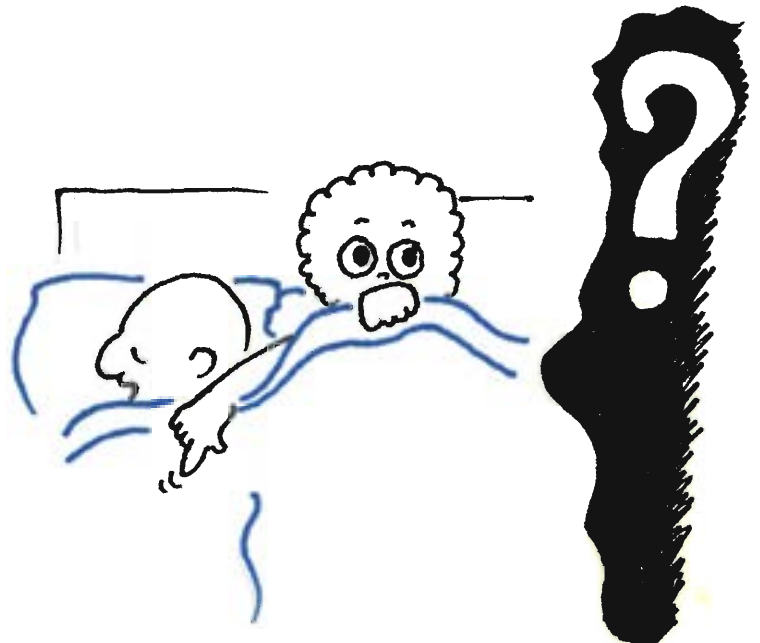
'Imagine you are at home, at night, asleep in bed. The domestic arrangements are as usual - spouse beside you, children in their beds, workers (if any) in their usual abode. You are woken by the sound of someone moving in the living area of the house, and you know it is not the sound of anyone who should normally be there.

What do you do?'

The immediate response was dead silence. Then slowly, with much chewing of pencils and pauses for thought, the answers were written.

Without exception, those with husbands woke him. But only one husband even mentioned his wife, none of the others either told her what he was going to do, or enlisted her assistance.

The actions taken - by the husbands - varied from a frank 'haven't a clue' to confronting the intruder with a loaded gun and shooting if necessary. Most men said they would investigate the situation (22% with a weapon), and fervently hoped the investigation would be sufficient to frighten the intruder away.



Less than one third mentioned dialling 111 or contacting the police.

The clear message was to the effect that such a situation had not been given any real thought before, but 'I would cope as best I could' - basically without any help from members of the family, or from outsiders.

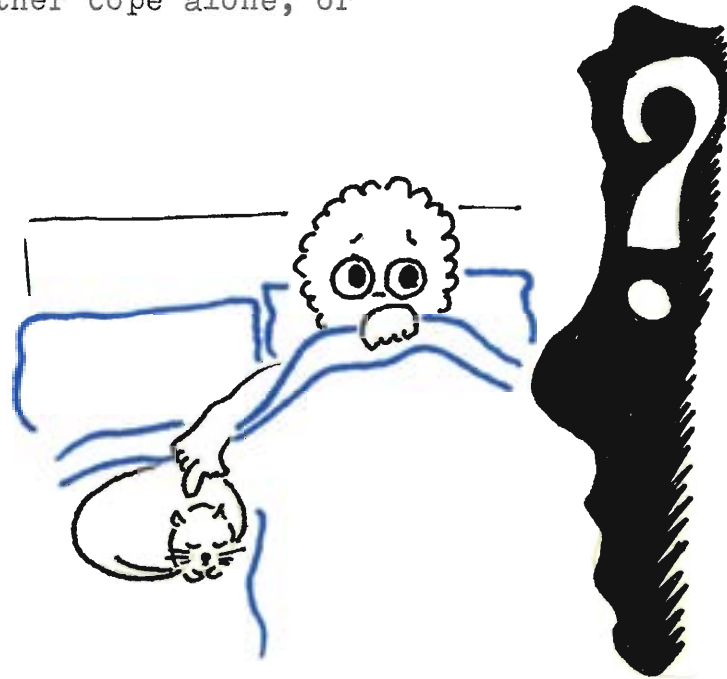
The question was then repeated, but only for the women:

'The situation exactly as described previously, except that your husband is away from home for the night.

What would you do?'

The silence resulting from this question was longer. The responses ranged from a very honest 'Lie there, panic, and probably wet the bed', to those who would confront the intruder on their own. Only one of the confronters mentioned a weapon, and that was an aerosol can - contents unstated. About half would phone the police if possible, although one said she would dial 999. The other half made no mention of outside help - they would either cope alone, or 'lie there terrified'.

Again, the indication was clear that such an emergency had not been thought about, and there had certainly been no family discussion on the topic. The first thoughts of most mothers were to check the children, but none of them mentioned getting any help from them.



It would seem not too difficult an errand for an older child to hop out the window with a note or message for a neighbour, but also not without risk. Certainly this sort of action would need to have been discussed with family members so that in the event of an emergency, the 'helpers' would know what was expected of them.

### Conclusion

This project has been only a very preliminary and superficial look at the security of rural households. It has certainly not answered any of the questions that have become apparent, and it would require a great deal more time, expertise and resources than I am able to offer, in order to develop any such answers.

