



Brazen thieves snatch car parts in broad daylight

By David Melsome

Motorists in East Finchley and Muswell Hill are reporting a spate of thefts of catalytic converters from their vehicles, many of them in broad daylight. The converters are detached from the exhaust system and sold on for the precious metals they contain.

The Archer has seen multiple social media posts from car owners in both areas warning others that thieves are operating. Several said their converters had been stolen in just minutes from cars parked outside their home in the middle of the afternoon.

where possible, park their vehicle to make access underneath difficult.

Toyota has developed a locking device that makes it harder for thieves to remove the converter and Honda has relocated the converter on recent

One resident of Trinity Avenue, N2, who asked not to be named, told us: "Two weeks ago at 10.30 in the morning I heard a drilling outside my window, looked out and saw a silver saloon car alongside my car, two men in hoodies bending down and one holding a wire cutter. I knew immediately what had happened but it was all so quick I had no time to catch the number plate nor run after them."

The cost of replacing the converter on her Toyota hybrid car is likely to be close to £1,000. She reported the theft to police but believes there is little they can do without supporting evidence.

Theft target

Catalytic converters clean up harmful gases before they leave the exhaust pipe. Thieves are targeting them because they contain valuable metals like palladium and rhodium, which are more valuable than gold. BBC News has reported that for the first six months of 2019, the number of thefts of catalytic converters nationwide jumped to 2,894, compared to 1,674 thefts for all of 2018. Hybrid vehicles are most at risk because their converters are used less heavily and therefore their precious metals are in better condition.

Protection

Police advise vehicle owners to mark their catalytic converter with a serial number to make it distinctive, fit a protective cover over it, install a car alarm and,



Theft target: A typical catalytic converter.

models to make it harder for thieves to reach.

Festive lights switch-on

Christmas starts in East Finchley on Saturday 7 December at 4.30pm. As dusk gathers, the festive lights sprinkled over the High Road's Christmas tree will be switched on to the sound of carols led by the Archer Community Choir and Brookland Junior School Choir.

Carols and mince pies

Everyone is invited to join in the carols and, thanks to the team at Budgens, enjoy mulled wine and mince pies. Put the date in your diary and join the festivities outside the supermarket at 4.30pm.



All creatures great and small: Father Marius, back row, with pets and their owners. Photo Mike Coles

Animal friends among the faithful

By John Lawrence

There was a very different type of congregation at Holy Trinity Church on the first Saturday in October. Dogs and cats occupied the pews to take part in the church's first pet blessing service.

Eight dogs, two puppies and two cats were brought along by their human owners. The cats stayed safely in their travel boxes while some of the dogs were allowed to wander freely.

Aside from a bit of whining in one of the hymns and a brief outburst of barking during prayers, everyone's behaviour was impeccable. One elderly golden retriever struggled gainfully to her feet every time the congregation stood to sing.

Animal tales

Instead of a sermon, owners were invited to tell stories about their pets and how they'd changed their lives. Police dog handler Emma Robling paid a moving tribute to her German Shepherd Zia and the many dangerous situations they'd faced together before she succumbed to cancer.

Cat owner David Broome recalled an encounter with a housebound lady who had two feral cats move uninvited into her home, in return for which they cleared her house and garden of a vermin problem.

RSPCA officer Abi McEwan spoke about an animal fostering



Take a pew: One dog waits to be blessed. Photo Mike Coles.

network she is setting up and dog owner Carmen Stevens made a plea for people not to buy animals from puppy farms, which can often mistreat animals.

New tradition

Father Marius, who led the blessing service, said he hoped it would be the start of a new tradition at the church in Church Lane, N2. Although he has no pets himself, he grew up on his grandparents' farm in Romania with horses, cows and pigs all

around.

"The service has all been about giving thanks for the animals who share our lives," he said. "The stories we have heard today show what a blessing they can be to so many of us."

Hymn choices included *All Creatures of our God and King* and *Think of the World without Animals*. And as people and animals mingled after the service, the pianist rounded it all off nicely by playing *Nellie the Elephant*.

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