

Being a Bad Neighbour Can Really Cost You

Neighbours from hell may provide entertainment for the TV viewer, but to the victim the pain is often not only emotional, but also financial. The case of *Raymond v Young* is a salutary example of what can happen when things go wrong between neighbours explains Kevin Lee.

The case of *Peter & Lesley Raymond v Steven & Fiona Young* was heard in Carlisle County Court over 12 days in 2014, before Recorder Duncan Smith. The judgement, running to 29 pages, is unpleasant reading.

The setting is the rural idyll of Lin Cragg Farm in the Lake District. The Young family had historically owned the farm, but in 1965 Frederick Young, the father of Steven Young, split the land up. The main farmhouse and 24 acres of land were sold off, leaving just the cottage and a small parcel of land surrounding it.

The farmhouse and the cottage were adjacent, with the cottage having a right of way over a lane that formed part of the farm.

The farm was then owned by Mr and Mrs Craig from 1968-99. It was then owned by a Mr Williams and his estate until 2009, when the Raymonds bought it. Mr Raymond was a retired solicitor; Mrs Raymond, a retired diplomat. She had served for a period in the centre of Washington DC, which was regarded at the time of her service as the most violent city in America. This experience was nothing compared to what was to come when she moved in next door to the Youngs.

Steven Young was raised in the cottage from the date of the sale in 1965. On the death of his parents, the cottage was gifted to him and his wife, Fiona. The judge described him as a witness “for whom the truth was always a subjective but variable concept”. His wife was said to be “a plain speaking lady with fixed interpretations of events to the point of being intransigent”. The judge also found that she “shared the same delusion that they were the victims...I found her evidence to be no less unreliable than that of her husband... nor any less truculent.”

So, in 2009 Mr and Mrs Raymond arrived and almost immediately trouble began. Rubbish from the cottage was allowed to accumulate on the farm courtyard. Mr Young acted in a threatening manner to Mrs Raymond. He would deliberately block her in on the lane. He would intimidate her by standing in front of her, smiling maliciously. He would put up two fingers to her.

He would tell her that he took offence at “outsiders” coming in and would hurl abuse at her. Mrs Young at one point helpfully suggested that Mrs Raymond should “piss off back to Barrow”.

Mr and Mrs Raymond decided to install CCTV for their safety. The Youngs’ response was to

vandalise it by painting the lenses, something that Mr Young admitted when questioned by the police. The Youngs also allowed their dog to foul on the farm courtyard. Mrs Raymond complained, but the Youngs did nothing to stop it.

The Youngs also burnt fires deliberately near the farmhouse. They allowed their children to ride quad bikes along the side of the farmhouse, just to harass the Raymonds. Similarly, the Youngs' children would kick footballs against the Raymond's property, and the judge lamented that their parents used them (the children) as foot soldiers in their war of attrition.

The Youngs denied everything. They called their entire family, including their children, as witnesses. They were consistent in their denial, the judge remarking that "the family unity in their contempt for the claimants was manifest, not only in the apparent willingness of the defendants to call their children to give evidence, but the children's enthusiasm to do so".

The Raymonds, understandably, had had enough and so they tried to sell up, but the Youngs were relentless in their campaign of hate. They put up signs warning prospective purchasers of alleged rat infestation, which was quite untrue. They also trespassed on the lane by deliberately parking on it. In short, the Youngs were determined to make the lives of the owners of the farm a misery. But why? What could make them act like this?

The judge found that this was, in fact, deep rooted hate dating back to 1965, when Steven Young's father had sold off the farm. Mr Young felt that it should have been his, and if he could not have it, no one else should be able to enjoy it.

The judge concluded that having heard 22 witnesses over 12 days in court; he was satisfied "that Mr Young was unable to accept the fact that he had no legal dominion over that property. It is clear from an examination of the historical evidence that it was his intention to make the life of those who occupy the farm a misery... his showing his buttocks to the security camera... goes only to show his juvenile and disrespectful attitude."

As a matter of law, the list of proven legal obligations was long: (1) harassment contrary to the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; (2) trespass to land and goods; (3) nuisance; (4) assault; (5) slander of title

And as to the damages?

1. Harassment; assault and nuisance, etc - £20,000
2. Diminution in the value of the claimants' property - £155,000
3. Aggravated damages to reflect the deliberate course of conduct - £5,000

Total: £180,000, plus costs.

The Youngs have moved out of the cottage, and no doubt will lose their property due to the award of damages. They face bankruptcy, but continue to publicly protest their innocence to the local press and complain that they have been wrongly portrayed as neighbours from hell. It's a shame for them – and for the Raymonds – that the judge found them to be exactly that.

Kevin Lee is Head of Property Litigation at Hill Dickinson LLP
Kevin.Lee@hilldickinson.com