What I believe has emerged, is the indication that there is a significant risk to rural residents of suffering from criminal activity.

This is shown in the police figures, and the rate of increase of most offences is greater in the rural sector than that in urban areas. Whether or not this has been influenced by the greater awareness and watchfulness among urban people, it should be an indication to those of us living in the country that some measure of protection and preparedness is worthwhile.

It is of concern that, while the perception of risk among rural people is in line with the facts as shown by police figures, this knowledge does not appear to have acted as an incentive to do anything about it.

The greatest satisfaction I have derived from working on this topic is the knowledge that rural people in my area are now more aware of security issues, and, more importantly, they are talking about them.

Farming districts are renowned - and rightly so - for their spirit of mutual support, and I am confident that this co-operation could be effectively extended to include support for protection from intruders.

All it needs is awareness, and time out from all the ever present demands of farming, to just get around to it .....

### Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

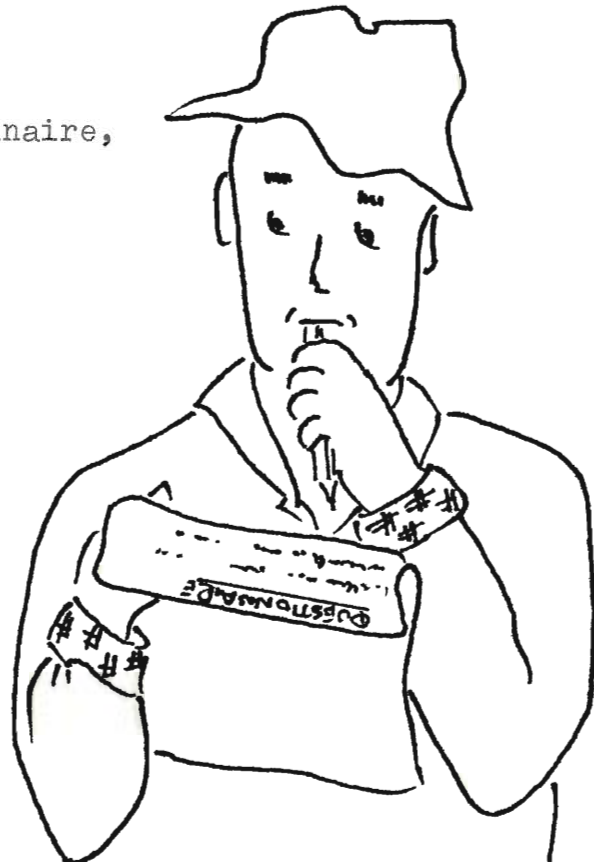
Questionnaires were filled in by 78 rural residents of the farming area around Tokoroa.

The numbers had to be restricted as I wanted all the respondents to live within the area covered by the Tokoroa Police District, so that the questionnaire results would be comparable with the statistical analysis of the police records.

As I did not have access to a computer, all results had to be collated by hand, and therefore large numbers, which would have been more significant from a statistical viewpoint, would have presented too great a task to be handled.

Of the 78 respondents, 36 were male and 42 female. Where it is of interest, the results have been tabulated separately for the two sex groups.

Confidentiality and security were promised to all those who responded to the questionnaire, and for these reasons all forms were destroyed as soon as the results had been collated.



Sample of questionnaire for females to answer.

Have you ever had a theft from your property? Yes No  
If yes; were household or farm items stolen? Farm House Both  
were the stolen items recovered? Yes No Partly  
was the insurance cover satisfactory? Yes No Not insured

Do you have any form of security system? Yes No  
(e.g. burglar alarm, watchdog, deadlocks etc)  
If yes, please indicate type .....

Do you lock the house when you leave the property? Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, please indicate when .....

Do you lock the house when you go out on the farm? Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, please indicate when .....

Do you have any arrangement with neighbours/relatives/workers to keep  
an eye on your property when you go away? Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, when? .....

Do you believe you are more or less at risk of being burgled than  
people who live in town? More Less Same Don't know

Have you ever been aware of a personal risk of assault while you were  
at home? Yes No  
If yes, please indicate what the danger was .....  
(e.g. prowler, threatening caller, threat by relative or friend etc)  
.....

Are you uncomfortable about being alone in the house? Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, when? .....

Do you believe you are more or less at risk of assault than you would  
be if you lived in town? More Less Same Don't know

Do you have any arrangement with neighbours, friends etc., for security  
when you are alone at home? Yes No  
If yes, please describe .....

Sample of questionnaire for males to answer.

Have you ever had a theft from your property? Yes No  
If yes; were household or farm items stolen? Farm House Both  
were the stolen items recovered? Yes No Partly  
was the insurance cover satisfactory? Yes No Not insured

Do you have any form of security system? Yes No  
(e.g. burglar alarm, watchdog, deadlocks etc)  
If yes, please indicate type .....

Do you lock the house when you leave the property? Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, please indicate when .....

Do you lock the house when you go out on the farm? Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, please indicate when .....

Do you have any arrangement with neighbours/relatives/workers to keep  
an eye on your property when you go away? Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, when? .....

Do you believe you are more or less at risk of being burgled than  
people who live in town? More Less Same Don't know

Have you ever been aware of a personal risk of assault while you were  
at home? Yes No  
If yes, please indicate what the danger was .....  
(e.g. prowler, threatening caller, threat by relative or friend etc)  
.....

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Are you concerned about leaving your wife alone in the house?  
Yes No Sometimes  
If sometimes, when? .....

Do you believe you are more or less at risk of assault than you would  
be if you lived in town? More Less Same Don't know

Do you have any arrangement with neighbours, friends etc for security  
when your wife is alone at home? Yes No  
If yes, please describe .....

Q1. Have you ever had a theft from your property?

Yes	No
62%	38%

Of those answering yes:

- were household or farm items stolen?

Household	Farm	Both
4%	83%	13%

- were the stolen items recovered?

Yes	No	Partly
13%	71%	17%

- was the insurance cover satisfactory?

Yes	No	Not insured
38%	4%	58%
		(includes 'didn't claim')

Q2. Do you have any form of security system?

Yes	No
33%	66%

Q3. Do you lock the house when you leave the property?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Male	44%	6%	50%
Female	67%	14%	19%
Total	56%	10%	34%

Q4. Do you lock the house when you go out on the farm?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Male	6%	56%	39%
Female	29%	48%	24%
Total	18%	51%	31%

Q5. Do you have any arrangement with neighbours/relatives/workers to keep an eye on your property when you go away?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Male	50%	22%	28%
Female	57%	29%	14%
Total	54%	26%	21%

Q6. Do you believe you are more, or less, at risk of being burgled than people who live in town?

	More	Same	Less	Don't know
Male	33%	22%	29%	16%
Female	29%	52%	10%	9%
Total	31%	38%	18%	13%

Q7. Have you ever been aware of a personal risk of assault while you were at home?

	Yes	No
Male	17%	83%
Female	24%	76%
Total	21%	79%

Q8. Are you concerned about being/leaving your wife alone in the house?

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Male	24%	18%	59%
Female	38%	19%	43%
Total	32%	18%	50%

(all the 'sometimes' were at night)

Q9. Do you believe you are more, or less, at risk of assault than you would be if you lived in town?

	More	Same	Less	Don't know
Male	6%	28%	50%	16%
Female	10%	57%	29%	4%
Total	8%	44%	39%	9%

Q10. Do you have any arrangement with neighbours, friends etc. for security when you/your wife is alone at home?

	Yes	No
Male	6%	94%
Female	24%	76%
Total	15%	85%

Analysis of Police Statistics

Police headquarters provided me with printouts listing all reported offences for the Tokoroa Police District for each of the last five years - 1980-84 incl.

I collated these into total offences in each category for each year.

Offences occurring in the industrial and commercial areas of Tokoroa, and those in the pubs, were excluded.

All other offences were totalled for rural and urban areas.

The figures were then divided by the population of each area\*, giving a figure representing the risk of a resident suffering from each offence.

These figures are tabulated in the following graphs.

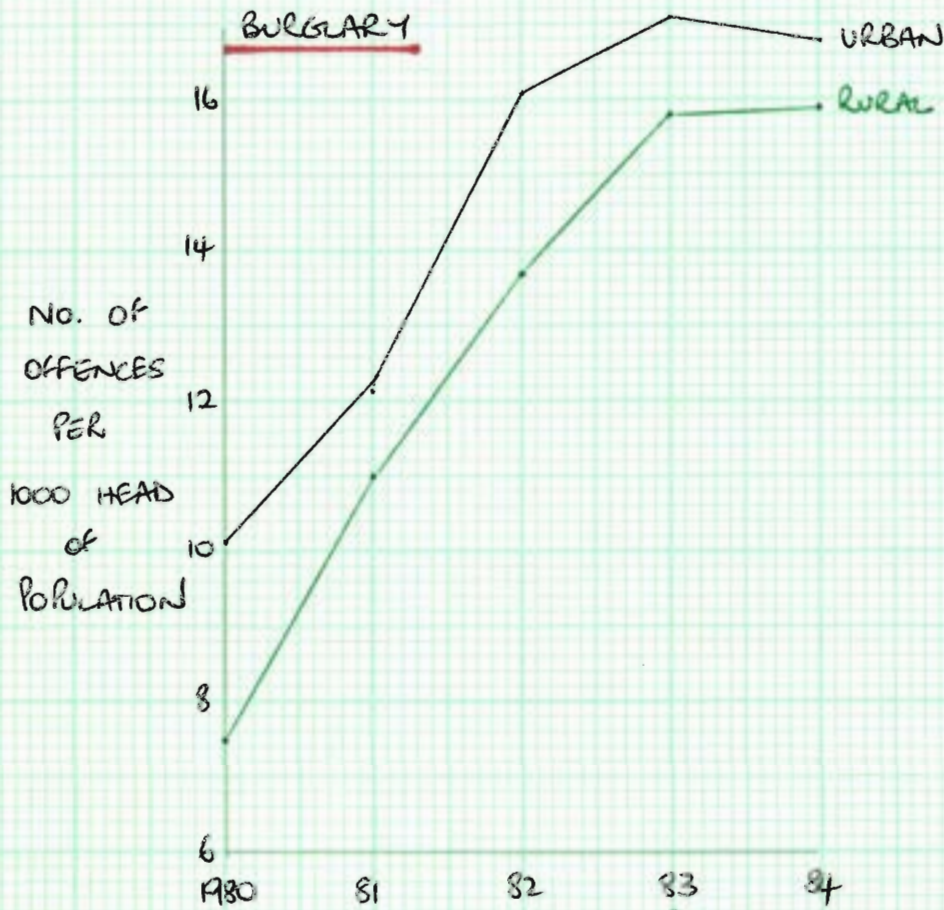
The most striking indication from the graphs can be seen by considering the last three years. In all cases the rate of offence per 1000 head of population is either higher in the rural sector, or is increasing at a greater rate.

