

Press release: Three motor racing friends jailed for diverting millions to fund opulent lifestyle

At Leeds Crown Court [Tuesday 31 July] former company director Jonathan France was sentenced to 10 years, as well as being disqualified as a company director for 12 years.

Also at court were his accomplices Jody Firth and Graham Myles Schofield having assisted Jonathan France carry out his dishonest activities.

Jody Firth was sentenced for 5 years and 4 months, while Graham Myles Schofield received a sentence of 2 years and 6 months. Jody Firth was also disqualified as a company director for 5 years and Graham Schofield was banned from running companies for 3 years.

Jonathan France was first disqualified from being a director of limited companies for 14 years in 2004 for his role in the mismanagement of Eric France and Son (Metals) Limited which went into insolvency. He was then declared bankrupt in November 2008 as he was unable to pay more than £7million owed after the collapse of his sole-trader businesses Embassy Racing and EFS Group.

Being bankrupt and disqualified should have limited his ability to directly or indirectly run a company but Jonathan France ignored these restrictions and continued to run companies. He also diverted millions of pounds from the company accounts to a combination of other business and personal accounts so that he could buy a house, luxury items and a fleet of cars.

And with the help of Graham Myles Schofield, he misled the Trustees managing his affairs that he had no assets to pay back his debts. Just under £7 million has since been recovered by the Trustee in bankruptcy.

Deputy Chief Investigation Officer, John Fitzsimmons, of the Insolvency Service, said:

Jonathan France is a fraudster and lied in order to cover up his true activities and fund his opulent lifestyle. But it wasn't just him who carried out the deception as he was supported along the way by Schofield and Firth, two racing colleagues who were well aware of France's bankruptcy.

We will always seek to tackle those who flagrantly disregard and cynically abuse the insolvency regime, which is there to protect creditors. After a substantial investigation we are pleased to see that France, Schofield and Firth have received significant prison

terms.

Only months before he was made bankrupt in 2008 on the grounds that he had no money to pay his debts, Jonathan France deliberately transferred close to £180,000 worth of money and assets out of his personal estate to avoid paying his creditors.

France's money and assets went to Graham Myles Schofield and Jody Firth, friends he had made through motor-racing. Assets moved by France included two classic cars worth £27,000 to Graham Myles Schofield and Jody Firth, as well as a further £152,607 was transferred to bank accounts controlled by Graham Myles Schofield.

Jonathan France then began a sustained campaign to continue running companies despite having restrictions placed on him. With Schofield, he also engineered false and misleading explanations to the Trustees and the Official Receiver about a substantial amount of possessions.

Between 2008 and 2013, Jonathan France managed and controlled JKL (Wakefield) Ltd before the company went into insolvent liquidation. The company bought and sold metals and listed Jody Firth as the company director but not Jonathan France.

And Jonathan France repeated the same tactic when Graham Myles Schofield had his name down as the official director for two racing companies effectively controlled by Jonathan France. WFR Ltd and WFR Holdings Ltd ran between 2011 and 2014 before also going into liquidation.

While managing JKL (Wakefield), Jonathan France diverted more than £6 million from the company accounts to a combination of other business and personal accounts.

Items bought from the £6 million included a 5-bedroom house in Huddersfield through a Discretionary Settlement Trust, while just under £200,000 was spent on furniture and £70,000 was used to buy fine wines.

And around £1.8 million was also used to purchase a fleet of high-end vehicles and personalised number plates, including three Aston Martins, two Ferraris, as well as a Rolls Royce and McLaren.

Jonathan France achieved the deception by falsifying company cheques, invoices and other paperwork to make it appear as if payments had been to bona fides creditors of the company when in fact they were made to purchase the cars and luxury goods.

After Jonathan France repeatedly failed to properly disclose his property to the Trustees, he was twice privately examined at Huddersfield County Court in 2012. At court, Jonathan France repeatedly and falsely argued that he had sold various items of jewellery, including two Rolexes and a platinum ring, as well as a number of paintings to a colleague for £250,000.

Jonathan France pleaded guilty to four counts of fraudulently transferring

property, three counts of acting as a director while bankrupt, as well as one count each for failing to disclose property to the Official Receiver or Trustee, perjury, fraudulent trading, false accounting and money laundering.

Jody Firth pleaded guilty to helping Jonathan France run a company despite being a bankrupt, while both Jody Firth and Graham Schofield pleaded guilty to money laundering.

The defendants

Jonathan Dean France aged 46 of Wakefield

Graham Myles Schofield aged 53 of Mirfield, West Yorkshire

Jody Dean Firth aged 36 of Wakefield

The Insolvency Service (England and Wales)

The Insolvency Service, an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), administers the insolvency regime, and aims to deliver and promote a range of investigation and enforcement activities both civil and criminal in nature, to support fair and open markets. We do this by effectively enforcing the statutory company and insolvency regimes, maintaining public confidence in those regimes and reducing the harm caused to victims of fraudulent activity and to the business community, including dealing with the disqualification of directors in corporate failures.

BEIS' mission is to build a dynamic and competitive UK economy that works for all, in particular by creating the conditions for business success and promoting an open global economy. The Criminal Investigations and Enforcement teams contribute to this aim by taking action to deter fraud and to regulate the market. They investigate and prosecute a range of offences, primarily relating to personal or company insolvencies.

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is [available](#).

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 7674 6910 or 020 7596 6187

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on: