

# Colin's Festive Blog

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2017**

Welcome to my last Festive Blog before Christmas and the New Year. Many of my readers, especially Mums, Dads and Grandparents, will be involved with Christmas bazaars, school plays, concerts, last minute shopping, and bracing themselves for the onset of school holidays, and no doubt that by the time the big day arrives, with a combination of exhaustion and depleted bank balances, the seasonal outbreak of 'Christmasitis,' may well have broken out. That said, we all look forward to the joy that Christmas can also bring, and hope that all the presents that we have bought for the children, are not broken, and actually work on the day. As a parent you will have already learned that it is important to have a good supply of batteries to hand, just in case Santa forgets to pack them with the presents.

Sadly, in our materialistic society, the true meaning of Christmas is often lost or obscured, and, although, over the years, I have formed my own considered opinion on the many aspects of religion, that I was taught as a child, Christmas does have a great deal of meaning to the many believers across the world, and, this should not be clouded or overtaken, or indeed hidden, by the blanket cover and pressures that the media and retailers bombard us with, at this time of year.

Christmas, is an opportunity for many organisations to join forces, and to promote their good work to their local communities.

I found one prime example of this, when together with my wife, I visited the 'Christmas Tree Festival,' in St. John's Church, Epping, where many local organisations dressed a Christmas Tree, representing the part that they play in making a difference in their community, as well as being a great fundraising opportunity for the Church, it was a brilliant opportunity for visitors to learn about some of the many local organisations that exist in Epping and the surrounding area.

I am writing this, whilst the snow that bombarded us on Sunday, is still on the ground, which serves as a timely reminder to all of us, to make sure that we are well prepared for Christmas and the New Year, and that we have a good supply of food and warm clothing, in case the bad weather decides to return. My wife and I are fortunate to live in a cul de sac, where, we are amongst a fantastic group of neighbours, and, we all look out for each other.

Not everyone is so lucky, and, as members of Neighbourhood Watch, I am sure that you will always be ready to help others in need of help and support in your community, especially at this time of the year.

## **Shoppers are being urged to be aware of the dangers of fraud in the lead-up to Christmas, as last winter saw a 25% rise in reported shopping fraud.**

According to national fraud and cyber-crime reporting centre Action Fraud, 15,423 people reported being a victim of shopping fraud in the run up to Christmas in 2016. In total, more than £16 million was reported stolen, a 45% increase on 2015.

- **The most common cyber scams and how to protect yourself**

Most cases (65%) related to fraud on online auction sites, such as eBay. On average, these victims lost around £727. The most frequently reported fraudulent sales included items such as mobile phones, clothing and accessories, footwear, watches and jewellery.

Pop-icon items such as Yeezy trainers, Kylie Jenner make-up, hair dryers, drones and Fitbit watches have also become a “trending” fraudulent sale item according to Action Fraud.

The City of London Police’s commander Dave Clark, the national co-ordinator for economic crime, comments: “Christmas is a busy time of year when we are required to make several quick decisions, especially when it comes to present buying. Our fraud awareness campaign is highlighting that it is very much ‘the thought that counts’ especially when it comes to avoiding fraudsters.

“Fraudsters see the Christmas rush as an ideal opportunity to take advantage of people’s generosity without a single care about the consequences this may cause for the victim.

“With a sharp rise in fraud reporting at Christmas time it is more important than ever that people do everything they can to protect themselves from fraudsters stopping them from enjoying the holiday season at the expense of others.”

- **10 tips to beef up your cyber security**

'Think before you buy'

Action Fraud has some key tips for protecting yourself from becoming the victim of shopping fraud this Christmas:

- Think before you buy: If something seems too much of a bargain, it’s probably poor quality, fake or doesn’t exist.
- Never click on unsolicited emails or text messages. Criminals can use the technology to make emails or texts look like they come from a legitimate business or organisation.
- If you’re buying tickets, always buy from official sources and never pay by direct transfer.

- If you're buying a holiday online, research it thoroughly to ensure that is a genuine offer and check to make sure it is registered with ABTA and ATOL.
- Think when you're buying: Use methods such as PayPal when buying on auction sites; never transfer money to someone you don't know.
- Secure Wi-Fi is vital for your privacy. Check that the network you're using is secure before you make any financial transactions.
- Keep your purchases secure: Always ensure that you keep your anti-virus software, operating systems and other security measures are up-to-date on your electronic devices. **Take a Tech Free 15 minute break to protect your devices.**
- Create strong passwords that are unique for each account you have. A good way to create a strong and memorable password is to use three random words. For more information and tips on how to protect yourself online, visit the Moneywise hub in partnership with Cyber Aware – **Stay secure online: How to be Cyber Aware** - and see [Cyberaware.gov.uk](http://Cyberaware.gov.uk).

If you think you've been a victim of fraud, contact your financial provider immediately, and notify **Action Fraud via its website** or by calling 0300 123 2040



My first Blog of the New Year will include insight and update in respect of Essex Crime Stoppers from my friend and colleague Peter Salmon, Chair of Brentwood Neighbourhood Watch.

Meanwhile, I wish all of my readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous

New Year! Colin

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<http://www.eppingforestnhw.org.uk/>

**Be Party Wise – Don't Drink and Drive**