



One of the boxes the illicit goods were hidden in

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Toy train tobacco fraudsters sentenced

Three members of the same Berkshire family have been sentenced after 2.5 million illicit cigarettes were smuggled into the UK – sometimes hidden in toy train set boxes.

William Powell, 68, of Twyford, and his son and daughter William Jnr, 35, of Reading, and Lorraine Bennett, 37, of Finchampstead, were due to receive cigarettes and tobacco through the post, worth more than £1.3m in lost tax.

An investigation from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) found that 2.5

million non-UK duty paid cigarettes were smuggled into the UK between January 2015 and 2018.

More than 1,800 kilos of illicit tobacco and 97,000 counterfeit tobacco pouches with duty-paid stamps were also seized by Border Force and HMRC officers at East Midlands Airport, postal depots and a garage in Reading. All of the seized goods were addressed to the trio's homes and worth £1.3m in lost tax.

Despite the trio being arrested on suspicion of Excise Duty fraud on various dates between 2015 and 2017, further packages were still sent to their addresses.

The illicit goods were imported from China and Hong Kong, often in containers described as holding metal parts, lights and even children's toys.

Richard Mayer, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“In a scam led by their father, Powell Jnr and Bennett participated in a major fraud which contributed to the £1.8 billion tobacco tax gap. The tax lost in this case is the equivalent of the salaries for 56 newly-qualified teachers in England and Wales.

“Tax fraud steals money from public services we all rely on. Anyone with information about suspected tax fraud can report it to HMRC [online](#) or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

Powell Snr and Powell Jnr pleaded guilty to Excise Duty fraud at Reading Crown Court on 27 February 2019. Bennett pleaded guilty to the same offence on 6 September 2019.

Powell Snr was sentenced to 30 months in jail at Reading Crown Court today (21 October 2019). Powell Jnr was sentenced to 18 months in jail, suspended for 18 months. He was also ordered to complete 200 hours of community service. Bennett was sentenced to 10 months in jail, suspended for 18 months.

Notes for editors

1. William Alfred Powell (DOB 31/10/1950) of Polehampton Court, Twyford, pleaded guilty to the evasion of Excise Duty at Reading Crown Court on 27 February 2019. He was culpable for £1,372,147.14 of the fraud. He was sentenced to 30 months in jail before the same court today (21 October 2019).

2. William Charles Powell (DOB 03/04/1984) of Hearn Road, Reading, pleaded guilty to the evasion of Excise Duty at Reading Crown Court on 27 February 2019. He was culpable for £522,490.65 of the fraud. He was sentenced to 18 months in jail, suspended for 18 months. He was also ordered to complete 200 hours of community service. Before the same court today (21 October 2019).

3. Lorraine Christine Bennett (DOB 29/12/1981) of Dart Close, Finchampstead, pleaded guilty to the evasion of Excise Duty at Reading Crown Court on 6 September 2019. She was culpable for £238,696.80 of the fraud. She was sentenced to 10 months in jail, suspended for 18 months before the same court today (21 October 2019).

4. Anyone with information about people or businesses involved in tax fraud can report it online [here](#) or call the HMRC Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.

5. Follow HMRC's press office on Twitter [@HMRCpressoffice](#).

6. The tobacco tax gap for 2017/18 was estimated at £1.8bn. [Source](#).

7. [Newly qualified teachers](#) in England and Wales earn a minimum of £24,373 a year.

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HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is the UK's tax authority.

HMRC is responsible for making sure that the money is available to fund the UK's public services and for helping families and individuals with targeted financial

support.

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