\* Population figures used are

Tokoroa 18750

Rural area 1450 - all Maungaiti riding of the Matamata County Council, plus part Lichfield riding.

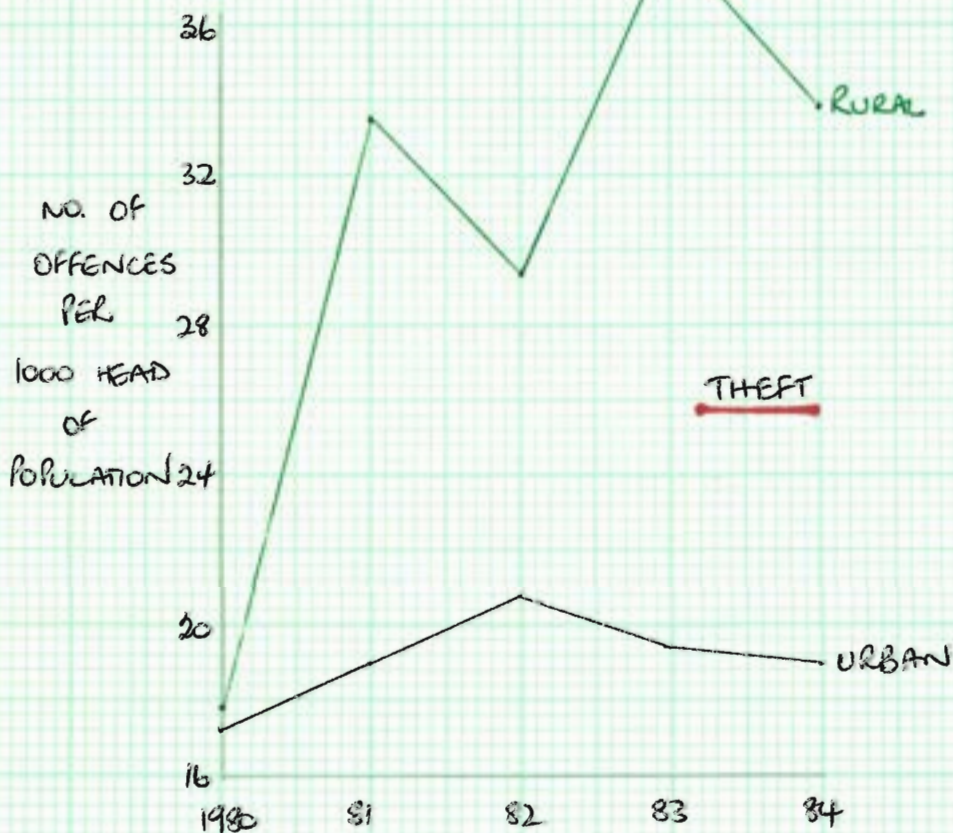


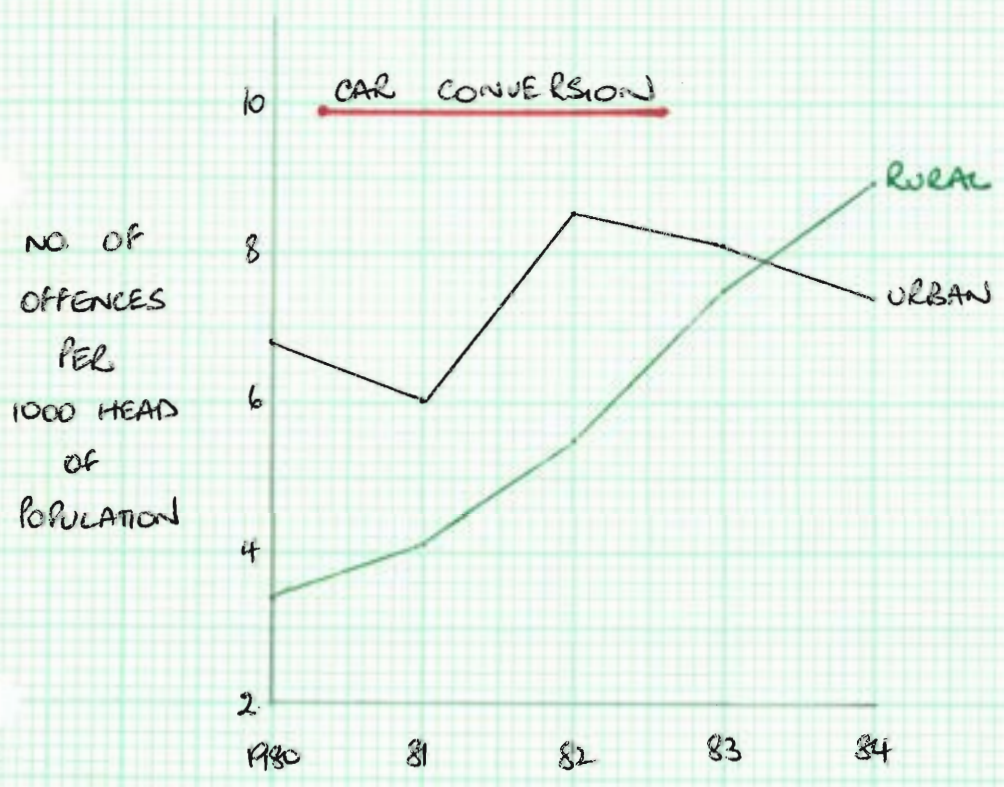
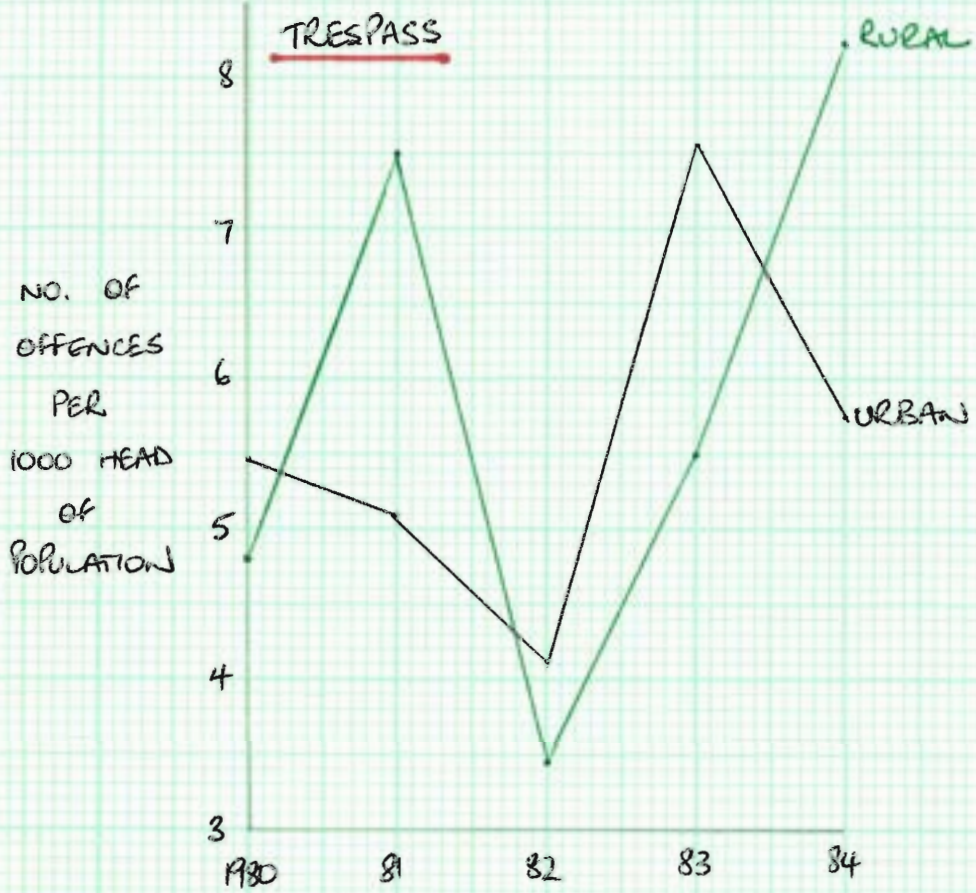


