

BAILIWICK

As the weather begins to get warmer the number of cockroaches appearing in Bailiwick Manor have been on the increase. These insects, closely related to termites, originally appeared upon the planet during the carboniferous period some 320 million years ago. They are almost universally condemned as hard-to-control carriers of disease and are certainly widespread, there being some 4600 species altogether, 450 of which are native to Australia but only four of which are considered to be pests to humans.

Killing a cockroach is not an easy thing to do. Decapitation might be thought a useful mechanism but both the body and the head can continue to live for a week after their separation. As a result, many believe cockroaches to be immortal, which brings me neatly to the one thing absolutely everyone knows about cockroaches: they are so tough they would even survive a nuclear war.

Unfortunately, this, along with the Emperor's New Clothes is nothing more than a barefaced lie. Indeed, although they are more hardy than humans when faced with radiation poisoning, cockroaches are among the least hardy insects when it comes to nuclear fallout.

Doses of radiation are measured in units conveniently called 'rads'. Most standard microchips are fried at 1000 rads and such a dose applied to an entire human body is normally fatal (higher doses can be given to localised areas in order to treat tumours etc.). A cockroach, however, can withstand doses of 20,000 rads.

Impressive though this is it is relatively puny for insects as a whole. The common fruit fly, for example, requires a dose of 64,000 rads to kill it and there are species of parasitic wasps which can survive doses up to 180,000 rads. (There is a bacterium that can survive 1,500,000 rads but this is only at normal temperatures - freeze it and the tolerance to radiation doubles!)

'Facts' that 'everybody knows' (such as the cockroach's resilience in the face of nuclear conflagration) are taken at face value without people asking whether they are true or not. It is for this reason that it is essential for users of social

media to actually *check* the facts presented to them before they assume them to be true and pass them on. As Abraham Lincoln himself once tweeted, "82.8 per cent of statistics are made up on the spot"!