

Neighbourhood News



from the Bell Tower Community Association

Issue 18 - December 2009

🔔 🔔 🔔 *Season's greetings to all our readers!* 🔔 🔔 🔔

Safer alleyways at last

After a long campaign supported by local residents and the Bell Tower Community Association, gates have been fitted to two alleyways in Randolph Road - one alongside the garage block and the other between Addison Road and Newport Road.



PROBLEM ALLEY: One of the alleyways in Randolph Road, with new gate and fencing

Alleys can be really useful, especially for people who live in terraced housing. They save having to carry DIY and gardening materials through houses. They are also, however, sometimes useful to criminals and those causing antisocial behaviour. If a burglar is planning on breaking into a house the two most important things they think about are whether they will be seen and whether they can escape. Burglars prefer to break into homes through the back door or rear windows, and a criminal can use the alleyway at the back of a terrace house without being seen, even in daylight.

This is one of the reasons that the Safer Reading Campaign has gated a number of alleyways across

Reading. The Bell Tower Community Association and the local Neighbourhood Watch identified the two alleyways in Randolph Road back in 2007 as particular problem areas and asked the Safer Reading Campaign to consider installation of gates for these. One had been used regularly for low levels of antisocial behaviour with reports of drug dealing and drug use, young people entering into gardens, graffiti and in some instances being used as a toilet. The other had a longstanding history of fly tipping. Residents had been left feeling fed up and very vulnerable.

As well as deterring burglars, alley gates reduce vandalism, antisocial behaviour, drug dealing and fly tipping. They help create a safer and cleaner environment and reduce the fear of crime.

After analysing all the evidence and consulting with local residents the Safer Reading Partnership agreed to fund and install some fencing and alley gates in both locations. Each household is provided with a key and the responsibility and ownership of the alley is returned to the residents. It is now up to residents to ensure that the alleys are kept clear of rubbish and that the gates are kept closed.



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News in brief

- At our public meeting in October the speakers were Councillor Tony Page and Anthony Bolton, Reading's Deputy Transport Strategy Manager. Detailed plans for the station redevelopment were revealed - in particular showing the extra platforms, the improved underpass and the location of a replacement footbridge, which will be on our side of the Three Guineas pub and much wider than the existing bridge.

The intention is to make much more use of the northern entrance to the station, and many buses and taxis, along with airport coaches, are expected to stop here. Trains to Gatwick will also be moved to a platform on the north side of the station.

- We are looking for volunteers to help redesign the planted area around the substation in Randolph Road and to help us maintain it. Please contact Teresa at 92 Addison Road if you can help.

- There have been further burglaries reported in the area, and this time some of these have been through the front door. This time of year often sees an increase in burglaries because of the shorter days and likelihood of finding Christmas presents, so be particularly alert. Use mortice locks on traditional wooden doors and be careful to deadlock all UPVC doors and remove the keys since burglars often open these by reaching for the handle on the inside through the letterbox.

- The Bell Tower Community Association is looking for a minutes secretary to support our monthly committee meetings. If you can spare a couple of hours each month please contact Barbara at 77 Addison Road.

Visit www.bell-tower.org.uk or email us at info@bell-tower.org.uk

Do you have a rat problem? Read on!

Living in an old house, you might expect to see the occasional rodent. A couple of years ago we got a new cat, and things changed...

We received frequent little offerings – sometimes dead, sometimes alive (I was getting used to whacking them over the head). After the entire mouse population of the area had apparently been eradicated, we stopped receiving little presents and relaxed. But then it happened – our first 'big mouse'. We had the inevitable discussion about what we had been presented with, but had to conclude that mice just didn't have feet that big.

Eventually in the summer we noticed the cupboard under the sink was becoming a bit smelly, and dismantling the waste pipe didn't help. Removing the kick boards revealed a mass of rat droppings under the cupboard, of varying sizes, along with a large stash of cat food. We had a family of them!

Five weeks of rat poison under the cupboards, loads of cleaning and half a dozen small dead rats later (some needing assistance with dispatch), we seemed to be down to the last one – the big one. We called it Basil (although it might have been the mother, so perhaps it was a Basilina?) Basil wouldn't take the bait and avoided the newly-acquired

traps, even venturing into the dining room one night and gnawing through the partition wall into the cupboard under the stairs. After being flushed out, Basil disappeared again, eventually to be cornered behind the fridge. The sound of Basil's demise could be heard by the neighbours several doors away – we thought our next visitor would be from the RSPCA or perhaps social services – but we finally got rid of our last rat.



PEST: The common or brown rat

However, the rats had the last laugh: soon after that we used the oven for the first time in a while, and suffice to say that the smell lingered for days. The rats had nested in the lining, and we needed a new cooker. We have had a few rats in the house since, but traps have caught these quickly. Our cat has now mastered the art of getting in through the cat flap when it is set for exit only, and since then has not managed to bring any more 'friends' in.

So what is the best way to get rid of rats? Quite simply, we found that persistence pays. Nearly all rats in the UK (including pets) are of the same species – the common or brown rat, *rattus norvegicus*, which can also be grey, black or white and grows to about 400mm long including tail. Young rats look like large mice, but are recognisable by their broader snouts and larger feet. Rats are very agile, eat almost anything and learn quickly. Before using rat poison, make sure all food is locked away in cupboards – and supervise pet feeding, since rats love pet foods.

Rat poison must be kept away from children and animals other than rats, so put it in bait boxes designed for the purpose or inaccessible places such as under kitchen units. Poisons are designed to be slow-acting, since a rat will stop eating anything it associates with illness.

Old-fashioned snap traps work well for young rats, although adults sometimes get wise to them.

My preferred bait is a few sunflower seeds stuck on with honey. Position traps where rats run – a good place is perpendicular to a wall with the treadle next to the wall – and use gloves when handling them, since rats can detect your scent. Be sure that the trap cannot be activated accidentally or by other animals.

We tried ultrasonic rat repellents, but cannot say that they made any difference; since the rats were trapped in the house they were probably just driven into a quiet corner.

Professionals will usually do the same as householders can – put down bait and set traps. Where they can really help is in giving advice on making your house rodent-proof and identifying the source of an infestation, since they know what to look for. For example, it needed a visit from a pest controller to prove that rats were coming from a damaged sewer in Swansea Road. This has since been repaired.

If you need help with a rat infestation, Reading Borough Council can offer advice and if necessary provide a subsidised pest control service – contact them on 0800 834035 for details.

David Neale

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