



Dodgy builders target elderly residents

By Janet Maitland

Police have issued a warning about a pair of dodgy builders who are targeting elderly residents living alone in East Finchley, Muswell Hill and further afield.

On 18 July, an 84-year-old resident in Fortis Green answered her door to two men who entered the house to show her water running down an internal wall. They said they had spotted that the wall was damp while working on her next door neighbour's house.

The men are believed to have lifted tiles on her roof and then poured water through the hole. The resident was so alarmed she went straight to the bank to get the £4,600 cash deposit the men demanded for doing the work.

An hour earlier, the same trick was tried on a 90-year-old resident in Barnet, but he checked with his neighbour, who confirmed that no work was being done.

The scam was also tried on an 87-year-old woman in Muswell Hill on 16 August, but staff at her bank became suspicious and called the police when she asked to withdraw £4,200. The scam also failed to work on an elderly resident in Crouch End on 21 August, who shut the front door on the man and called the police.

The latest report at the time of going to press is of an elderly resident in Highgate who answered the door on 22 August to a man claiming that a leak from her roof was damaging the party wall and asking for a £1,800 deposit to fix it.

Don't be intimidated

The men are described as white, one aged in his 50s and the other in his 30s. The younger man is described as tall, heavily built, dark-haired and eloquently spoken. They drive a small white van with a ladder on the roof.

"I am determined to do all I can to catch these unscrupulous offenders," said DC Jo Ravenhill. "Don't let anyone intimidate you into taking them on for work at the door: you just don't know who you're letting into your home. If you're concerned about anyone at your door, call police on 999."

Anyone with any information about the fraudsters is asked to contact DC Jo Ravenhill on 020 8345 0838 or to contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Reputable workmen and utility companies will be happy to make appointments for work or checks to be carried out, greatly reducing concerns over false identity cards.

The bottom line is: if you don't know the person at the door, don't open it.

Police community support officer Jan Lovell has run the

Shield Project over the last three years, working alongside the elderly and their families, and would be happy to visit, or give further advice regarding these issues or any other concerns you may have.

For advice or help, contact the East Finchley Safer Neighbourhood team on 020 7161 9014 or email eastfinchley.snt@met.police.uk

KALASHNIKOV KULTUR By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

Tune in and zone out

In the weird and wonderful world of music it's time to celebrate 20 years of Mogadon for the mind as Britain's favourite aural sleeping tablet holds its birthday party. They could have commissioned a new and challenging work by Marc Anthony Turnage or Philip Glass, but this is Classic FM and they don't do difficult.

Right from the start on 7 September 1992 Classic FM has played it safe, played it easy and kept it light. This is the place for a nice chunk of Mozart followed by a pleasant little tune from Brahms before keeping calm with the theme from *Downton Abbey*. This is not the place for anything too serious, it's the place for easy listening. What do you expect from a late night show called 'Smooth Classics'? Sponsorship by Horlicks?

If you can tell a book by its cover you sure as hell can tell a radio station by its presenters and Classic FM takes us to a whole new low. There's gardening guru Alan Titchmarsh and fop-of-the-week Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen. There's failed MP David Mellor, ex-newsreader John Suchet and people so blandly appealing to nice people that they must have been specially invented. With nice people playing nice music there has to be a special slot for mummy drivers taking children to expensive schools and, guess what, there is.

Classic FM's big thing is the Hall of Fame, four days of predictability every Easter. In 16 years of the favourite pieces of classical music voted for by you, but not by me, there have only been four winners. Bruch's *1st Violin Concerto* topped the charts five times, Vaughan William's *The Lark Ascending* did it four years in a row. This year the top 20 tunes included some schmaltzy setting of letters home from the troops and music from a video game. You can't get more lightweight than that, trust me.

In the end it all comes down to what you want from music. Do you want music from the adverts, themes from soporific TV programmes, very incidental music from Disney movies? Do you want to be lulled into a false sense of insecurity as you read the Morning Mule? If that's your dream then rejoice; Classic FM is the station for you. But if you think music should be challenging, sometimes difficult and say something about the human condition then look elsewhere. After all, overdosing on sedatives isn't good for you.

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Meena (left) with friend Sybil at Hammerson House.
Photo by Daphne Chamberlain

Advocate volunteer

By Daphne Chamberlain

The quality of life for older people in care homes is concerning more and more of us, including Meena Nair, who lives in Deansway. Just over a year ago, Meena began work as a volunteer with Advance Advocacy in Barnet, the organisation which speaks up for older people. She told us, "I would love to encourage others to volunteer. I was panicky at first, but just relax and be friends with the people you meet."

Recently I accompanied Meena on one of her weekly visits to Hammerson House, in The Bishop's Avenue. We stayed for a couple of hours, while residents greeted her over tea and biscuits. In one flat, a resident told me how Meena had intervened when there was a delay in getting a chair essential for his comfort.

Furniture, Blue Badges, Taxicards, emotional matters.... residents come to Advocates for help with all these things. Meena told me, "Because we are independent, we can help with issues that have been overlooked, even in a good care home. Elderly people don't want to cause trouble, but we can be their voice. We want to help, but without offending. That's why it's so important to have the support of the home."

Backing advocacy

Hammerson House, which runs integration courses for all

volunteers, does offer support. A manager told me, "We can all contribute, and that benefits the client, ourselves and Meena. I'm an advocate for advocacy."

More homes across the borough are beginning to feel the same, and Meena and her fellow advocates have constant help and support from Advance, who give them ongoing training. Advance's Heena Cornwell accompanied Meena on her first visit to Hammerson, to explain advocacy to the residents.

Meena has the last word. "I really enjoy my visits. Some of the residents have so much to tell. They have seen and done so much. Making things happier and more comfortable for them is good for me too. You grow stronger when you are advocating on behalf of someone else."

For more information, contact meena@advocacyinbarnet.org.uk.

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