



SAFE AS *Houses*

L-J Andrew gleans some sage advice on home protection with security expert and Managing Director of Brook Security, Terry Roffey



During lockdown, reports of theft and burglaries plummeted – halving year-on-year – as houses were no longer left unoccupied during the day and burglars were restricted by lockdown curfews at night.

Since these restrictions have lifted, however, rates are rising again. Despite the fact many of us are still working from home, the number of people out at work during the day and an increase in empty homes is having “consequences for individuals, communities and the impact on societal behaviour” – all of which are causing an increase in theft, according to Metropolitan Police chief superintendent, Paul Griffiths.

“If there are challenges economically, there is sometimes a rise in crime and disorder,” he says. Data from Scotland Yard goes some way towards supporting this. Following record falls in offences such as burglary, theft and robbery in April, the total number of crimes recorded in May, was up by more than 8,000. Burglary rose by 6% in two months and continues to rise.

Back in March of this year, David and Victoria Beckham were the unwelcome victims of a terrifying home invasion that occurred while they were asleep.

Since lockdown, the limelight couple have spent most of their time at their Grade II listed, four-storey Holland

Park mansion – a glorious seven-bedroom family home purchased for £31m back in 2013 and which they have subsequently spent £8 million remodelling to accommodate a growing extended family. The stunning residence sports a walled garden, two dressing rooms, a catwalk-style runway, playroom, gym, spa area, salon for entertaining and an underground car park.

On the night of the intrusion, the couple and their 10-year-old daughter, Harper, were asleep on one of the lower levels of the home, when a burglar broke in through a top floor window.

The family weren’t even aware their home had been targeted until the couple’s 17-year-old son Cruz, returned from a night out, noticed broken glass and a ransacked bedroom. The Beckhams were understandably “shaken up” by the incident and reportedly lost thousands of pounds in valued possessions.

This, however, is by no means an isolated case. The infamous ‘Bling Ring’ carried out a string of robberies on A-List stars, including Paris Hilton and Simon Cowell, from 2008 to 2009. This infamous group of thieves stole over US\$3 million in cash and valuables. Last year, the biggest burglary of a PCL spree, was a £25m raid on the Kensington home of the socialite Tamara Ecclestone, while she was in Lapland. The 37-year-old daughter of the former motor racing

supremo Bernie Ecclestone said the raid left her “scared” and “obsessing over security”.

Such ‘high stakes’ incidents certainly raise the question of ‘if it can happen to them, how best can I protect my property?’ Managing Director of Kent-based security firm, Brook Security, Terry Roffey, has more than six decades of experience in the industry, working across a breadth of commercial sectors and residential properties of all sizes and setups.

What’s the most common mistake homeowners make with their security?

The biggest misconception is that ‘it will never happen to me’. Until, that is, a burglary or robbery takes place, and it’s then an on-the-back-foot, emotionally draining experience, because the belief that “your home is your castle” has been completely violated.

The second most common assumption, is that ‘I only need a security system to meet my insurer’s requirements.’ As such - it doesn’t matter what that system actually does in the cold light of day (or night) or the level of protection it provides. ‘I will probably never use it anyway’.

The harsh reality is, a property is more than likely not adequately covered by a fit-for-purpose security system; one which the owners are fully conversant with. Moreover – whatever security is in place, may be wholly inappropriate in the event of a break-in.

Any system should begin with a “Risk Assessment” and an understanding of the “Operational Requirement”. This could best be translated into - how is an intruder likely to break-in to my property? Are there any insurance requirements to be met? What is the tailored solution to fit my lifestyle and attitude to technology? Am I tech savvy or a technophobe?

Why is it important to have layered levels of security at home?

Layers of security are like layers of clothing. There are times when you want to be warm, so you wear several items of clothing and if the weather changes, you can remove



something to be more comfortable. On a hot day, you may decide what’s the minimal amount of clothing to wear, but you may also take a jacket just in case.

