

Each type of property has its own security Weaknesses

Maisonettes, Flats, Apartments and HMO's

Maisonette can vary in their design but generally I would label a residence as a Maisonette if it were a two story building, containing two flats, each with its own front door onto the street with no communal stairway or communal front door. Some have both doors down at street level and others, stairs at the side of the building to reach the upstairs flat front door. In essence the downstairs property can be regarded as the downstairs of a house with all its access opportunities to a burglar. In the absence of a means to reach the upstairs property windows the upper flat is less at risk with the main entry point being the front door. However, those with an outside staircase at the side leading to the upstairs flat may be a little more vulnerable as the door is out of sight and above street level so no one would take much notice of someone trying to force the door.

Residents of purpose built Flats and Apartments have also become victims of Burglary and in some respects are the more vulnerable for several reasons. Although you would expect the "risk" that the offender would not know which flat was occupied at any given time and the comings and goings of residents would deter the offender, sadly this is not always the case. A lot would depend on the security of the communal front door. Once inside, the offender is out of view of passers by and has more time to select his target. You could pass him on the stairs and not give it much thought.

Tower Blocks

Most (although not all) tower block style flats have some form of entry system on the communal street door. Usually the door is opened with a fob, issued to each resident. When the fob is presented to a reader on the outside it releases a magnetic lock to enable the door to be opened to gain access. A release button on the inside allows residents to exit the building. This access control system would also incorporate an entryphone arrangement so a visitor could contact the particular flat and the resident of the flat can speak to the visitor, via the system and remotely release the door to allow their visitor to enter.

At first glance this would appear to be a very secure entry system but sadly it has a list of weaknesses and offenders have used all the methods below to gain access to tower blocks.

- 1) When residents are entering or leaving the door closes very slowly giving the offender ample opportunity to walk into the block unchallenged. This is called "tailgating"
- 2) Residents hear their door buzzer sounding in their flat on a regular basis and get into the habit of pressing the remote release on the door without using

the entry phone system to check who is trying to get in. Its human nature so the offender just presses various flat numbers knowing that someone will just release the door.

3) To allow Postmen etc. to enter and make deliveries there is usually a "tradesman" button which will unlock the door during pre set time range. Usually from around 6am until 9am. This means anyone can use the tradesman button between these times and open the door.

4) To assist the Fire Brigade to enter these buildings there is usually a small metal plate with a round hole in it placed near the front door. A special "fire Key" has a hinged section and when inserted into the hole the hinged part drops down inside the lock and opens the door. Sadly these are freely available on auction websites for under £5. that would give the offender access to all blocks of flats that have this Fire Key arrangement.

5) Because of the nature of the door closing automatically, furniture deliver Companies having to bring multiple items in, Plumbers, Electrician, Carpet fitters, Painters and Decorators bringing in tools in and residents taking multiple items in / out quite often wedge the door open and then forget to close it when they have finished. Obviously this would allow anyone to walk in.

Once the offender has gained access to the block he will check each flat for signs of occupancy, even knocking to check no one is home with a believable excuse if someone should open the door. Although doors are being replaced by Councils and Housing Associations with more secure designs, initially the entry system gave a false sense of security, so individual flat doors were not the most robust types and not too difficult to force. Offenders have been known to target several flats on different floors in one visit.

So, with the obvious security inadequacies of the street door you should consider that your home security starts at your own front door.

Front Doors

Have a good look at your front door. Does it look / feel solid and robust? Is it of wood construction or UPVC? If you are a Council / Housing Association tenant and you have a wooden door it may be worth asking if they have any future plans to replace the doors in your block. Recently I have seen replacement UPVC doors being installed in the local tower blocks and they are extremely strong and secure. But even the modern UPVC doors require the handle to be pulled up AND the key needs to be turned to lock the door securely. If you are the owner you may still be offered the replacement door, at a cost, but if not, wood doors can be reinforced with extra security features. I have seen metal gates on the outside of flat doors and although very secure, I would be concerned about the occupants being able to get out in an emergency. There should be a door viewer and a strong door limiter so you can see who is calling and restrict how far the door can open. A rim latch (Yale type) on its own is not sufficient. The door should also be fitted

preferably with a 5 lever mortice deadlock, though insurance companies will accept a rim automatic deadlock; both must be to British Standard 3621 or the equivalent European Standard EN12209.

