

Colin's Blog Birthday Blog May 2018



If nature is always showing us
that change is the lesson
that we have come to learn,
why do we insist
on staying the same?

As I approach my 71st Birthday next week, I have taken time out to reflect upon life, its ups, its downs, and to focus on the splendours of the natural world, which surrounds us. The meaning of life, dreams that have come to fruition, others that are yet to materialise, and bear fruit.

We are often inundated with messages of doom and gloom from across the world, yet there is still so much to admire, absorb and appreciate.

So many good things, so many wonders to take in, and inspire, as we walk down life's rocky path.

You may wonder what happened to last week's blog, well, I confess, that I took time out, to travel with my wife and friends, to bonnie Scotland, to recharge my batteries, ready for whatever challenges that may present themselves, over the coming months.

Retirement opens wonderful opportunities to reflect and enjoy, along one's chosen route.

Like many of my peers, I still feel that I have much to learn and much to give. Perhaps, as a result of my many years of community involvement, it is no surprise, that I have chosen to be an ambassador for Neighbourhood Watch, and a member of both Rotary and Probus, where I can relate to like-minded friends and colleagues. To quote from my published *'Positive Thoughts on the Circle of Life: -*

Go forward - Through life, Wasting not a moment.
Use your time attempting to achieve your Goals and fulfil your ambitions.
Allocate time to give something back,
Through helping others less fortunate than Yourself.

I have always strived to be true to my words and encourage others to do the same!

So, back after a refreshing break, I have settled back in front of my computer to produce my latest bog.

Last Saturday we witnessed the wonderful spectacle of the Royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan, now the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, then, on the 22nd May, the Country remembered the anniversary of the horrific Terrorist attack in Manchester, a real contrast of emotions.

Fraudsters taking advantage of the HMRC tax refund process

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) are currently processing tax refunds after the end of the tax year and criminals are taking advantage by sending out phishing emails and text messages.

The fraudulent emails and texts include links which take victims to fake websites where their personal and financial information can be stolen.

In March 2018, HMRC requested 2,672 phishing websites be taken down and received 84,549 phishing reports. HMRC have warned that this kind of phishing is expected to continue in the coming months as genuine tax refunds are issued.

Tax refunds only come through the post or your employer

Treasury Minister, Mel Stride MP, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said: "HMRC only informs you about tax refunds through the post or through your pay via your employer. All emails, text messages, or voicemail messages saying you have a tax refund are a scam. Do not click on any links in these messages and forward them to HMRC's phishing email address and phone number.

"We know that criminals will try and use events like the end of the financial year, the self-assessment deadline, and the issuing of tax refunds to target the public and attempt to get them to reveal their personal data. It is important to be alert to the danger."

Other types of HMRC scams

Fraudsters also use spoofed calls and leave victims automated voicemails saying that they owe HMRC unpaid taxes.

In most cases they ask for payment in iTunes gift card voucher codes and tell victims they have arrest warrants, outstanding debts or unpaid taxes in their name.

How to protect yourself

Recognise the signs - genuine organisations like banks and HMRC will never contact you out of the blue to ask for your PIN, password or bank details.

Stay safe - don't give out private information, reply to text messages, download attachments or click on links in emails you weren't expecting.

Every Report Matters – report phishing emails to: -

https://actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud and forward them onto HMRC at: - phishing@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk. Or telephone Action Fraud: **0300 123 2040**



International Missing Children's Day is an awareness event that is observed every year on **25th May**. The aims of the day are to place a spotlight on the issue of child abduction, educate parents on safeguarding measures to protect their children and also honour those who have never been found and celebrate those who have.

Missing Children's Day began as an observance in the USA in 1983. The date was chosen following the disappearance of 6-year-old Etan Patz on 25th May 1979 from New York City. International Missing Children's Day which observes the same date was launched a number of years later in 2001 and is now observed all over the world.

This awareness event is run in conjunction with the **Global Missing Children's Network**. The network, which formed in 1998, has 23 member countries who all connect in order to share information and best practice, working towards improving the effectiveness and success rate of missing children investigations.

On **International Missing Children's day**, there is a massive, worldwide social media campaign where participants are encouraged to share images of those who are still missing on all forms of social media as well as celebrating stories of those who have been found.



