

## Mother admits false claims for £51,000 benefit

Neighbours helped to convict a mother-of-three for illegally claiming £51,000 in state benefit, a court has heard.

Michelle Evans, 40, of Jellicoe Road, Newton Abbot, made false claims for income support, housing benefit and council tax payments over a four-year period.

She told the Department for Work and Pensions she was living as a lone parent.

But neighbours confirmed suspicions she had been living at the address with a man.

Exeter Crown Court was told the offences were so serious she faced jail.

But the judge decided to suspend a 12-month sentence after hearing Mrs Evans was seriously ill and needed daily dialysis treatment.

He told her legitimate claimants felt angry about benefit cheats like her who undermined the system.

Prosecutor Oliver Willmott said investigators mounted a surveillance operation at the defendant's address in March 2007.

He said the evidence of neighbours helped to reveal she was living with a man and not as a lone parent.

Over two periods between April 2003 and June 2008, Mr Willmott said Evans claimed £43,000 in income support; £14,540 in housing benefit; and £3,258 in council tax, making a total of £62,094.

Evans disputed this sum and pleaded guilty to four counts of failing to notify the state about a change in circumstances on the basis she had fraudulently claimed £51,100.

The court was told in mitigation that Evans was a woman of previous good character who had not set out to deliberately defraud.

Defence counsel Rupert Taylor said the money had been spent on the household and everyday living.

"There's a lifetime of debts to be repaid," he said.

Recorder Robin Belben imposed a 12-month suspended sentence on the grounds it would be almost impossible for Evans to get the medical treatment she needed behind bars.

She also received a 12-month supervision requirement.

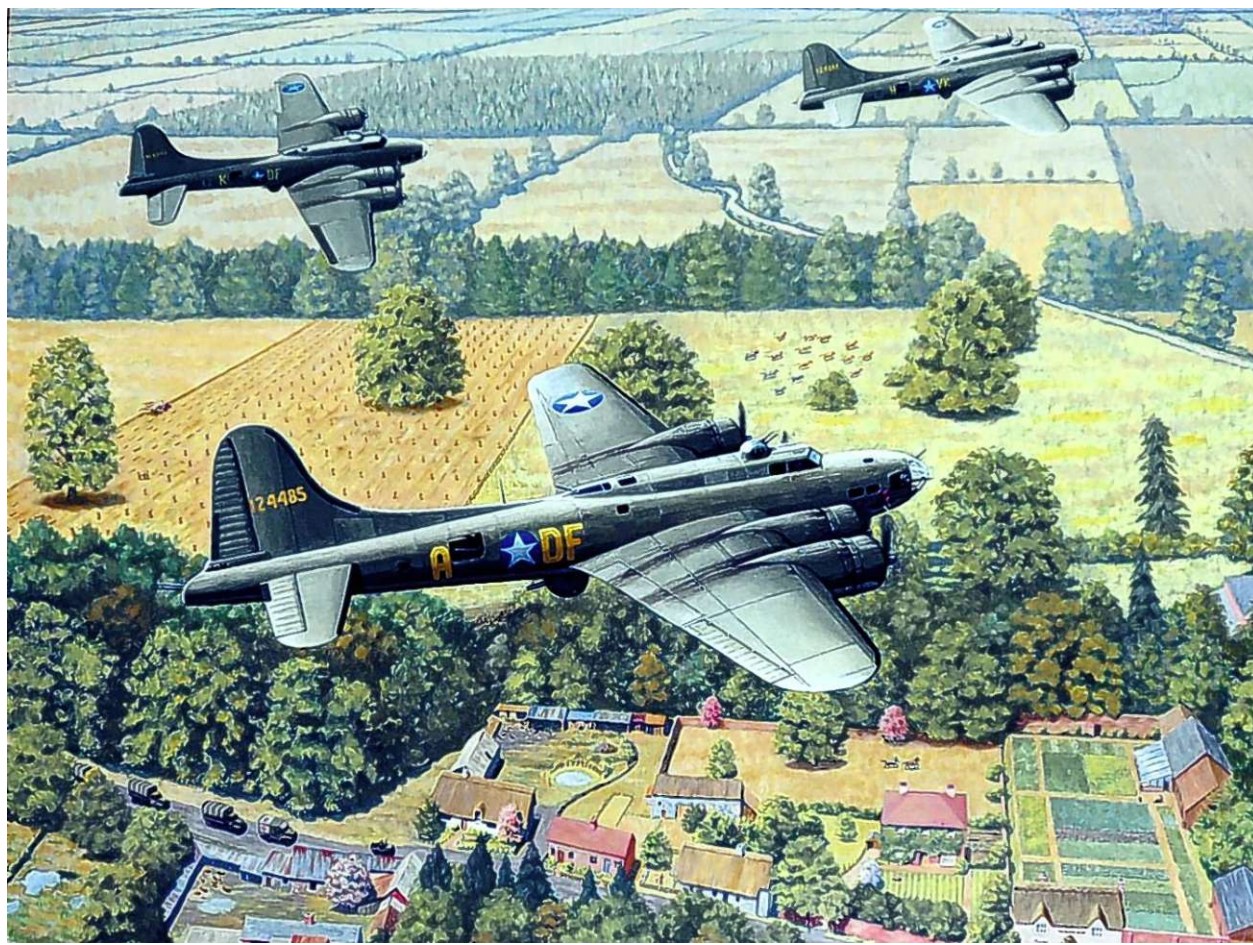
## County expands garden recycling

Garden waste collections have been stepped up across parts of Cornwall.

