

Cast Yow's View from the Ward Hill

THERE'S a lot more to disappearing tricks than you might think. In the season of panto all things might turn to the magical and the wonderful, but if you really want to vanish in a puff of smoke you may literally have to do more than burn your boats, but burn a pretty big hole in your bank balance.

Out there are agencies that specialise in helping people who for one reason or another need to 'disappear'.

For some it's dreams of a sun-filled life on some tropical beach, for others they may be escaping debts or nagging partners, others just want to leave everything behind.

But rest assured, being a successful missing person is something of a full-time occupation.

From the sheep's viewpoint, owning up to your misdemeanours, may be a less stressful existence than the work involved in keeping your whereabouts a secret. Possibly the only true way to disappear is to be dead, but then most who want the benefits of death do not like the idea of having to go through the physical necessity of cardio arrest or other gory heart-stoppers.

So how do you get to disappear? Well a look at the doings of Frank M Ahearn will be enlightening reading. Among his recommendations are serial disposal of mobile phones, the use of internet cafes, various non-traceable email addresses, PO Boxes and being highly organised and well planned.

Not a course for the disappearing numpty or fainthearted. Keeping ahead of your lies seems to be the most difficult thing, and as Frank tells all, for every would-be invisible man, there is a pack of hungry skip-tracers out there trying to find people.

It pays well and the people-finders get a good buzz from their occupation. Planning your disappearance should take at least six months and suggests that poor souls who suddenly disappear are more likely to have been abducted against their will rather than have plotted their way into a glamorous new existence.

Skip-tracers and privacy experts are two sides of the same coin, and it's a fascinating world of grey legality and uncertain morals where they operate. Whether you are a hard-core extremist needing to hide or stalker trying to find a victim, it seems this mode of business is booming. With personal data flying round the internet and gaining a market value as a tradable commodity, names, addresses, credit cards and national insurance numbers are out there for the taking.

In the US there have been nine million victims of identity theft, and it seems that humans are a little slow to catch up on just how critical that can be. Some freely load copious amounts of personal information onto social networking sites, presenting valuable

information for free to everyone out there wanting to use it for illegal purposes.

So if you truly want to disappear, the game seems to be, don't use any form of home-based communication system, any cards, loyalty plastic or similar. Create a smokescreen with plenty of misinformation followed by a campaign of disinformation and then get to work on reforming yourself as a new person.

Becoming camera shy is probably a pretty good idea too, if you haven't managed the cash-only plastic surgery work. For a humble sheep it sounds way too difficult, and only a thing possible in the crazy human world.