

Rogue traders sentenced to over 14 years in prison

Four rogue builders have appeared in court charged with conning vulnerable and elderly residents out of thousands of pounds.

The four men, all of Irchester, – Michael Rooksby, John Lee, Charles Michael Hugh Doherty and Charles Doherty – would cold-call at homes and claim that work needed to be done to the house, in most cases roofing repairs. Often the work was unnecessary, where work was carried out it was of poor quality and the price would be extortionate. They often sought further sums from the same victim, allegedly for further work.

We identified 26 victims, aged between 71 and 93, across the county and East Anglia who were tricked out of a total of £138,000. One victim was conned out of more than £30,000. Our investigation was supported by Northamptonshire Police.



Clockwise from top left: Michael Rooksby, John Lee, Charles Michael Hugh Doherty and Charles Doherty

At a hearing at Northampton Crown Court, Lee, Rooksby and Charles Michael Hugh Doherty admitted fraudulent trading, while Charles Doherty admitted two counts of fraud. Rooksby was jailed for three years and 11 months, Lee for three years and four months, Charles Michael Hugh Doherty for four years and 10 months and Charles Doherty for two years and three months.

At an earlier hearing, Joanne Lester of Irthlingborough, pleaded guilty to money laundering offences having paid cheques from the victims worth nearly £18,000 into her bank account. She had retained approximately 10% of this amount for facilitating this. She was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment suspended for 12 months, given a 12 month supervision and ordered to carry out 100 hours unpaid work.

These types of crimes have had a massive impact on the victims. Some of the victims stated:

“This upset me deeply. I served in the RAF for over 30 years and had saved and managed my pension to enable me to live comfortably and ensure I had money to pass on to my family. Now there is considerably less. I do not trust anyone and where I used to leave my door unlocked, I now keep it locked and seldom open it if anyone knocks.”

“I was unwell at the time and had recently lost my wife. I felt pressurised and intimidated and thought I might be attacked. I now feel wary of anyone coming to the door. I always check my surroundings in case they come back. I always worry I might be targeted by someone else. I have felt embarrassed, angry and worried; they caught me at a low point and abused me to steal my money.”

“I was terrified of him returning so kept all doors locked; before I had an open house for visitors. I was on edge the whole time which is not my normal character.”

One million pound confiscation order against former letting agent

A former letting agent from Kettering has been ordered to pay a confiscation order of £1 million under the Proceeds of Crime Act following our prosecution and financial investigation.

Harpreet Garcha, of Bath Road, Kettering, who ran property lettings franchises in Kettering, Desborough and Corby, was sentenced to two years and nine months in prison in 2016.

Garcha fraudulently generated significant profits at the expense of tenants and landlords, by covertly inflating contractors' bills for maintenance work. He was also convicted of providing false invoices to HMRC to reclaim VAT on business expenditure and making false statements in insurance claims on behalf of landlords which resulted in unjustified county court judgements against former tenants. He admitted two counts of fraudulent trading, two counts of money laundering, five counts of insurance fraud and one offence of VAT fraud, committed between 2008 and 2012. Two further counts of mortgage fraud were left to lie on file.

His sentence included two-and-a-half years for the fraud-related offences and three months for the contempt of court offence, to run consecutively. He was also disqualified from acting as a director for nine years.

A confiscation order for £1.006 million was made under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 – the largest confiscation order we have ever secured. Of that, £51,000 will be paid out in compensation to some of Garcha's former tenants and landlords who were identified as victims of his offences. He will face up to seven years in prison if the order is not paid in full.

Catering company fined over wedding reception nut allergy error

A catering firm has been ordered to pay more than £3,000 after serving a bride, who suffered from a nut allergy, a cake containing almonds on her wedding day.



Kayleigh Cortis and her husband Stephen hired Impressions Caterers Ltd to provide the food for their wedding reception at Hunsbury Hill Centre in September 2016.

The couple had told the company about her nut allergy and were assured that the meal would be entirely nut-free. However, during the wedding buffet, she realised the sponge cake she was eating contained almonds.

