

The Oasis Centre - Cornwall

Registered Charity Number 1139355, founded to serve the communities in the parishes of St Columb Major, St Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Eval and St Ervan



Looking Out for Burglars

Number 15 in a series of notes on important issues.

It is not nice discovering that a burglar, perhaps more than one, has paid a visit to your house. Treasured possessions may have disappeared for ever, there is a mess to clear up and then the trauma of a police report and investigation and perhaps an insurance claim.

In truth, the word 'burglar' is probably the wrong term to use because a real burglar will target a specific property for valuable items known to be there. Those items will go swiftly, there will be little sign of a search and there will probably not be much mess. The criminals who visit our homes are more likely to be opportunist thieves. They are out looking for opportunities every day. An unlocked door or a window open with an indication that there is nobody about is what they are looking for.

If they get in, they will only be there briefly, in case you return. First, they will establish their exit route, preferably a door, so they will look for keys left in external doors or hanging on convenient hooks. They will put on your door chain (if you have one) to obstruct you and to give them a warning of your return. That may take them a couple of minutes.

Their next stop will be the master bedroom, looking for jewellery, valuables and cash in dressing tables and bedside cabinets or under the mattress. They have no time to sort through your jewel box but will take the lot. Your biggest loss may be the sentimental items that are irreplaceable and no amount of money can compensate you for their loss.

Next, the thief will ransack the chest of drawers. Starting with the bottom drawers, the contents will be thrown across the room to spread them out and expose valuable items. Thieves of course do not have to clear up the mess they make and breakages are not their problem. Then they will go to children's rooms for laptops, gadgets and computer games.

On their way out, probably via the kitchen, thieves will empty out cupboards looking for tins containing keys or cash (they sound different). Fridges and freezers may be tipped out in case you have hidden jewellery in an ice cream carton. Finally, they will check remaining rooms for bank statements and useful paperwork along with valuable ornaments.

It will only take about five minutes to create this scene of devastation. Of course, the thief's visit will be even more hurried if your alarm is sounding. The point for us to note is that we need to conceal our really valuable items in places that such a hurried search will not uncover. We know our own houses best and are best placed to hide things in them. A regular review of our defences in terms of locks and the other steps we can take to discourage opportunist thieves is recommended by the police.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall