

## Nightmare neighbour avoids jail term

EADT 14 June 2006



Michael Cornwell



A NEIGHBOUR from hell who has made the lives of villagers a misery for four years has escaped a jail sentence despite admitting two further incidents.

Police officers arrested 53-year-old Michael Cornwell in March after he sprayed graffiti with an aerosol can on a neighbour's house and blocked a driveway with his car, Ipswich Crown Court heard.

Cornwell, of Back Lane, Monks Eleigh admitted two offences of acting in breach of a restraining order made by magistrates in April 2003.

Sentencing him, Judge Peter De Mille said his initial view was that Cornwell should be jailed for a minimum of two years.

However, after hearing mitigation from Cornwell's barrister Jude Durr, he said he was prepared to impose a community order in a bid to break his cycle of re-offending.

Before making a community order with a requirement that Cornwell be under the supervision of the probation service for two years and attend courses designed to address his offending behaviour, the judge asked Cornwell if he was prepared to co-operate with such an order.

When Cornwell said he would co-operate the judge warned him that if he breached the order he would be brought back to court in front of him and be jailed for at least two years.

"For two years you would be very wise to co-operate with the probation service and to consider yourself in effect under a suspended prison sentence," said the judge. He said the restraining order would remain in place.

Ian Pells prosecuting said that difficulties between Cornwell and his neighbours dated back to July 2002 and had resulted in magistrates making a restraining order in April 2003 preventing him from harassing his neighbours.

He said Cornwell had been a neighbour of one woman for 26 years and had become involved in a dispute with her over the ownership of land.

This had resulted in Cornwell placing items, including human excrement, on her property and walking across her land using abusive and threatening behaviour on a regular basis.

The court heard that Cornwell had been jailed for 18 months in July 2005 after breaching conditions of the restraining order.

He had been released in October 2005 and had committed the latest breaches on March 14 and March 17 this year.

On these occasions he had blocked the driveway of Rose Cottage in Back Lane with his Peugeot 205 and had sprayed graffiti with an aerosol on Rose Cottage.

Previous court hearings have been told how Cornwell has terrorised the quiet community, threatening neighbours with rocks and bricks, bombarding them with verbal abuse and restricting their liberty by blocking the lane with his car.

He has also damaged property, painted his name on the road outside his cottage and left trails of rubbish in neighbouring driveways.

Yesterday, Mr Durr for Cornwell, said his client did not have a criminal record until 1996 and, but for the continuing trouble with his neighbours, he was not offending in other spheres of his life.

He said current breaches of the restraining order were towards the bottom end of seriousness but he accepted that Cornwell's behaviour represented a "real and continuing annoyance" to his neighbours.

Mr Durr said Cornwell had a history of psychiatric illness but this had not manifested itself in any serious, violent behaviour towards members of the public.

Mr Durr said Cornwell viewed himself as a victim of on going and persistent victimisation by his neighbours, the local council, police and the RSPCA.

"In many ways he is a vulnerable human being who leads a lonely and isolated existence. Previous prison sentences appear to have had very little effect on him," said Mr Durr.