

**Q** We have the good fortune to live in a beautiful and reasonably secluded part of the country. However, on several occasions recently a camera drone has circled over our house and garden during the day, and twice at night, often as low as 20ft from the ground. Are there any privacy laws in place? What action could we take against this occurring – would we be within the law to take a pot shot at it?

## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

The drone user's actions may also represent the offence of harassment. You should consider reporting the operator to the police, who may decide to initiate a prosecution or invite the CAA to do so.

If the use of the drone does not represent a criminal offence, it may still be in breach of civil law. If it flies repeatedly above or near your house and garden at a low level and/or interferes with the reasonable enjoyment of your property, this might represent a trespass or nuisance entitling you to apply to court for an order prohibiting further infringements. The local authority may also be prepared to take enforcement action if it considers that a statutory nuisance has occurred. You should keep a log detailing the infringements to support your case.

If the drone takes photographs that identify individuals, the operator could be in breach of data-protection laws. The Information Commissioner (ico.org.uk) might be prepared to intervene. You should consider reporting the drone user to the police, and think about civil remedies – but I do not recommend taking matters into your own hands. If you cause damage to the drone, you might yourself face criminal charges and a claim for the cost of repairing or replacing it.

It's likely that drones will become more closely regulated, so look out for announcements from the CAA (caa.co.uk).

**Ed Cracknell is a senior associate at Russell-Cooke Solicitors; russell-cooke.co.uk**

**Q** About 20 years ago, we installed a "Bell grate" fire in our sitting room (see picture). It is the most efficient fire we've ever had. We want to fit one in another room, but we cannot find one. Have they gone out of production?

**Tina Wyatt, via email**

**A** "This type of grate was a product of the Edwardians' desire to improve the efficiency of the traditional open fire," says Elizabeth Elcombe, director of the north London fireplace store Amazing Grates. "It fused the open fire with an enclosed stove: the air supply was controlled, the canopy effectively funnelled the smoke and it increased the amount of both radiated and convected heat. Models such as the one illustrated were manufactured by Rayburn; more elaborate variations can be found in the Arts and Crafts style, with brass or copper canopies. Amazing Grates can source original models for between £1,000 and £5,000."

"This style is known as a 'canopy dog grate'," adds Jesse Gibilardo, director at Gibilardo Design. "There are a range of them in catalogues dating from the 1950s and older. They were made by several firms, including the Carron Company and

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Bratt Colbran. My best guess is that your grate is from the 1950 or 1960s. The Bell company still exists (bell.co.uk), and Rayburn produces canopy dog grates (phenixfires-online.co.uk). Robert Aagaard has an antique one for £714 (ref 0085; robertaagaard.co.uk); amazing-grates.co.uk; gibilardodesign.co.uk

**Q** We are thinking of buying a terraced house covered in pebbledash. The rest of the street is red-brick, so I imagine the same bricks are underneath. Is it possible to remove the pebbledash? What are the alternatives – can we cover it up?

**MS, Norwood Junction, London**

**A** If your house is within a brick terrace, it's likely that there are bricks beneath the pebbledash; the way to check is to chisel off a small area and see what appears. But I imagine that the vendor would not be happy for you to do this, so visit the local library to see if you can find historic pictures of the street.

If there is brickwork beneath, there may be major renovation specialists that will be able to help with removal. First, they will chisel off the pebbledash – a number of the brick faces will be damaged in the process, and will need to be replaced. Next, the brickwork must be repointed and a brick cleaner applied. As for prices, for 40 sq metres of pebbledash in London, allow £1,900 for scaffolding and removal, £2,800 for repointing and cleaning, and £14 each for replacing bricks.

If you decide not to remove the pebbledash, the other option is to apply a smooth render over the top, which could then be painted.

**Billy Heyman is managing director of BTL Property; btlpropertyltd.co.uk**

**Q** How do I eradicate wild bees from my chimney? Last year, we had some in a disused chimney and grate in the bedroom of my ancient farmhouse. The chimney sweep unblocked the flue and pest control used smoke, which removed a huge number of dead bees – into the bedroom! Now they are returning through an airbrick at the top of this chimney.

**Peter Hayward, Suffolk**

**A** Though domesticated for thousands of years, the western honeybee, *Apis mellifera*, is a native of central Asia and northern Africa. Feral bees are non-hived colonies that swarm when population numbers reach a critical point; and, as interesting as they are in a hollow tree trunk, they can be a problem in a building cavity, especially if they are inaccessible to a beekeeper. Honeybees defend their combs with their lives – and, once stung, a victim is labelled as its enemy by scents from the venom sac, which remains attached in the skin. Other bees then detect their foe and pursue it vigorously. Each venom delivery is less than one-ten-thousandth of a gram, but after 10 stings, you'll have a sit-down and a cup of tea, 100 stings and you should seek medical assistance; 1,000 is nearing a fatal dose. A large colony can have 80,000 bees.

Hire a professional with protective gear to destroy your unwanted guests. Make sure all the combs are removed, and that access through the airbrick is covered with a mesh smaller than the bees to prevent others being attracted to any lingering scents of honey or wax, otherwise you'll have another nest before long. Although bees are not protected by law, there may be personal injury attached to killing one of the few insects regarded affectionately by the public.

**Richard Jones is the author of House Guests, House Pests (Bloomsbury £9.99); bugmanjones.com**

## TOP TIPS

Burglaries may be falling year on year, but thefts from gardens are on the rise, according to figures from the Home Office. Here's how to protect yourself.

■ Research has found that only one in five household insurance policies covers gardens, too. Most home contents policies do, but the limits vary hugely: from £250 to £15,000. What you're looking for is "contents in the open" – this covers loss or damage to belongings left outside but still on your property. Check the level of coverage you have.

■ If you have a fancy bike, you might want to take out standalone insurance. Ask specialist shops such as Evans Cycles about cover options.

■ Keep tools and garden gadgets in a locked shed, and mark valuable items with an ultraviolet security pen (£1.26; officemachines.net). Anchor expensive plants with wire pegs dug into the ground around the rootball.

■ **goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute**



# Home help

Whether you're being invaded by bees or buzzed by drones, our team of experts is here to offer advice

