

IS THE END NIGH?

OUR COLUMNIST RICHARD BARR WONDERS IF WE WILL ALL STILL BE HERE IN JANUARY? HERE'S HOPING...

I DO HOPE YOU ARE READING THIS ARTICLE.

IT IS NOT AS THOUGH I have a small ego which needs inflating (I do) or that I suspect that you cannot read (I wouldn't dare) or that our brand new editor has eventually rumbled me and realised that the things I write in this column are just so much hot air (they are, and we need it if the forecasts for the weather in January are borne out: she can warm her hands on my words).

It is more important than that. It will mean that my ramblings will have been converted into print and put into a page of Places and Faces which in turn will have joined the other pages and been formed into a glossy magazine which has fallen through your letter box or you have picked up at one of the posh places that carry these valuable publications.

You may not be surprised to be feeling in your hands the crisp pages of a new Places and Faces, but a whole lot of people far more famous than you or I will be surprised. Many a celebrity is reported by the December 21 2012 website as believing in the Mayan prophesy.

And what is that prophesy? Simply that the world as we know it ended on December

21 2012. The Mayan civilisation consisted of a number of city states in Central America which shared a common culture and was in existence from about 5000 years ago. They had kings and palaces. They drank alcohol and used tobacco. In fact they sounded a little like us.

What they also did was create calendars - not advent calendars with little doors to open (with or without pieces of chocolate behind them) nor appointment calendars or Filofaxes. They created something called a long count calendar which was based on the concept that events had natural cycles. The Mayans recorded such cosmic events as eclipses and the arrival of comets - and made predictions of future events from past cycles. And that was where lay the problem: the Mayan calendar ran out on December 21 2012, leading a number of eminent people to believe that these ancient people had decided there was no point in going further into the future - because there wasn't to be a future.

As I write this piece, the doom laden website tells me there are only 19 days, 11 hours 41 minutes and 28 seconds left of life

on this planet.

However, there are other equally distinguished people and organisations that have a different view. NASA (who should know a few things about cosmology) has gone to the trouble to issue a statement reassuring us that the world will not end on December 21.

In their words: 'Our planet has been getting along just fine for more than 4 billion years and credible scientists worldwide know of no threat associated with 2012.'

I hope they are right, because otherwise I am wasting my time writing this - time which I should be spending in unadulterated hedonism in the last days of the world.

So - if you are there and if the January issue of Places and Faces is in your hands, happy New Year to you!

It is unfortunate that our new year starts in the gloomiest month of the year - characterised by unmitigated bleakness spreading weeks into the future. Little wonder that new years' resolutions are so seldom kept: they die of cold and depression.

Having survived the end of the world, we now need to make the best of it until it ends next time.

HERE IS THE RICHARD BARR SEVEN POINT PLAN FOR SURVIVING JANUARY AND GOING ON TO HAVE A HAPPY NEW YEAR:

- 1 Take (or at least plan) a holiday - and go somewhere warm.
- 2 While everyone else is struggling to carry out their resolutions, do something different or eccentric: wear odd coloured socks and wait to see if anyone notices. Grow a moustache (if you are a woman) or shave your armpits if you are not.
- 3 Turn off Facebook and texting for a month, and telephone your friends instead. In the same vein, write a letter to someone you are fond of instead of an email. Or, more fun, write a letter of complaint.
- 4 Go for a walk. If it is snowing, throw snowballs. If it is raining, get close to someone and jump in a puddle.
- 5 Feed the birds. It is a grim month for them too. Put a bird feeder outside your window and sit quietly. Count how many different songbirds come to visit.
- 6 Buy some strong vitamin D pills and take them. Buy a daylight lamp and sit in bright light at home for several hours a day. Try not to be SAD (i.e. suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder).
- 7 Get a hobby - knit, paint, cook, write the book you always planned (that, by the way, is my resolution).

ON THE OTHER HAND if your still smouldering copy of Places and Faces is delivered to the ruins of your home, take comfort that you will have something worse to cope with than January and make a resolution that next time they say the world is going to end, live the remaining 19 days, 11 hours 41 minutes and 28 seconds to the fullest.