Security is much the same. The more layers there are, the better the security is, for example:

- Physical security, fences, gates, prickly hedges, locks, padlocks, shutters and grills, maybe even manned security officers
- External Detection System to create an “Early Warning System”
- CCTV Video Surveillance, to see what the early warning system is alerting you to
- Perimeter Intruder Alarm System and devices fitted to doors and windows
- Internal trap detection devices or movement sensors
- Personal attack alarm devices
- Safe Room, acting as a safe place to retreat to wait for the police or security team to arrive
- Fogging technology to fill an area with harmless smoke, creating a barrier between you and the intruders.



What advancements in recent years have been made in home security to enhance protection?

In terms of electronic security, the advancements have been uppermost in the technology arena. The introduction of reliable wireless systems for Intruder and Personal Attack Alarms, use of Apps and Radio Fobs are transformational. As are HD Cameras, 4K CCTV Systems viewed on an App, which can be monitored remotely. Another vanguard area is Artificial Intelligence (AI), where systems can be set up to ignore small animals and detect persons or vehicles or both. Biometric technology can also be used to decide who has access to where and at what times.

How can a high level of security be maintained and kept up to date?

All security systems should be supported by a full-proof maintenance support service. This means covering a reactive response to any faults and providing regular planned inspection visits to test the security system. Keeping up to date with the latest updates is probably less of an issue, if effective layered security systems have been installed. These will continue to function even when a new version is launched, unlike an I-phone for example, where you can update it every couple of years. For me, it's a priority to ensure that the system you have around you, to protect your home, property and possessions, is still performing the tasks required.

What's the best way to secure a home that's often left vacant?

Protecting a property that is vacant is not dissimilar to protecting one that is occupied. Exceptions may have to be taken into account, such as the need for additional fire or water leak detection – hence a layering up of

requirements. Arranging for a professional alert service is also recommended. This is bespoke to your requirements, with service level agreements in place, stating that you expect appropriate response levels to kick-in within a given timeframe for an additional fee, rather than relying on family, friends, Police or the Fire Service.

How do you ensure clients secure the right level of security for their individual needs?

The all-important “Risk Assessment” process is the key starting point; looking at the possible points of entry to a given property. There are obvious access points, such as doors and windows on the ground floor, possibly balconies and terraces on the first floor or climbing aids, such as pergolas and orangeries, that unintentionally assist an intruder to scale higher levels. Some London 5-storey terraced homes for example, have parapet walls at the top of the house. Shared access from neighbouring properties and the dynamic occasions where a neighbouring house has scaffolding erected (giving direct access to what may have been considered a low-risk point of entry), are further examples. So many times, we have visited a property following an incident where you would have thought, “this will never happen,” until it does. Designing a tailored layered security solution that's easy to operate is crucially important. Otherwise, it will not be used and monitored by the client.

Concludes Terry: “Protecting your home comes in many forms. A layered approach provides an enhanced level of security, whilst at the same time, taking the surrounding area and access points into consideration.”

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THE KNOWLEDGE

The layered approach to security, allows homeowners to work from the outside in, to create the most secure environment possible, by making your home as inaccessible as possible; to impede access, ideally before the intruder reaches the house.

- External movement sensors with motion-activated spotlights, infrared night vision sensors and the ability to remotely activate a siren, can scare away potential intruders.
- Driveway alarms typically come with motion sensors that alert homeowners when people come within a certain distance of their property or outside buildings. In addition to driveways, they can be placed in gardens and in garages.
- Smart doorbells are not only able to capture people approaching your front door, or coming within a certain distance of the front of your house when peering through windows, they're also useful for capturing people scoping out your neighbours' property. If a break-in happens in your street, the idea is that you can all share your smart doorbell footage with each other and the police, effectively creating a CCTV network. There can be issues with GDPR if images are shared without the correct permission.
- Beyond video doorbells and app-controlled locks, a number of companies have taken the concept a step further with built-in fingerprint readers and more hardy lock mechanisms. Some of these may not meet insurance company standards, so options should be well researched.
- The last internal layer protects the family and most valuable possessions. If the criminal does breach your defences, then the third objective is to detect, hence the use of equipment such as IDS and CCTV enabling the homeowner's security partners to identify the intruder's location as well as obtaining evidence.