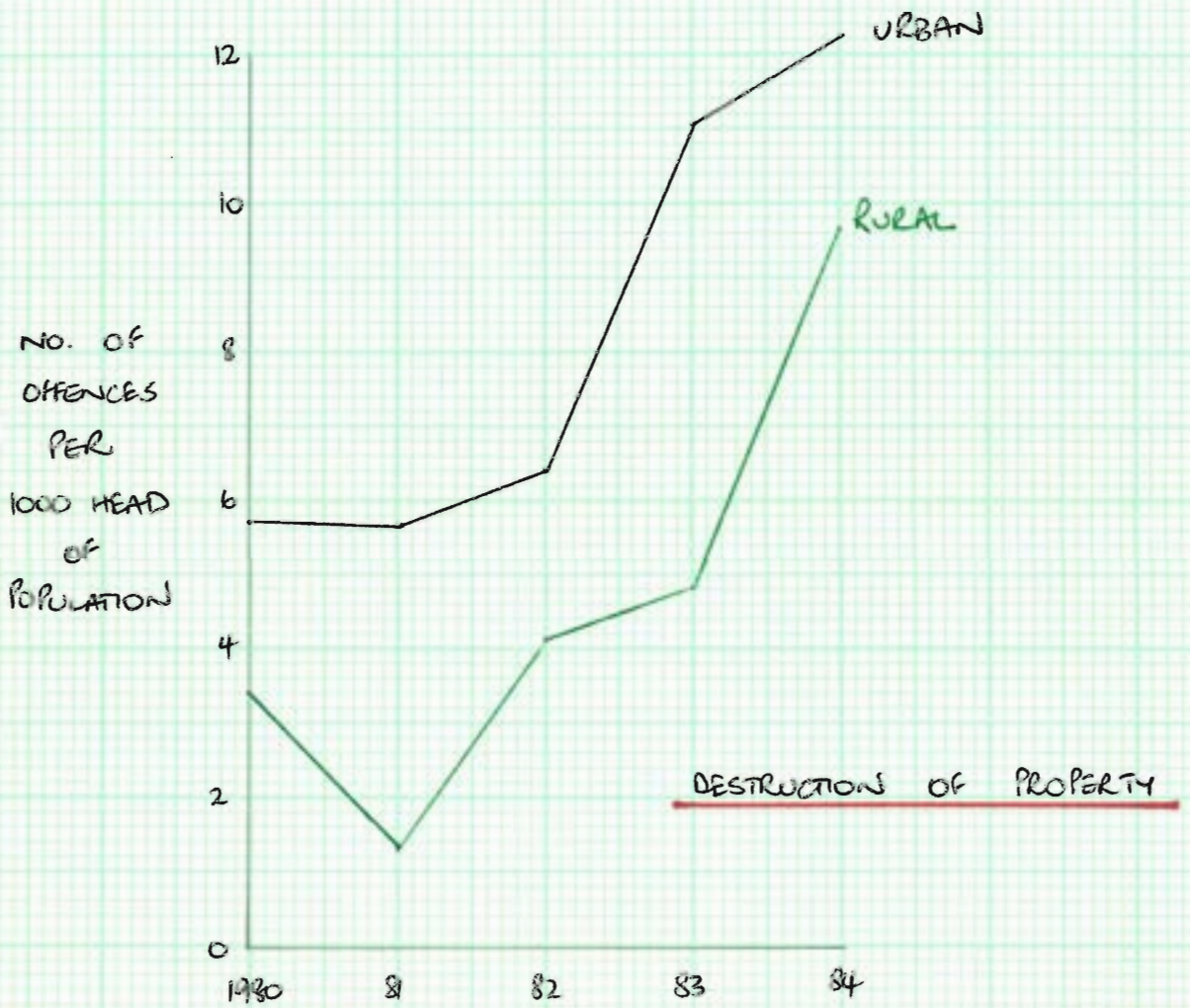
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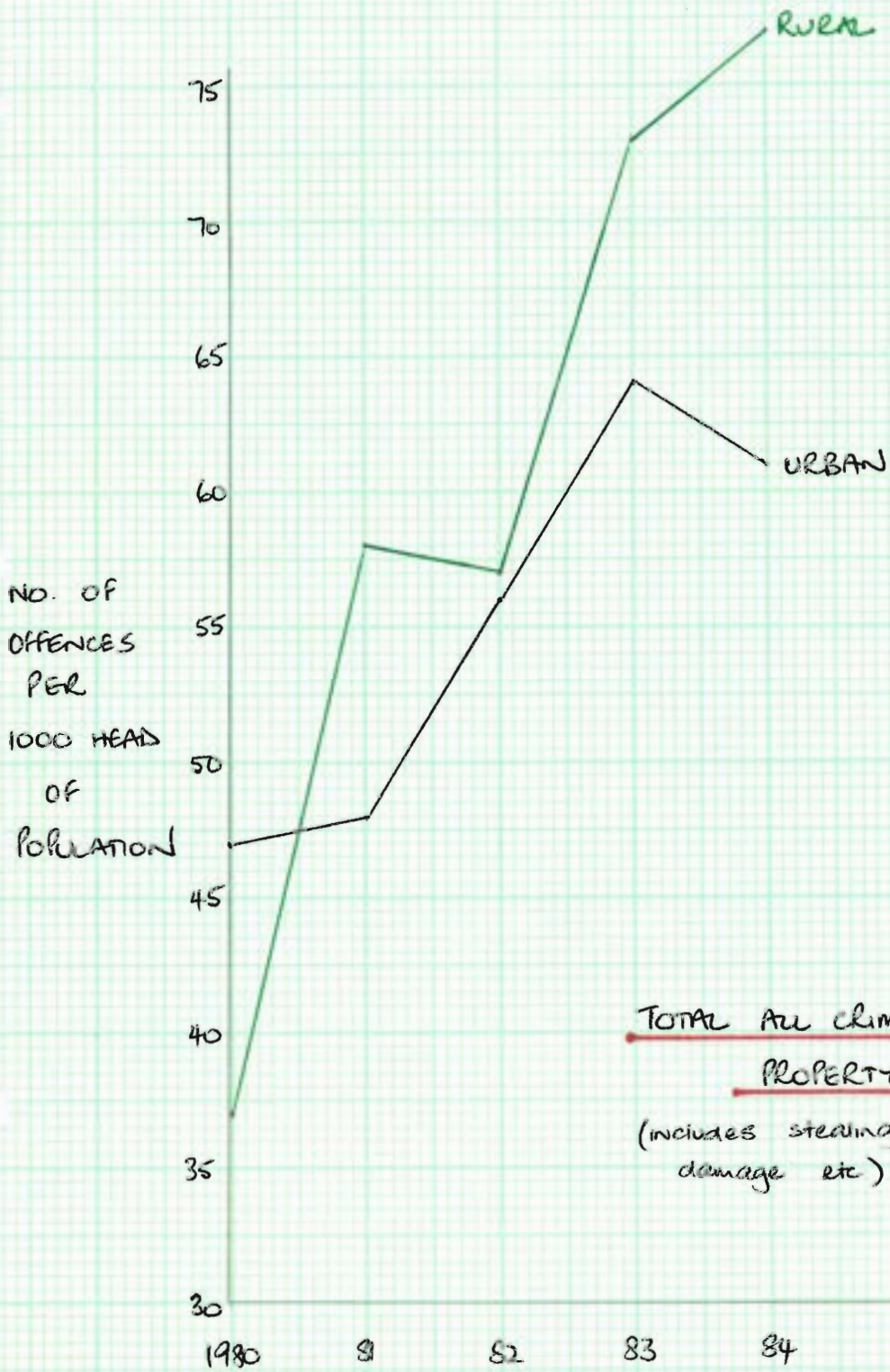
Theft is defined as unlawfully taking property from an open site, or entering via an open door.

