

Appendix 2.

Rogue trader who conned the elderly finally behind bars

A rogue builder who sought to evade justice by leaving the country has been jailed for more than four years, following a successful prosecution led by Merton Council's trading standards officers.

Cold-calling Joseph Horner conned homeowners, on their own doorsteps, into paying hundreds of pounds for "shoddy" building works, many of which were unnecessary or carried out to an inadequate standard. The fraudster led a group who targeted elderly and vulnerable residents across Merton, Wandsworth and Slough over a five-month period in 2012. The victims, some of whom have now died, were pressured into handing over their cash for the over-priced building works.

One resident was told a parapet wall and chimney stack were in a dangerous condition and Horner commenced work without her agreement. An inspection by Merton Council's trading standards officers found the unnecessary works had actually caused damage to the property. Another resident cold-called by Horner was told a roof tile was missing from his home. Offering to undertake works for £300 cash and provide a 20 year guarantee, the conman also claimed the roof had multiple problems which could lead to its collapse.

Trading standards and Met Police officers arrested Horner in Mount Road, Wimbledon Park in August 2012. He was bailed to attend a Crown Court but as he failed to appear an arrest warrant was issued. Horner left the country, however, he was arrested when he returned in May this year and appeared at Kingston Crown Court, where he was remanded in custody to face trial.

Horner pleaded guilty to Fraud Act offences at the same court on Friday 23 August and was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison. The 51-year-old, from Slough was also sentenced to the maximum six month sentence for a Bail Act offence that is to be served consecutively. Although the total financial loss by victims was £6,650, a compensation order was not made, as the defendant has no money.

Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, said: "I hope this case sends out strong warning that rogue traders who con residents into paying for shoddy or unnecessary works in Merton will be brought to justice.

"Many residents don't come forward, or even tell family and friends that they've been victims of doorstep fraudsters due to fear, embarrassment, or because they don't realise they've been conned.

Callous rogue traders ruin lives and so I'd urge anyone who is suspicious of work being carried out in their neighbourhood to contact their local trading standards department or the Citizens Advice consumer helpline."

"Our advice is never to do business on the doorstep, no matter how good the deal sounds."

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