

CHAPTER EIGHT

CARE AND SECURITY

Anyone Watching?

The snag about choosing exhibition sites where there is a strong human traffic flow (Chapter 3) is that they need a lot of policing. It is not very logical but remains unfortunately true that many people feel less compunction about stealing books than almost anything else. This may in part be due to the fact that in most countries books can be borrowed free from libraries; and in many countries, too, books are provided free in parts of the education system. People become used to getting the books they want without paying for them, and this seems to spill over into occasions when the books are not free and cannot be borrowed other than by stealing.

This piece of amateur psychology apart, it remains true that all bookshops, libraries and book exhibitions report a high percentage of book thefts, and that this percentage is closely related to the amount of strict invigilation. Since invigilation becomes more difficult in crowded places, it follows that the need for the utmost vigilance in the sort of site we have been suggesting is essential.

There are hundreds of ways of pilfering books, but most of them need some form of receptacle into which to slip the book. It may not be possible to make people leave their bags, satchels and briefcases at the door; but if it is, so much the better. Coats with large pockets or folded over the arm can easily camouflage stolen books. So can other books brought to the exhibition. The bearer places his book or books on top of some of those being

exhibited and then picks up the display book when he retrieves his own. Or he brings in a cheap second-hand book and substitutes it for an expensive new one on display, perhaps disguising the act by wrapping the jacket of the display book round the cheap one.

Mind my Book!

Stealing, however common, is not the invigilator's only problem. Damage is another. People drop books, denting the corners or breaking the spine. They grip or open them with dirty hands. Worse, they mark books, yes even books on display, with pencils, pens and turned-down corners. They deface pictures of personalities they don't like - such as politicians or film stars. They even detach pictures, particularly if they are dramatic, erotic, or depict a sporting event.

Invigilators must be taught that they are not there primarily to read books or pass the time of the day with visitors. They are there to invigilate, which means keeping a constant and eagle eye on the books and on everyone who comes to look at them. And somehow they must do this without upsetting or putting the visitors off. On the contrary, they must make them feel wanted, must answer their questions and kindle their enthusiasm. Keep these things in mind when choosing invigilators, and prepare a roster if necessary so as to ensure that several invigilators are on duty whenever the exhibition is open.