The service, which operates on the same day as household recycling collections, will now collect green waste from across East Cornwall, rather than just a handful of properties.

Currently, around 1,800 tonnes of garden waste are collected in East Cornwall and sent to one of two sites for composting.

Householders are required to buy special garden waste sacks from Cornwall Council.



One of Wilf Plowman's many paintings that he is planning to sell for half their normal price

## Artist Wilf plans clearance sale of his life's work

One of Devon's best-known artists is selling off his works because he has too many paintings and not enough room.

After a lifetime at the easel Wilf Plowman, 82, whose work has been bought by the Duke of Edinburgh, the Princess Royal and billionaire Arab oil sheikhs, has decided to have a clear-out.

He is offering up to 40 works at half-price and is consider-

ing auctioning off paintings for the Royal Air Force Association.

Mr Plowman, who served in the RAF after the Second World War, lives in a two-bedroom bungalow at Lymstone with his wife Doreen.

He said: "I am afraid I am coming to the end of my painting life. I seem to have lost my inspiration and so I think it is right to get rid of these paint-

ings that are around the house.

"In all there must be 30 or 40 of them, and I really would like other people to enjoy them.

"Normally the larger pictures, like the one of the aircraft, would go for £1,000 – but it will be a half-price sale, with the smaller ones going for only £150."

Mr Plowman can be contacted on 01395 266422.



Artist Wilf Plowman

# Small farms have big role in making industry sustainable

BY PETER HALL  
Farming Editor

Small-holdings of 10 acres or less can provide viable and highly sustainable livelihoods – and could prove the way forward for survival in an ever-increasing world population.

The viability of very small farms was the key finding of a major piece of groundbreaking research from Dr Larch Maxey, an academic at the University of Plymouth, who worked on examples of small-holdings in Dorset and Somerset.

Dr Maxey said he believed the research could play a significant part in the transition to a more sustainable society, increasing local food production and boosting the rural economy in both developed and developing countries.

Small-holdings in the South

West of England – including ones near Taunton, Bruton, and South Petherton in Somerset, and at Dorchester – were among those where accounts were examined, owners interviewed and working practices monitored.

Dr Maxey, the Research Fellow at the University who led the year-long study, said: "These farms' success turns upside down the established understanding that only large farms are viable.

"The fact that these businesses can succeed on tiny pockets of marginal land flies in the face of the perceived wisdom on farm viability. A wide range of enterprises are based on these small farms, from the traditional market-gardening of fruits and vegetables, to more innovative ventures such as champagne cider."

He continued: "Adding value

is a key element of success, for example, with producers also processing and marketing food. Enterprises are increasingly spreading risk too – so if one crop or market fails, others are available. And they are developing synergies, such as using waste from one product to support another."

Dr Maxey said he hoped the report – "Small is Successful: Creating sustainable livelihoods on 10 acres or less" – would also inform the current process of developing a National Planning Policy Framework for England.

He added: "Our research shows the value of policies which allow highly sustainable, low-acreage livelihoods to flourish within the National Planning Policy Framework – and sets out recommendations to achieve this. This benefits sustainable small-holders, as it

replaces the risk of being overlooked with policies which specifically acknowledge and support them."

He said that other significant findings from the research included evidence that small-scale livelihoods could increase the productivity of marginal land, and the range of enterprises capable of supporting low acreage livelihoods was diverse and growing.

"Livelihoods often mix and match different enterprise options," he added. "Mental attitude and approach are the strongest determinants of success."

But Dr Maxey stressed that high property prices and the constraints of the planning system were the greatest barriers to growth in the small-holding sector.

COMMENT PAGE 10

## Child sex inquiry 'still a long way to go'

The majority of the alleged victims in a major child sex exploitation inquiry are runaway teenage girls, police have revealed.

Officers investigating the Operation Mansfield case in Torbay said they had now spoken to 40 girls, mostly aged between 12 and 15, as part of their investigation into sexual grooming and abuse of youngsters in the past three years.

Officers revealed that the girls are mostly children who have gone missing in the past.

Detective Inspector Simon Snell, who is heading the inquiry, said: "The profile of the majority of them is that they are kids that go missing quite often. That seems to be the profile of our victims."

He said all the children were vulnerable because of their age.

Det Insp Snell, who has worked investigating child exploitation for a decade, said: "Some of the victims don't perceive they are victims because they have been groomed for so many years. That is a common occurrence in grooming."

"Young people and children, shouldn't be engaging in sexual relationships with people who are much older than them."

He also revealed the investigation was initiated by concerns about the safety of some children in the Torbay area which was raised in a dedicated Missing Persons Forum which meets on a monthly basis.

One month into the operation, there are still up to 50 officers from the Major Crime Investigation Team and CID working on the 'large, complex' case out of major incident rooms at both Torquay and Paignton police stations.

Det Insp Snell said his team have interviewed 40 possible victims and 25 of them have provided police with potential evidence.

He said there was still a 'large volume' of children to see and the investigation could take months to complete.

"We aren't finished by a long way," added Det Insp Snell.

## Bike route map aims to boost business

A pocket-size map of a popular cycle route has been produced to help boost surrounding businesses.

The easy-to-carry guide to the Tarka Trail shows visitors where to eat, park, picnic, shop and sightsee along the 30 miles between Braunton and Meeth.

The £1 map goes on sale at Easter as the first in a range of products to boost earnings for local organisations and retailers.

An initial of 40,000 maps will be produced – in a durable design that folds in on itself and slips into a pocket.