

Librarian who stole hundreds of books to sell online is jailed for 8 months

Steven Morris

A librarian who stole books and documents, including records of the 1966 Aberfan colliery disaster in which 116 children died, was jailed for eight months yesterday.

Elizabeth McGregor, 57, took hundreds of books from the public library where she worked in Pontypridd, south Wales and tried to sell them online to help clear her debts.

When she realised she was under suspicion, McGregor tried to burn some of the books she still had and put others into her recycling bin.

Police found missing titles on sale on her Amazon and eBay accounts -

including Aberfan: A Disaster and its Aftermath by a social worker, Joan Miller. McGregor also stole a copy of the report of the tribunal of inquiry into the disaster, when a colliery spoil tip slid down the mountain above Aberfan and engulfed the village school. Twenty-eight adults also died.

Senior library staff noticed that books and other material were going missing. Merthyr Tydfil crown court was told. Police went to McGregor's home in Hirwaun, near Aberdare, and found hundreds of books, some damaged by fire. Others were recovered from her bin.

jailed her for eight months - six for theft and two for perverting the course of justice - Judge Richard Twomlow said she had stolen in a "calculating and careful way". The material on Aberfan was "valuable in historic and cultural terms". It was "mercifully" relatively undamaged.

He told McGregor: "You were found guilty of the theft of the books. You were also found guilty of setting them on fire or throwing them away. The items you stole were of historic and cultural value."

Nuhur Gobir, prosecuting, said: "They were of relatively low financial value, but there was additional significant harm." McGregor claimed she had bought the books from libraries when they were sold as excess stock. She was convicted of theft and perverting the course of justice.

Kathryn Lane, defending, said McGregor was in "significant debt" and feared she was going to lose her home. "She's a lady in her late 50s who, having had a low level of social interaction for many years, is a lonely individual with her share of physical and mental issues."

Richard Killick, senior prosecutor at the Crown Prosecution Service Cymru Wales, said after the case: "Any matter involving a breach of trust is very serious. In this case, however, it was twofold in that McGregor breached the trust of her employer and that of the community she served. By taking these books, she denied the community the opportunity to benefit from these resources."

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