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EXPOSED:

Police lead fetish offensive

A POLICE campaign is under way to crack down on fetish clubs, it emerged this week.

Casual remarks during a low-key operation in Brighton have revealed an informal network of police officers opposed to such venues, whether they are illegal or not.

The discovery calls into question official assurances that such clubs interest the police only when members of the public complain and has fuelled gay claims of police duplicity in gross indecency cases.

Evidence of the network, whose existence has long been suspected, centres around the Stainless Steel Ball, an established event in Brighton for pierced people, which took place on October 22nd.

Two officers turned up at the end of this year's event. There was no disruption, and organizers Wildcat International say they had no objection to the visit, but the officers disclosed they first heard about the ball when London's Metropolitan Police sent them a flyer for it and asked if they were aware of the event taking place on their patch.

Two days later, uniformed officers visited Wildcat's piercing workshop and showroom. Wildcat again says it had no problem with this, but another Brighton man, Roger Paine, says the local

police's sudden interest in the fetish scene is sinister.

Paine had applied for a bar extension to hold a fetish-themed AIDS benefit this weekend, but this was refused when the police licensing officer drew a connection with the Stainless Steel Ball and said the event would "cross the bounds of public decency".

Strawberries

Paine says the two events were unconnected but he believes the police were encouraged to make the link by the initial intervention from London. "These events are incredibly well behaved, but suddenly Uncle Plod is turning up and pissing on everybody's strawberries," he said.

Fetish activists in London, still reeling from the 60-man police raid on the Whiplash club in London on October 13th, expressed little surprise that different police forces appear to be alerting each other to such gatherings.

At that time, police said they were acting on a public complaint, but one clubgoer told *Capital Gay* he had watched a police officer pocket flyers for future events during the Whiplash raid.

"Some group of officers is certainly gathering flyers to make local forces aware that events should be stopped. I wonder what proportion of the

mailing lists for these clubs are undercover police," he said.

Angus Hamilton, the gay solicitor who has often questioned police assurances that gross indecency operations and club raids are only mounted in response to public complaints, said the news of the contact between police in London and Brighton came as little surprise.

"This appears to confirm the suspicion that public complaints do not always exist. It seems to

be a clear case where the motivation did not come from the public, nor even from the local police force, but from the Metropolitan Police," he said.

A spokeswoman for Brighton Police said that while she was not aware of the details of the Stainless Steel Ball visit, it was not unusual for the Met to pass on information to her force. "It could well have happened. I don't think it's anything sinister," she said.