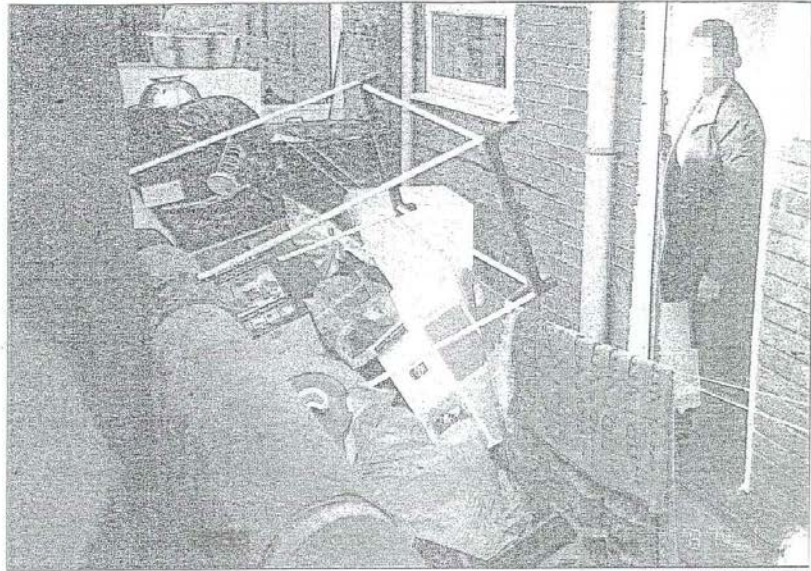


CONVICTED: TENANTS ILLEGALLY HARASSED



PICTURE: MATT SHORT/ 608570-0

PROBLEM: Property that had been thrown over into a neighbour's yard by the landlord

Landlord forced family from home

by KATHRYN EDWARDS

A landlord who illegally evicted and harassed his tenants has been jailed for five months.

Shailash Kataria, of Columbine Road, in Hamilton, Leicester, admitted forcing the family out of their Highfields home and two counts of harassing them.

The conviction has been hailed by housing bosses as the first blow in a crackdown against unscrupulous landlords. Housing officers say they usually deal with about one new case of people facing illegal eviction each month in Leicester.

Leicester Magistrates Court heard how Kataria (28) changed the locks of his Nedham Street property without warning the tenants or providing new keys. He went back two days later to take out their furniture and other possessions, and dumped them outside the house.

Richard Adkinson, prosecuting, said the single mother living in the house was away shopping when Kataria and six or seven men turned up at the property on October 15.

He said the landlord confronted the woman's 16-year-old daughter, who



PICTURE: 608570-2

DUMPED: Belongings in a yard

was alone at home at the time, and started to change the locks.

Mr Adkinson said: "The men then went into the property with cans of beer and started drinking them and spilling alcohol on the carpet.

"Not only is it abusive to behave that way in someone's home, but the tenant was a Muslim, and found it even more offensive for alcohol to be drunk there."

Minesh Byhaly, defending, said Kataria had not realised he was do-

ing anything illegal. He said the landlord had taken the action after rent had not been paid, and now regretted what he had done.

Deputy district judge Michael Wheeler said: "I see these three offences as very serious matters where you took the law into your own hands.

"I have listened carefully to the defence case, but there are no circumstances that would persuade me to give you anything but a custodial sentence."

Speaking outside court, Steve Nasl of the city council's housing operations team, said the conviction has been important for the authority's campaign.

He said: "It shows that the court take a very dim view on landlord who illegally evict their tenants.

"It sends out a clear message the everyone in that situation should follow the law carefully."

City council housing spokesman Andy Metcalfe said: "I don't want to see anyone go to prison, but this family did not deserve to be made homeless or have their belonging dumped in that way either."

Landlords and tenants experiencing problems can call the city council housing team on 0116 252 6904.