

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 Nottingham Knockers

Number 04 in a series of notes on important issues.

Have you heard of “Nottingham Knockers”? The expression may be new to you but the activity to which it refers may be a familiar one. The activity first came to public notice some years ago in Nottingham and so the expression was coined.

They are men or women, usually young, who suddenly appear on people’s doorsteps carrying bags containing domestic items such as dusters and brushes that they are trying to sell. They will have convincing stories perhaps about being just out of prison and trying to go straight, unable to get a job and having a young family to support. They are very plausible because they have been well briefed.

The briefing and the bag of items for sale will probably have been supplied by their gang-master who will have dropped them off in the area, perhaps with several others, with instructions to visit a specific group of houses, yours among them. They may produce a seemingly authentic ‘certificate’ or ‘licence’ to support their story.

They are really looking for vulnerable people and potential victims. If you buy their goods (probably sub-standard) that is a bonus for them. Their real reward is the information they can gather about each house that they visit. Does the occupant seem elderly or vulnerable? Does he or she live alone? Are there alarms? How long does he or she take to get the money to pay? A crumpled note just out of a purse is not very interesting but a brand new, unfolded banknote may indicate a large store of cash in the house.

The information gathered in this way is relayed to the gang-master, who will prepare a ‘suckers list’ for the area – a list of houses likely to reward further criminal attention. These lists can be sold in pubs and clubs, perhaps many times, thus ensuring ongoing interest on the part of the criminal fraternity.

The police recommend a polite standard response to visits of this sort – “I do not buy goods or services at the door.” Standard door stickers discouraging cold callers are also available. Do not engage in further conversation. These callers are also briefed to find out what they can about your neighbours and would be especially delighted to learn from you that the people next door have just gone on a fortnight’s holiday or are never at home before 9pm!

Incidentally, any ‘certificate’ or ‘licence’ produced will be worthless. The only lawful authority for such visits is a Pedlar’s Certificate issued by the police to someone of “good character”. A person just out of prison would not qualify! It is illegal to carry out door-to-door sales (except books and food) without a Pedlar’s Certificate.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre – Cornwall