Burglary involves gaining entry in order to take property, in opening a closed (but not necessarily locked) door etc.



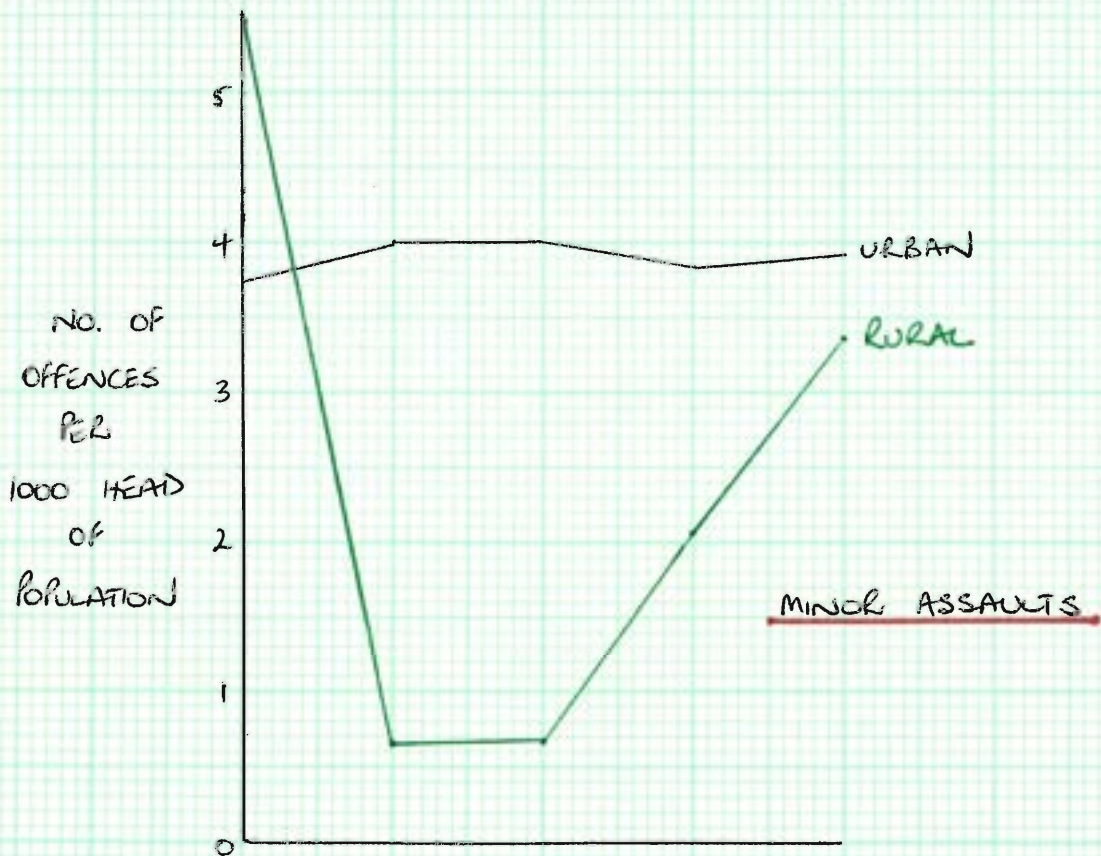
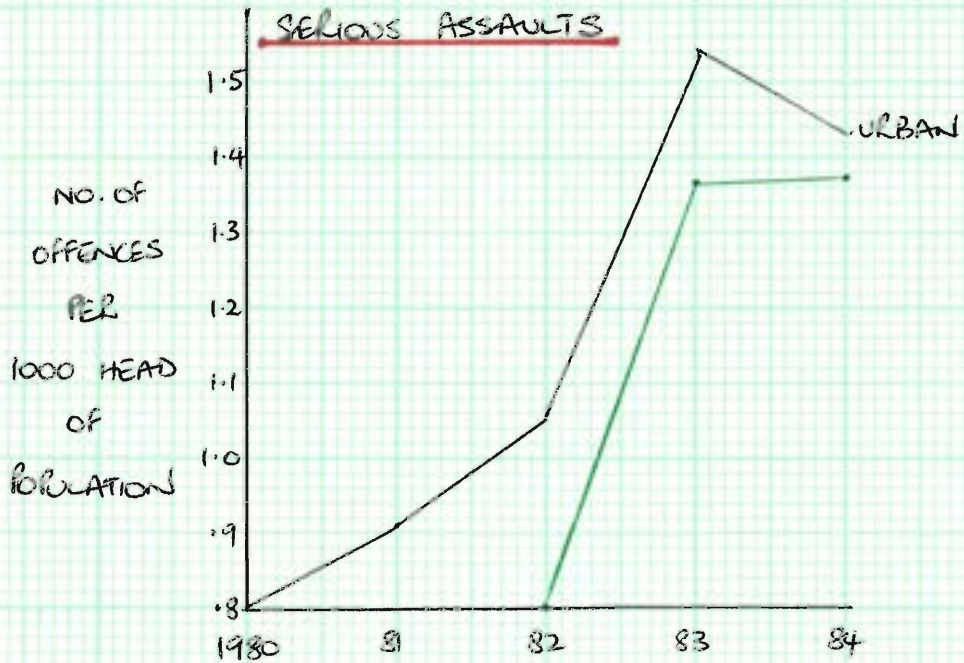


