

Fight for your Rights



Consumer warrior **Anne Hunt** goes into battle on your behalf

DUMPED in a ditch

Linda thought she'd paid for her beloved dog to be decently cremated...

It was devastating when our 12-year-old chocolate-brown collie, Bournville, developed a brain tumour. The vet advised us to put him to sleep.

Saying goodbye to our dear friend was terribly hard, but my husband John and I agreed it was kindest to end his suffering.

We asked our vet — Ambivet in Heanor, Derbyshire — to arrange an individual cremation. They did this through Peak Pet Cremations. We paid £120 and a week later collected the ashes and put them in a little casket.

But the following week I got a call... 'It's the RSPCA,' a woman said. 'We're sorry to inform you that a walker has found your dog's body, along with three others, dumped in a ditch.'

'That can't be right,' I replied. 'We have our dog's ashes. We even have a signed certificate from Peak Pet Cremations.' But the woman explained they'd identified Bournville by his microchip. 'That's how I got your number,' she said.

In disbelief, I insisted on viewing the body. And it was Bournville. His once-lovely coat was matted and he was riddled with maggots.

The RSPCA advised us to contact the police.

They weren't very interested at first, but I wasn't going to let the matter drop. Finally they agreed to



John and I were devastated

Our dear Bournville

investigate Peak Pet Cremations. Our cremation certificate was taken away as evidence. Then experts analysed Bournville's 'ashes'. They were bonfire dust.

Emma Bent, owner of Peak Pet Cremations, was arrested on suspicion of fraud and released on police bail while the investigation continued.

More dumped animal corpses were found. But not long afterwards, I received a call from a police detective who warned me the case might be dropped. 'She mustn't get away with it!' I fumed.

By now I was in touch with other victims. We contacted MPs and the papers.

Almost two years on, wearing T-shirts with our dogs' faces on them, we attended Derby Crown Court to see Emma Bent, 35, from Heage, Derbyshire, plead guilty to seven charges of fraud and 16 further offences.

The court heard she'd made around £91,000 from her business and had handled more than 2,800

pets. But she was never licensed.

She'd offered a cut-price cremation service to vets, at first burning pets in her garage. After her neighbours complained, she moved to farmland and burnt them on bonfires. But some corpses, like that of our precious Bournville, were just dumped and left to rot.

Bent cried when she was sentenced to eight months in jail. But I reckon her tears were for herself, not for the grieving pet owners she'd cheated.

I'm just pleased I was able to help bring her to justice.

LINDA ALLEN, 55,

HUCKNALL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

● *Ambivet accepted a formal caution for not checking that Emma Bent had the correct licence. They told us they immediately ceased using her service once the bodies of the four dogs were found. They said: 'Throughout the subsequent investigation we have co-operated fully with the various agencies involved.'*

CONSUMER WARRIOR SAYS:

'The whole pet cremation industry has been brought into question by this case. Kevin Spurgeon of the Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria urges pet owners to use a crematorium recognised by his organisation. Its helpline is 01252 844 478.'

Unhappy returns



Q When returning goods for a refund, I'm often asked for my name, address, signature and even a phone number. Do I have to give the shop this private info?

A If you're returning goods because they're faulty, then you can legally refuse. But if it's simply because you've changed your mind, you haven't much option. By law, shops don't have to give refunds for no good reason. They do it to keep our custom, but it does mean they can impose their own rules.

5 tips for when you BUY A BED

1 Don't buy second-hand. It might seem like a bargain, but a used bed is likely to be moulded to the previous owner's shape and may also harbour dust mites.

2 If your bed base is in good condition, save cash by just buying a new mattress. And take a tip from the hotel trade — invest in memory foam because it lasts longer.

3 Buying online is usually cheaper, but try out the model in a shop first. It'll be worth the time and effort.

4 Factory shops are also an option, and large items like beds that take up a lot of space are usually discounted the most. See gooddealdirectory.co.uk for warehouses in your area selling items from high-street retailers.

5 Divans with under-bed storage may cost a bit more but can save money in the long run as you won't need as much bedroom furniture.

'I'm glad I helped bring her to justice'



Emma Bent

£250 A STORY – HAVE YOU BEEN WRONGED OR WON YOUR RIGHTS?

E-mail consumer@thatslife.co.uk or see page 3 for contact details

that's life!