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Repeat Burglar Avoids Jail; Jesmond Woman Films His Escape

July 27, 2025

— Categories: Crime



A repeat offender with 80 prior convictions has narrowly avoided prison after being caught burglarizing a Jesmond home in broad daylight, thanks to the quick thinking and bravery of the woman who lived there.

Craig Stewart, 45, was sentenced at Newcastle Crown Court after admitting to one count of burglary. Despite his extensive criminal history, he was handed an 18-month prison sentence suspended for two years. The court also imposed an Alcohol Abstinence

Monitoring Requirement (AAMR), a measure designed to curb alcohol-related reoffending through electronic tagging.

Recorder Brian Whitehead acknowledged Stewart's crime appeared "impulsive rather than planned" but stressed that his criminal record left "little room for leniency." He warned Stewart that he was in the "last chance saloon," and any future offense would likely land him in custody.

The incident occurred on the afternoon of June 23 at a property in Newcastle's Jesmond area, where the victim was working from home. Alarmed by noises coming from her kitchen, she investigated and discovered Stewart rummaging through an outbuilding attached to her home.

When confronted, Stewart showed little remorse. "What the hell are you doing?" the woman demanded, to which he casually replied, "Don't be like that." As she told him she would call the police, he responded again, "Ah, don't do that," before fleeing the scene.

Undeterred, the woman chased him down the street while filming his escape. Despite his attempts to cover his face and repeat pleas for her to stop, the footage helped police identify him. Stewart was later found living in a tent on Highbury, Jesmond, and arrested shortly after.

In a statement read in court, the woman described the emotional impact of the ordeal: "Once the adrenaline had calmed down, I felt shaken up and anxious. I was scared at the lack of emotion he had."

Stewart's defence barrister, Lucy Todd, told the court that he had relapsed into alcohol use following a personal dispute with his father, whom he also acts as a carer for. Todd added that while on remand, Stewart had begun engaging with support services to address his addiction and behaviour.

The case has reignited debate over how the justice system handles repeat offenders. Critics argue that persistent criminals like Stewart pose ongoing threats to public safety and question whether suspended sentences serve as enough of a deterrent.

Meanwhile, the woman's courageous response has been praised, but her experience also highlights the dangers residents can face even in broad daylight and the emotional aftermath victims must endure.

Whether Stewart can turn his life around remains to be seen. But with 80 prior convictions, the public will be watching closely and expecting swift accountability if he reoffends.