

Baby girl is mauled to death by pitbull

We warned police about danger, say neighbours

By **Jaya Narain, Rosie Taylor** and **James Tozer**

A BABY girl was mauled to death by a dog that neighbours had allegedly warned was dangerous.

Ava-Jayne Corless, who was just 11 months old, suffered horrific injuries when the American pitbull terrier attacked her while she slept.

Her mother, Chloe King, 20, and boyfriend Lee Wright, 26, heard the commotion and rushed upstairs to rescue her from the jaws of the beast.

Paramedics were called and took Ava-Jayne to hospital where doctors were unable to save her life.

Miss King and Mr Wright were last night being questioned on suspicion of manslaughter and child neglect. A police spokesman said the animal was banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act of 1991.

Senior officers have launched an investigation into reports that neighbours had called Lancashire Constabulary to complain about dangerous animals at the property in Blackburn.

Faisal Shahzad, 35, fled after two dogs broke through his garden fence. 'I had to run quickly into the house and barricade the door because they were tearing after me,' said the taxi driver.

'I've got three children and they were all in the house absolutely terrified. The two dogs were scary. I called the police and they said something would be done and my neighbour also called the RSPCA.'

Another neighbour, 80-year-old Brian Harrison, said: 'That dog was a nightmare for neighbours and people were worried about approaching it.'

'It's an absolute tragedy that should never have happened.'

'Only last year it mauled to death a neighbour's cat and nothing was done about it.'

Kyle Perry, 19, was chased down the street by the dog. 'It was a big dog and it used to just bark and bark,' he said. 'I have



Ava-Jayne with father Dean and mother Chloe

been chased by it down the street. It was terrifying.'

Blackburn MP Jack Straw said: 'What will it take to convince people not to keep dogs like this – and to get across to all dog-owners, of every breed of dog, that no dog should ever be left unsupervised with a baby?'

The incident happened at around 11pm on Monday while Miss King was visiting Mr Wright at his home 40 yards from hers.

The pair are understood to

'Too worried to approach it'

have put the baby to sleep in a bedroom and were watching television downstairs when they heard the attack begin. By the time they reached Ava-Jayne she had suffered catastrophic injuries. The dog was destroyed.

Chief Superintendent Chris Bithell said previous contact with neighbours would form part of the police investigation.

Last night, police said the dog had been identified by experts as a pitbull.

Owners cannot be prosecuted for dog attacks on private prop-



Mauled: Ava-Jayne Corless. Inset: A pitbull

erty until new legislation comes into force this spring.

Tougher sentences will be introduced under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill.

Rachel Cunningham, of the Blue Cross animal charity, said: 'We can only hope the Government's planned changes to the bill will allow authorities to step in at the first sign of a dangerous dog and help prevent terrible events like this.'

Jennie Rudd, of animal welfare campaign group Naturewatch Foundation, said dog attacks were caused by irresponsible owners. She added: 'If it has aggressive tendencies it is the owner's responsibility to make sure it never gets near a child, and that it isn't forced into situations where it feels it has to attack – because there is always a reason for a dog to bite.'

Last night Ava-Jayne's father, Dean Corless, 24, said he was devastated by the tragedy: 'I rushed to the hospital to see her straight away.'

'She was the most beautiful and adorable little girl, she was just the best. She was my whole world. Her mum and I aren't together any more, but I saw Ava-Jayne all the time. I will miss her every single day. I just don't know what to do now.'

'It is just so tragic. I have my family around me now, but we are all devastated.'

The RSPCA confirmed the charity had been contacted after a dog at the address killed a neighbour's cat.

The death was treated as an accident with no action taken.

Veteran Labour politician Tony Benn, 88, spends a fourth night in hospital



Unwell: Tony Benn

TONY Benn was seriously ill in hospital last night. The left-wing politician was admitted to an NHS ward on Saturday after feeling unwell.

The 88-year-old had recently moved into sheltered accommodation near his house in Holland Park, London, where he had lived for decades.

He was elected as an MP in 1950 and served as a Labour minister before standing down from Parliament in 2001. His MP son, Hilary, is Labour spokesman on community affairs.

Mr Benn was admitted to hospital in

By **Daniel Martin**
Whitehall Correspondent

September last year after complaining to his GP he was feeling unwell. And in 1990 he was given only three years to live after a leukaemia diagnosis.

Last year he revealed he did not fear death after suffering a stroke, explaining that losing his American wife Caroline to cancer 14 years ago had helped him cope. 'I just feel at a certain moment your switch is switched off and that's it,' he said.

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