

Raoul Moat might have amassed more Facebook friends than the average university student, but he is...

NO LEGEND

WHEN RAOUL MOAT became a figure of nationwide infamy there were few neighbours volunteering to express shock that the bodybuilding bouncer from the Bigg Market had turned out to be a rampaging gunman.

After all, Moat had just been released from prison and, although it was his first spell inside, it was not his first run-in with the law. He had been arrested 12 times for violent offences, including possession of a samurai sword, and questioned in relation to a murder among Newcastle's gangs. He had also beaten his ex-girlfriend, had a history of steroid use and a raging temper. Those who knew him, far from saying that he was a nice guy who kept himself to himself, predicted that he would choose to go down in a blaze of glory.

In other words, the man who went on a rampage in Northumberland in July was a known quantity. Indeed, prison officers at Durham prison correctly feared that Moat would

target his ex-girlfriend, Samantha Stobbart, and alerted the police in Northumbria. A few hours later, he showed up at the home she shared with her now lover, karate instructor Chris Brown, and opened fire with a shotgun, killing Brown and seriously wounding Stobbart.

The family of those two victims are understandably angered that the police did not heed the warning. PC David Rathband, who was later shot in the face by Moat, might also wish that more had been done to follow up on the very specific information passed on by the prison service.

In the end, despite the dire predictions, Moat did not go down in a hail of bullets, but by his own hand. The shotgun he had used to terrorise Tyneside became the instrument of his own death. None of this is disputed, yet Moat has become a hero to a vocal minority who would like to champion him as some kind of martyr to police brutality.

Bizarrely, those charges have arisen as a consequence of the police's extraordinary restraint in trying to take Moat alive. Cornered by the police in a clump of trees by a riverbank, Moat was armed, dangerous and desperate. In most other countries, such an encounter would have ended only one way: a police marksman shooting him square in the chest. In Afghanistan, our boys would have dropped a 500lb bomb on him without a thought.

But in Britain, the plan was to take him alive using a new generation of Taser, the XRep – a shotgun-style device with a longer range. The police have not commented on the details of what they were trying to do, but the accounts of what actually happened give us a good idea.

Piecing it together, one can assume that the police strategy was to shoot Moat with the Taser, then pounce on him before he recovered his senses sufficiently to shoot back at them. We can guess this because it is what actually happened – with the one difference being that Moat ended up shooting himself in the head before the scrum of officers jumped on him.

Such bravery deserves the highest commendation, but Sir Hugh Orde, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, has been one of the few to offer it: "The idea that they would deploy a Taser to try and bring him in alive defines the British style of policing better than I ever could," he said. "Frankly, in a situation like that, the notion that anyone would consider using anything other than lethal force just sums up the British style of policing. The effort to bring somebody as dangerous as that into custody using the minimum possible force is a very clear indication of what they were trying to do. Bearing in mind the history of this guy, it is surprising they would even consider this kind of approach."

This seems to be the correct view. Moat, though undoubtedly troubled and in need of help that was not forthcoming, had become a marauding killer and an extremely dangerous man. Even his own mother, who has had her own problems with mental illness, said he would be better off dead – and few would argue that she was crazy for saying so.

But this view of extraordinary police bravery has not prevailed. Instead, the coverage has focused on whether the Tasers caused Moat's death, jolting him into pulling the trigger on the gun that he was holding to his own head.

In part, this is down to a bungled post-mortem that made no mention of the Taser strikes. This is surprising. The XRep Taser is a new type of wireless stun weapon that can be fired from a regular shotgun. The nose of the projectile has four large, sharpened electrodes that pierce the skin and deliver an electric shock large enough to incapacitate even a man as big as Raoul Moat. Anyone hit with such a weapon ought to bear some marks, so there is certainly a case for a second autopsy, which has been granted.

There is no such case, however, for making a martyr of a man who shot his defenceless ex-girlfriend, murdered her boyfriend and came very close to murdering a police officer. Even so, Moat has become a kind of posthumous Facebook hero, with 35,000 people joining a fan page titled "Raoul Moat you Legend".

But it is not just a few unamusingly ironic teens on the internet pushing this sympathy. The newspapers have all

RAOUL MOAT TIMELINE

Reporting on the Moat story was hampered by the police's cautious release of information, an official media blackout on some elements of the story and the general confusion that comes from such a hotly followed story. As a result, few of the contemporaneous reports describe what actually happened. Here, pieced together from reports during and since, is a picture of how the events unfolded.

Thu July 1

- Moat is released from Durham Prison after serving nine weeks for assaulting a family member
- He calls his ex-girlfriend, Samantha Stobbart, and asks where she is. She warns him off by saying she is now seeing a police officer, which is a lie

Fri July 2

- Durham Prison informs Northumbria police of Moat's threats to harm Stobbart

Sat July 3

- In the early hours of the morning, Moat drives in a black Lexus to the Gateshead home of Stobbart and her new boyfriend, Chris Brown. Moat kills Brown on his front doorstep with a shotgun then fires two rounds through the living room window, seriously wounding Stobbart
- Moat turns up at the Newcastle home of Andy Mcallister, an old friend, who tells Moat to turn himself in and later informs police of the visit

Sun July 4

- Shortly after midnight, Moat calls 999 to say he is planning to kill a police officer. Twelve minutes later he shoots PC David Rathband at a roundabout in Newcastle and later writes on his Facebook page: "Ha, ha! You can come but you can't catch me!"

Mon July 5

- Moat returns to Mcallister's house, which is not under surveillance, and writes his 49-page "murder statement", in which he declares war on the police
- Moat holds up a fish and chip shop in Seaton Delavel
- A Rothbury resident notices a suspicious-looking Lexus, but does not connect it to Moat

Tue July 6

- In the morning, police reveal to the public that Moat is driving a black Lexus and the Rothbury resident immediately informs police of its whereabouts. Shortly after that, now that Moat is known to be in the area, a local farmer alerts police to suspicious smoke in one of her fields
- Rothbury is closed down as the manhunt zeroes in on Moat
- Police find the tent Moat had slept in, as well as a letter and a four-hour taped rant in which he threatens to kill members of the public, saying: "For every piece of inaccurate information published, I will select a member of the public and kill them"
- A loaf of bread is reported stolen from a farmhouse close to where Moat was later found and another resident reports that their house had been broken into while they were away

Thu July 8

- Moat is spotted walking down Rothbury High Street, but successfully runs away from the police. He is thought to have been hiding in a storm drain

Fri July 9

- Moat steals a single tomato from the allotment of a local gardening enthusiast in Rothbury
- The fugitive bouncer is finally cornered on a riverbank in the town and the six-hour standoff begins

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

NOT CROSS



CCTV images of Raoul Moat at a branch of B&Q in Newcastle on 2nd July

given serious coverage to the question of appropriate force, as if jumping on an armed murderer can in any way be considered excessive – regardless of whether he has been momentarily stunned or not.

That said, the events that led to Moat's death have not cast the British police in a good light (see box). All the information needed to prevent him harming anyone was available to the right people, but not acted on. Given that prison officers suspected he was intent on harming his ex-girlfriend it is a wonder that they were powerless

to prevent his release, but it is mind-boggling that the police, when warned of this, also failed to act.

This incident, together with the shootings in Cumbria earlier in the year, also draws attention once again to the ease with which guns can fall into the wrong hands and has prompted politicians to launch a new investigation into gun control laws. Jerking knees rarely form the basis for sensible legislation, but it is to be hoped that something positive can be drawn from the case. The acceptance that Moat was the cause of his own death would be a good place to start.



LAST of the MOHICANS

