



Shop Volunteer Escapes Jail Sentence

Volunteer Paul Carter has been spared a jail sentence after admitting stealing nearly £5,000 from Rowde community shop, which almost led to its closure.

Carter, 54, of Jubilee Cottages, Rowde, pleaded guilty to stealing £4,958 cash belonging to the village store at a hearing at Salisbury Magistrates' Court on July 8. The case was adjourned for sentence until Monday.

Michelle Hewitt, prosecuting, told the bench that Carter, who rents a cottage next door to the shop, had been a volunteer there for some time.

When the paid manager went on holiday in April, he volunteered to take over while she was away.

He had been shown how to bank the takings at the post office at the Spar shop in Bath Road, Devizes, but instead he put the cash from the till into his own account.

On April 14, shop committee chairman Jackie Bawden noticed that £2,000 had not been banked but Carter had gone away on a business trip to Bulgaria.

The police were informed and Carter was interviewed on May 8 and 13 when he refuted any suggestion he had stolen any money.

Officers did not accept his story and he was interviewed again on May 18 when he finally owned up.

Tim George, defending, said his client accepted he had paid the money into his own account but no malice had been intended.

He said Carter had been setting up a land management business with a colleague in Romania but it had fallen through, leaving him with debts.

Carter had used the shop's cash in an attempt to complete the deal but he had since borrowed £4,500 to pay the shop back.

Carter was sentenced to 12 weeks' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, ordered to do 200 hours of unpaid work in the community and told to pay compensation of £458.

Carter had pleaded not guilty to three other charges: of stealing £61 and £51 cash and stealing alcohol and other groceries to the value of £84. The Crown Prosecution Service withdrew those charges.

Jackie Bawden said: "Paul's actions have had a devastating effect on us as individuals and on the shop.

"At the moment we are living from day to day, not sure if we can remain viable."

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