Impressions Caterers Ltd, of Abthorpe, Towcester, admitted an offence contrary to the Food Safety Act at a hearing at Wellingborough Magistrates' Court. The court heard how the company has since made changes to its processes and has asked us to visit their premises to make sure their systems are fully effective in future. The firm was ordered to pay a total of £3,156.36.

Shopkeeper fined for selling cigarettes to underage customer

A shopkeeper from Raunds has been ordered to pay almost £3,000 after a shop assistant sold cigarettes to an underage girl.

As part of an undercover operation, an underage test purchaser visited nine different shops. Hill Street News and Off Licence in Raunds was the only shop that sold cigarettes to the test purchaser during the operation. When interviewed, the shop owner, Baskaran Thibakaran, said the shop assistant who sold the cigarettes was not an employee but was helping him out for half an hour.



Thibakaran of Hill Street, Raunds, appeared at Northampton Magistrates' Court where he admitted selling cigarettes to someone under the age of 18 and was fined £1,400 and ordered to pay court costs of £1,394.16.

Online retailer fined for false description of leather wallets

An online retailer based in Wellingborough has been ordered to pay £5,000 after admitting selling wallets which were falsely advertised as genuine leather.



Following a customer complaint a test purchase was made from PGS Gifts Ltd. The wallets were analysed and found not to be genuine leather.

Investigations found that an earlier customer complaint was made to the business. The customer reported that she was disappointed with the quality when it arrived and it smelt of plastic rather than leather.

When visiting the business premises we found that labels inside the wallets stating they were in fact made from PVC had been cut out before sale.

The company admitted two charges relating to unfair trading during a hearing at Northampton Magistrates' Court and was fined £3,000 and ordered to pay £1,960 in legal costs.

Man sentenced for selling unroadworthy car to young driver

A man from Kettering who sold an unroadworthy car to a young driver has been fined and sentenced to unpaid work following our investigation.

John Chambers, t/a J C Salvage, sold the car, a Vauxhall Corsa, to the 18-year-old school leaver through an advert on eBay for £3,200. However, the car was later found to have serious structural damage likely to have been caused in a crash and was not safe to be on the road. His advert had stated that the vehicle had come from an insurance company, that the car had minor front panel damage, but that damaged parts had been replaced. However, the car had in fact come from a salvage company and the serious structural damage was not repaired.



An expert engineer examined the vehicle and stated "A person driving this vehicle would, in my opinion, be putting their life and the lives of other road users at risk. The vehicle is unroadworthy and not fit to be used on the road".

Chambers admitted three offences relating to supplying a vehicle in an unroadworthy condition and making false statements during the transaction. He was sentenced at Northampton Crown Court to 100 hours of unpaid work and ordered to pay a fine of £500 and prosecution costs of £1,000.

Fine for Corby shopkeeper over sale of counterfeit vodka

A shop owner from Corby has been fined for selling counterfeit vodka. Balraj Singh Dhaliwal, who runs VG Stores in Willowbrook Road, was investigated after a customer complained about a bottle of Chekov vodka they had bought.



When our officers visited the store they seized 87 bottles of illegal vodka, most of which were found in a storeroom at the back of the shop.

Dhaliwal appeared at Northampton Magistrates' Court where he admitted four offences relating to the sale of the illegal vodka. He was fined £800 and ordered to pay £1,250 in court costs.

To make a complaint, provide information or get advice

Our partner organisation, the Citizens Advice consumer service provides free, confidential and impartial advice on consumer issues and will refer cases to us where further action may be appropriate.

The service will provide information on all consumer issues, including:

- advice before you buy
- businesses acting unfairly or illegally
- cancellation of contracts for goods or services
- faulty goods
- guarantees
- scams
- unsatisfactory service



Therefore, if you have a complaint about a trader or need advice or information on problems with goods or services please visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/, or call the Citizens Advice consumer service helpline on **03454 04 05 06**.

Please give us your feedback on this newsletter or our work

Please write, call or email us on the contact details below; we really value your opinion.

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