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Butcher's luxury lifestyle funded by VAT scam

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The discarded butcher's statuette from Turner's business

By Rob Preece Crime Correspondent

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A FORMER butcher from Yorkshire is facing jail after he admitted stealing £3.3m from the taxpayer over 14 years to keep his affluent lifestyle when his company ran into difficulty.

Gary Turner, a Jehovah's Witness and father of six, was once a successful businessman whose meat wholesalers firm, Turners Butchers, was famed for the quality of its pies and sausage rolls.

After trade began to dwindle, however, he used the company as a front for a lucrative VAT fraud which enabled him to maintain his big-spending habits.

When investigators from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) raided his £290,000 home in Morley, near Leeds, they found he owned six high-performance vehicles, all with personalised number plates, as well as expensive guitars and a watch collection worth more than £35,000.

Some of his ill-gotten gains were used to buy a house for his son in the same street.

Turner, 47, registered his company in 1988 and it grew quickly, operating franchises in local branches of Kwik Save.

But he turned to crime in 1996 when the business started to wane, creating fake invoices and receipts from suppliers and using them to fraudulently reclaim VAT from the state.

After his arrest in April last year, he admitted having fraudulently misled the authorities and described his business affairs since 1996 as "all fake".

He sent VAT repayment applications to HMRC every three months, claiming sums of between £19,000 and £46,000 each time, while he had no legitimate business income.

Even his family were unaware of what he was doing, as he kept up the pretence the business was profitable.

HMRC's assistant director for criminal investigation, Peter Hollier, said: "We want to make it clear to people who think that it is acceptable to defraud the tax system that tax fraud is a serious criminal offence. Turner tried to play the system so his family could live a luxury lifestyle.

"He went to a lot of effort to hide his crime but despite his best attempts our investigators were able to unravel what he thought was a water-tight scam."

HMRC grew suspicious of Turner's high repayment claims and put him under investigation.

When investigators approached him for details, he claimed his accountant had all the paperwork – but the accountant did not exist.

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