

# Four jailed over £16m tobacco tax fraud



Iqbal Haji, 50, a postmaster of Whalley Street, Blackburn, was sentenced to six years jail for Excise Duty evasion and two years jail for money laundering, to run concurrently

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**Four Lancashire men who attempted to steal more than £16 million in tax by selling illegal cigarettes and tobacco have been jailed**

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and tobacco have been found.

The men were all linked to the crime after an investigation by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) identified their involvement through sales records in two 'dealer' books, kept by Iqbal Haji, 50, at his home.

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Money and tobacco found during a raid by HMRC officers on the home of Iqbal Haji in Whalley Street, Blackburn

Haji's home was searched by HMRC officers in September 2014 after five months of investigation into his suspicious activities. The officers seized illegal cigarettes, hand rolling tobacco and cash. They also discovered the meticulous records he kept of his illegal trade, dating back to 2010.

Iqbal Haji, a postmaster of Whalley Street, Blackburn, was sentenced to six years jail for Excise Duty evasion and two years jail for money laundering, to run concurrently, by a judge sitting at Preston Crown Court yesterday.

HMRC officers found a total of 15 kilos of illegal Golden Virginia hand rolling tobacco along with £101,124 in cash at his home. His two dealer books detailed illegal sales that evaded £16,160,885 in Excise Duty and VAT over four years.

The two books revealed three of his main customers, Keith Allen, 66, James Willmott, 54, both of Accrington and Wayne Brown, 51, of Darwen. All three were jailed alongside Haji yesterday.



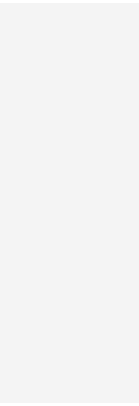
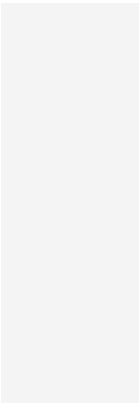
Wayne Russell Brown, 51, a self-employed club owner, of Springvale Garden Village, Darwen, was sentenced to 13 months jail for Excise Duty evasion and 13 months jail for money laundering, to run concurrently

The four men were jailed for a total of 12 and a half years and now face confiscation proceedings to recover their criminal profits and the stolen tax.

Keith Allen, 66, of West View, Oswaldtwistle, Accrington, was sentenced to four years jail for Excise Duty evasion and 18 months jail for money laundering, to run concurrently. HMRC officers found 7.85 kilos of illegal rolling tobacco along with £39,670 in cash plus 610 Euro at his home. From 1 May 2014, Allen made 33 visits to Haji buying 1,549.5 kilos of tobacco and 341,600 cigarettes, evading £359,025 in Excise Duty and VAT.

James Willmott, 54, of Wellfield, Clayton le Moors, Accrington, was sentenced to 16 months jail for Excise Duty evasion and 16 months jail for money laundering, to run concurrently. HMRC officers found 7.5 kilos of illegal Amber Leaf HRT, 320 smuggled cigarettes and £3,414 in cash at his home. From 1 May 2014, Willmott made 17 visits to Haji buying 745.5 kilos of tobacco and 40,000 cigarettes, evading of £143,830 in Excise Duty and VAT.

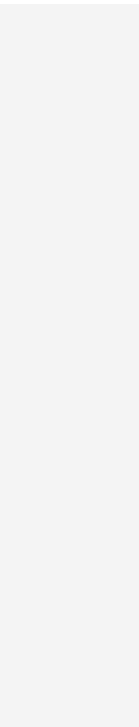
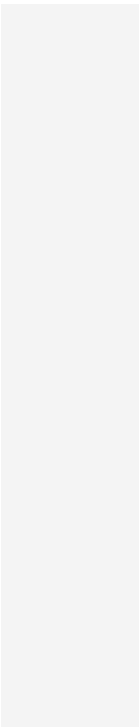
Wayne Russell Brown, 51, a self-employed club owner, of Springvale Garden Village, Darwen, was sentenced to 13 months jail for Excise Duty evasion and 13 months jail for money laundering, to run concurrently. HMRC officers found 200 President, 4,000 Italian brand, and 821 other illegal cigarettes and 13 kilos of illegal rolling tobacco at his home. From 1 May 2014, Brown made 19 visits to Haji buying 1,227.35 kilos of rolling tobacco and 100,000 cigarettes, evading £64,272 in Excise Duty and VAT.



Keith Allen, 66, of West View, Oswaldtwistle, Accrington, was sentenced to four years jail for Excise Duty evasion and 18 months jail for money laundering, to run concurrently.

Sandra Smith, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said: “Our investigation proved that Haji was at the centre of a criminal network evading millions in tax to line his own pockets. Disrupting criminal trade is at the heart of our strategy to clampdown on the illicit tobacco market, which costs the UK around £2 billion a year. This is theft from the taxpayer and undermines legitimate traders. The sale of illegal tobacco will not be tolerated.”

Anyone with information about the trade in smuggled or counterfeit tobacco can contact the Customs Hotline on 0800 59 5000 to report it.



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