

Name: Alert ID: TMML202403132573 A corrupt lawyer who helped a buy-to-let landlord use dirty money to fraudulently build a £10.8million property empire has been jailed for seven years.

Father-of-three Ross McKay, 39, was the conveyancing solicitor who gave a 'veneer of respectability' in a series of illicit properties deals masterminded by Scott Rowbotham. Businessman Rowbotham, of Stalybridge, Greater Manchester, managed to build up a portfolio of 88 properties with the help of McKay. Manchester Crown Court heard the pair's scheme yielded £10,842,271 and police managed to seize £3.5million of it in the biggest haul in British history. The pair's trial also heard McKay represented crime lord Billy Black, who was friends with one-eyed police killer Dale Cregan. Black is currently serving 22 year for fraud and drugs offences. Rowbotham accumulated around £500,000 a year in rent from his property empire, getting mortgage lenders to hand over huge amounts by lying about his income. He told clients he was an operations manager for a TV company with a salary of £48,000 a year - but the fake pay slips covered up the reality - that he had only declared £1,000 in income and £18.20 in tax over 11 years. Rowbotham's girlfriend was also pocketing £20,000 in tax credits at the time. McKay, of Wilmslow, Cheshire, who worked for Parker Birds law practise in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire after qualifying in 2004 carried out the conveyances on a 'no questions asked basis' for 81 of the criminal properties belonging to Rowbotham knowing it would enable him to build up a large property portfolio and to live lavishly off the proceeds. Rowbotham drove a Range Rover Sport while Burns had a Mercedes C220 AMG Sport. McKay was arrested in 2014 during an investigation by police and tax officials into the financial affairs of Rowbotham and his associates following Cregan convictions the previous year for murdering two policewomen and two gangland rivals. It emerged the lawyer had also been laundering money for a shell company used as a front by crimelord Billy Black who is currently serving 22 years in jail for fraud and drugs offence. At Manchester Crown Court McKay, of Wilmslow, who now runs a solo consultancy was convicted of money laundering following a seven week trial. He denied wrongdoing. Another lawyer acting on behalf of 52-year old Black was jailed for nine months at an earlier hearing. Sentencing him to seven years in prison, Judge Timothy Smith told McKay: 'You were expected to be of the utmost integrity and honesty in your role. 'Any applicant for a solicitor must comply with 10 practices, including to uphold the rule of law, act with integrity, and comply with legal obligations. 'These convictions mean you fall short of the qualities expected of a solicitor. You were consistently in breach of each requirement of a solicitor, and failed as your duty to uphold the law. 'In trial you portrayed yourself as being an average solicitor, one that helped to support your family but any outward show of professionalism was a charade. 'You allowed criminal property to be obtained and assisted these people in organised crime. 'You must have known or suspected in continuing to provide them with legal services. 'You were turning a blind eye and you knew the money you were dealing with was criminal property. 'Any case in which the court sees a mature professional man with young children is a tragic one. 'Although the consequences will be harsh and will affect your family, the tragedy is not yours, it is theirs. 'There has been for you as a solicitor a fall from grace. This will have a devastating effect on your family. The professionalism you had will not be there anymore.' The court heard Rowbotham had claimed to be an operations manager for a TV company earning £48,000 a year to get loans when in reality he had earned only £1,000 in declared income and paid just £18.20 in tax in an eleven-year period. Nick Clarke QC prosecuting said: 'In brief McKay a practising solicitor throughout, carried out the conveyances on the vast majority of criminal properties belonging to Rowbotham and Burns knowing or suspecting it would enable them to build up a large portfolio of criminal property and to live an expensive lifestyle off the proceeds. 'Properties currently held in Rowbotham's name in which McKay acted as the solicitor, obtained during the years 2005 -2008 show a purchase price total of over £6.6 million. Others were new builds for which we have no price. 'In order to buy the properties Rowbotham obtained mortgages and Re-mortgages amounting to millions of pounds obtained through mortgage fraud. 'The total deposits have come from criminal activities of himself and others and cannot be explained by any legitimate and honest employment. He also obtained mortgages by purporting to sell properties he already owned to other people including his long-term partner, mother of his long-term partner and other associates, in order to raise finance. 'McKay received his instructions from Rowbotham. After Rowbotham's criminal property empire was complete, the defendant was recruited to assist in the management of a loan company, in part used as a front for money laundering some of the proceeds of Billy Black's criminal activities. 'The Company received over £250,000 which after

laundering through the company was repaid to Black through dividends and income. 'The role of the defendant was to add a veneer of respectability to the management of that company and the idiosyncratic payment of dividends and wages. The court heard the total benefit from the frauds was £10,842,271. Police seized £3,522,459 in assets from Rowbotham - one of the biggest proceeds of crime recoveries in Britain. In mitigation defence lawyer Mark Rhind said: 'It is sad when a mature man comes before the court with his first conviction and to face his first custodial sentence. 'It is even more sad when he is of good character and has a young family who will suffer badly. 'When that man is a lawyer and facing the end of his career and may face financial ruin is a tragic set of circumstances. 'Rowbotham had hatched this scheme and was doing this before McKay became involved. 'He would apply for mortgages with false details and McKay had knowledge of that. 'They were all tainted properties and came from Rowbotham being able to buy them. 'McKay may have closed his mind to what the jury believed what in front of him - but he wouldn't ask questions. 'The criminality became obvious over time as Rowbotham kept putting in deposits but he simply closed his eyes to what was in front of him. Mr Rhind added: 'He had given his training contract at the law firm as the boss had just left but the supervision was like a light touch and he was in his early 20s and was left to create a business with little supervision. 'He led the practice on his own and it clearly went badly wrong - it was when he was young, inexperienced and left to his own devices. 'There was nobody in the conveyance department that was qualified other than him. As soon as he was arrested he was unemployed as a solicitor. 'His wife has worked to support the family but she is in debt with tax and the mortgage. 'They now have no family income as she is looking after the new child. She is unable to return to work as she has to look after the children. This will be an extremely difficult sentence for a man of his age to deal with.' Rowbotham, of Stalybridge was jailed for three years and eight months at an earlier hearing after he admitted fraud and money laundering between 2004 and 2014. Council revenues assistant Burns, 36, was given a suspended sentence and is reported to be running Rowbotham's letting operation.