



HEARTBROKEN: Mike Clark with son Oli and the new equipment bought to replace stolen items. Picture by Nigel Sutton

Cruel thieves steal sentimental goods from sailing family

Residents consider neighbourhood watch scheme to fight crime

Ben Bloom

A FAMILY has been left heartbroken after their car containing almost £4,500 worth of sentimental sailing equipment was stolen from outside their Hampstead home.

Apparatus including a mast, beam and spar, which is used for rigging, were in Mike Clark's car which was stolen by thieves outside his West Heath Road home on July 3. Mr Clark says it is one of many incidents in a recent crime wave to hit the wealthy Hampstead street.

Mr Clark, 48, who had sailed his dinghy's maiden trip on the River Thames on the day of the theft, says it is the emotional rather than financial damage which is most distressing because all the equipment was hand built by his late father.

He said: "It's heartache because my father died two and a half years ago and I feel a connection with him when I go sailing and use the things he built. You just don't expect this kind of thing to happen."

The family's silver Toyota Emina people carrier contained numerous other unique pieces of sailing equipment including a daggerboard, rudder and tiller hand-built by Mr Clark himself.

"They took me hundreds of man hours to build," he said.

"My fear is that the criminals will just dump it all in a skip. We have to hold out some hope. You never know, there may be people out there who may notice where this stuff is."

Father-of-two Mr Clark, a property investor who has lived in Hampstead for 17 years, only finished building his dinghy, named Jessiver, last summer after five years of construction.

A £400 reward has been offered by Mr Clark's insurance company for information leading to the retrieval of the equipment.

The theft is the latest in a series of crimes to take place on West Heath Road, with 25 incidents occurring over the past six months including a number of robberies.

Just a day before the Clarks' car was stolen, a 40-year-old woman was forced to hand over her Rolex watch on the street when two men on a scooter mugged her in front of her five-year-old daughter. That incident has been linked to a number of robberies in the area by scooter muggers dubbed the 'Rolex robbers'.

Mr Clark said: "We've had to become a lot more security conscious. We are looking into forming a residents' association because people are starting to feel so unsafe living on what is

essentially a nice road. You become conscious of anyone who doesn't fit in the street when you look out the window, which isn't very nice because you don't want to think of yourself as a curtain twitcher."

Barnet police say there is currently no investigation into the Clarks' car theft due to a lack of evidence.

PC Paul Reidy from the Child's Hill Safer Neighbourhoods Team said: "We are aware of a run of crimes on West Heath Road and I want to assure the residents we are working towards solving the problem."

"We have increased patrols in the area for the coming weeks and are organising a street briefing in which to listen to the concerns, thoughts and ideas of the residents so we can work with them in making their street a safer place to live."

"I know there is interest in starting a neighbourhood watch programme, and we support this wholeheartedly, as we believe that residents make themselves much harder targets for criminals. We look forward to working with the residents and will help in any way we can."

The street briefing will take place at 6pm on Thursday at the Carlton Close junction of West Heath Road.