There are roller, night latches available that can be locked from both sides. These latches are particularly useful in high rise flats to stop the door closing and locking you out. Unlike a house you cannot climb through a window to get back in so it would mean a locksmith attending. Being a roller design you can just push the door open again should it close behind you. Just remember not only will you need to lock the door with the key when going out you will also need to lock the door from inside when home and at night or anyone can just walk in.

Ground floor flats in tower blocks have a further complication in that they have windows at ground level, which is one of the most reported entry routes used by offenders. Double glazed units or not, the locking mechanisms, handles and what's on view inside the property can all attract the offender to try and gain entry. Second floor windows are not immune if there is a balcony and a way up. I have seen an up ended shopping trolley used as a ladder to gain access to a first floor balcony and then into the flat via the balcony door.

Ground floor flats and Conversions

Ground floor flats in conversions can be considered as a house. Windows at ground level, side or garden access all present security difficulties and opportunities for the offender. Houses converted to flats would usually have their own front door inside the main communal street door. Each with its own living space, kitchen and bathroom. One flat upstairs and one downstairs (or larger variations) The front door is the first problem in that it is down to each resident to ensure it is closed when they leave. It should have a mortice lock as well but even if there is one I have never seen it used. This makes the street door very vulnerable to being forced or slipped or just opened if it's left on the latch. Once inside the offender can work on both doors without being seen from the street. Therefore it is very important that you look to your own front door to be as secure as possible to stop or at least frustrate any attempt at a forced entry.

HMO;s (House of Multiple Occupancy, Bedsits)

With few exceptions these residents are privately owned conversion of an existing 2/3/4 bedroom houses. Each resident has a room to themselves with a shared lounge, bathroom and kitchen. Apart from the front door each room usually only has a Yale type latch which is totally inadequate to protect the room against a forced entry. The door is typically an internal door which could be the cheap, MDF honeycombed style. Which, as a barrier, is too flimsy. The older, solid wood doors, offer a much better resistance but either door can be reinforced and improved to provide a better level of protection.



Quality locks are only as strong as the doors and frames to which they are attached. Timber frames should be sound and securely bolted or screwed to the walls every 600mm (23") around the whole frame. Ensure that the frame is solid and the door should be of substantial construction; at least 44mm thick to support the mortice lock and hung on three strong 100mm (4") hinges. The rim latch and the mortice should be fitted 45 to 60cm (18-24") apart. In the door itself recessed or decorative panels should be a minimum of 9mm (1/3") thick. Doors with glazed panels are inherently less secure than solid doors, hence the need for a deadlock. Consider replacing ordinary or toughened glass panels with laminated glass - two pieces of glass bonded together with a sheet of laminate - as they offer much greater resistance to attack. Or if light coming through the panels is not really a

benefit then consider a solid door replacement or adding some plywood panels either side of the door.

Ideally the door should be fitted with a lock which has an automatic deadlocking facility, approximately a third of the way down from the top of the door. Additionally, a mortice deadlock latch should be installed a third of the way up from the bottom of the door and it should be used as often as is practicable. These locks must be suitable for emergency exit purposes, in that they **must not** require key to unlock them from inside, opening being achieved by means of a handle or thumb turn. **Security is a priority when the flat etc is unoccupied..... BUT Safety is the priority when the flat etc is occupied.** Where there is any conflict between security and fire requirements or legislation, Safety requirements must take precedence.

What you are trying to achieve is to make it harder for an offender to break in NOT make it harder for you and your family to get out in an emergency.