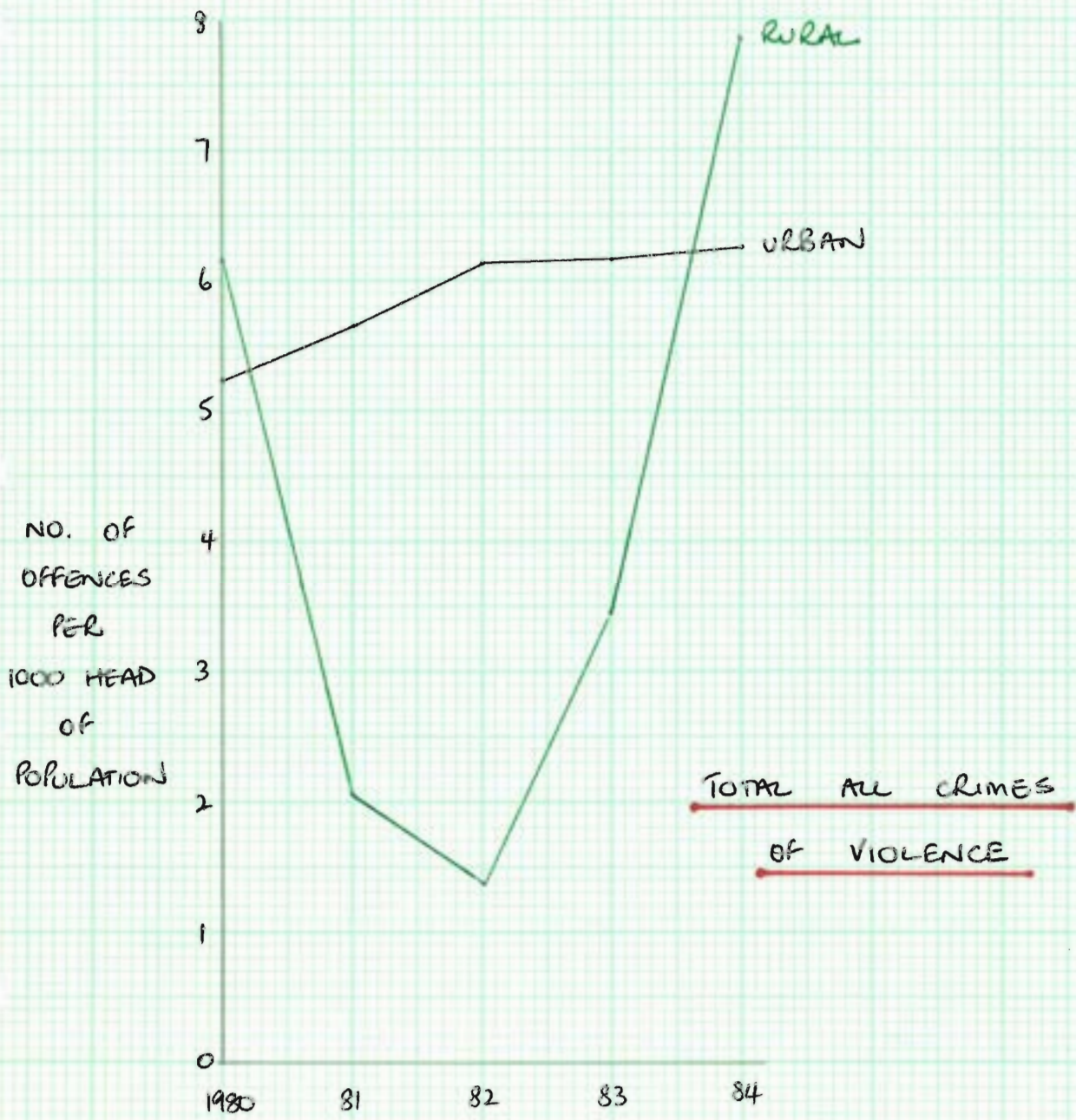




TOTAL ALL CRIMES AGAINST PROPERTY

(includes stealing, trespass, damage etc).





NO. OF  
OFFENCES  
PER  
1000 HEAD  
OF  
POPULATION