26th May – 3rd June 2018 (That fits in with both my Birthday and Wedding Anniversary!) English wine – the most famous of all the continental blends. Yet sarcasm aside, it's not exactly a small industry any more. According to English Wine Producers – the organisers of **English Wine Week** – there are no fewer than 577 vineyards across the UK. While the colder climes might be a little sparser on the wine front – Scotland has four, the north has 19 and Wales has 23 – the south-east alone has 152 and the south-west has 136. And with Brexit coming fast and a huge question mark next to import tariffs, maybe it's time we developed a better understanding of what we can get domestically? And if English wine doesn't end up being to your taste (but make sure you try wine from all 577 domestic producers first), at least we've got a pretty decent beer scene these days. Hic Hic Hooray!



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Although some of my readers may well already be in BBQ mode, for the 22nd year running, many may well shortly be heading to the depths of the garden shed, ceremoniously removing the plastic cover and welcoming back into the garden the beloved barbecue, for **National BBQ Week**. From the 28th May to 3rd June 2018, up and down the country, restaurants, pubs and homes will all be encouraged to fire up the grill, filling the air with the smells and sounds of summer.

The British BBQ has come a long way since the early days of charcoal encrusted pork sausages and burgers cooked to the consistency of lumps of coal. With celebrity chefs regularly taking to the outdoors to display their culinary talents, *Al fresco*, there is no end of recipes that would tempt even the most steadfast traditional BBQ chef.

There's very little that can't be cooked on a BBQ from the traditional English breakfast to a whole turkey dinner!

Why not make 2018 the year to really make the BBQ part of your summer menu. Keep it simple and colourful with fruit and vegetable skewers and meltingly tender pork medallions or go big with whole Szechuan smoked duck!

And it's not just about the grilling! BBQ's are a great way to get together with friends and family. Add some wine or ice-cold beer, good music and good company, what better way to celebrate **National BBQ Week**.



Barbeque safe this summer

Now that the warm, light evenings are with us and the summer holidays are fast approaching, barbecues are beginning to sizzle across Essex. But behind the bangers and burgers, summer fun has a serious side. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, as part of the Fire Kills campaign, is asking everyone to take extra care when cooking *al fresco*, especially when lighting barbecues.

ECFRS Head of Community Safety said: -

“It's natural to want to go outdoors and enjoy the warmer weather with family and friends - many of us can't wait to get the barbecue lit. We all know how tempting it can be to give stubborn coals a helping hand, but, please be patient and make sure you use the right tools for the job.

“And if you've planned a barbecue and the weather lets you down, don't take the barbecue indoors or into a tent. In recent years, some people have sadly succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning as a result, so we are urging everyone to stay safe this summer.”

Following the fire service's top tips, you can ensure your barbecue is a safe, enjoyable event.

- Never leave a lit barbecue unattended.
- Follow the safety instructions provided with disposable barbecues.
- Never use a barbecue indoors.

- Make sure your barbecue is well away from sheds, fences, trees, shrubs or garden waste.
- Keep children, pets and garden games away from the cooking area.
- After cooking, make sure the barbecue is cool before moving it.
- Use enough charcoal to cover the base of the barbecue, but not more.
- Empty ashes onto bare garden soil, not into dustbins or wheelie bins. If they're hot, they can melt the plastic and cause a fire.
- Enjoy yourself, but don't drink too much alcohol if you are in charge of the barbecue.
- Always keep a bucket of water, sand or a garden hose nearby for emergencies.
- **NEVER** pour petrol onto your bbq.



29th May, as well as being my Birthday, is perhaps, the most British day in the calendar, **Oak Apple Day** has absolutely nothing to do with celebrating apples themselves and everything to do with the restoration of the monarchy, following the rule of Oliver Cromwell and his anti-royal

cohorts. Cromwell was a man so miserable that he banned Christmas, and it was for this (but probably more the execution of Charles I) that he was dug up two years after he died and posthumously executed. What a time to be alive. Other names for **Oak Apple Day** include Restoration Day, Royal Oak Day, Shick Shack Day, Oak and Nettle Day, and Yak Bob Day.

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Colin I. Freeman MITOL Trustee and Executive committee member of Essex County NhW Association, member of Epping Forest, Brentwood and Harlow NhW committees and Advisor to London Community Watch. colin@neighbourhoodmatters.org.uk

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HELPING COMMUNITIES TO HELP THEMSELVES

