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Drugs baron Kevin Hanley jailed for 17 years over cocaine smuggled in fruit plot

Oct 02, 2014 12:40 | By Steve Robson

The judge said Hanley was described as the "top man" in a smuggling operation that stretched from Venezuela to London's Covent Garden

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Drugs plot: Kevin Hanley

Britain's most wanted drugs baron has been jailed for more than 17 years, for smuggling cocaine in watermelons and pomegranates.

Kevin Hanley, 52, set up the international trafficking ring after 'Mr Big' Brian Wright - known as The Milkman because he always delivered - was brought down by a massive police operation.

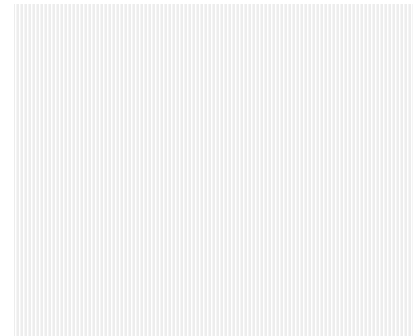
Hanley used a wholesale food business in London's Covent Garden Market as a front for the transportation of Venezuelan cocaine by lorry from southern Europe to the UK.

His new venture was finally broken up in 2012 after a surveillance operation led to the arrest of his gang and the seizure of £2.5m of cocaine and £2m in cash.

But Hanley remained on the run in Greece until July last year when police swooped on an Irish pub in Athens as he watched the British and Irish Lions rugby team beat Australia.

He pleaded guilty to the drug smuggling conspiracy in January but the case could not be reported until today following an application by the media. Hanley was jailed for 17 years and four months on Tuesday.

His two 'lieutenants', Greek TV mogul Chrysi Minadaki, 45, and grocery businessman



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John Fowler, 58, were jailed for 17 years and 16 years respectively.



TV career: Chrysi Minadaki was a well-known personality in Greece

Associates Mathew Edward, 49, and Richard Harrison, 58, who plotted the distribution of cocaine to Scotland, were jailed for six years and ten months and five years and six months respectively.

Brian Brendan Wright was the head of the most successful international drug trafficking network before he was jailed for 30 years in 2007.

Wright rubbed shoulders with royalty and laundered his money by making huge wagers on horse racing and bribing jockeys, trainers and stable lads to stage results.

The smooth talking gambler boasted a celebrity lifestyle, counting the comedian Jim Davidson and the bookmaker Victor Chandler among his horse racing acquaintances.

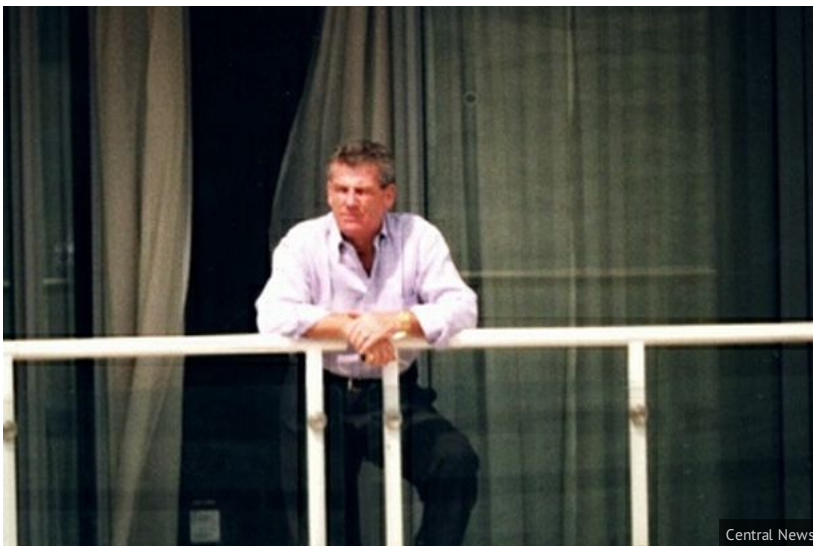
Police launched a massive investigation into 'The Wright Organisation' after £80 million of cocaine was discovered on a yacht near Cork, Ireland, in November 1998.

Hanley, described as 'the right hand man' of Brian Wright, was convicted of conspiracy to import cocaine and jailed for 15 years in October 2001.

He was released in May 2006 and his licence period expired in 2010 - but by January 2011 he was already organising the new smuggling operation.

Judge Wendy Joseph QC told Hanley: "You were known to be at the top of your illegal trade, and were described as a 'top, top man'. It is you who has drawn everybody together in this web of trafficking.

"The really seriously aggravating feature is you have been before the courts before for drug related matters.



The Milkman: Brian Wright, who had Hanley as his 'right hand man'



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"It does not need me to spell out the harrowing misery that drug trafficking causes, not least to the victims of other crimes committed in order that drugs are purchased."

Surveillance by the National Crime Agency revealed Hanley talking about drug shipments in meetings with Minadaki and Fowler and travelling to Venezuela, Madrid and Amsterdam.

Prosecutors said it was not known how much cocaine was smuggled before the operation was foiled in late 2012.

They told the court: "Front companies were set up and the purpose appeared to be to provide a legitimate front for the importation of controlled drugs."

"The cocaine was being imported to Venezuela to southern Europe and then sent on in lorries from Greece to the UK mainland."

The companies used included Fowler's PCC Ltd, which had traded in the fruit and vegetable business, and a company set up by Minadaki, 11 Fresh.



'Lieutenant': John Fowler was also jailed

In November 2012 police raided Fowler's home in Chelsea and recovered £2million in cash, around £2.5million worth of high purity cocaine, £100,000 of amphetamines and £61,000 of skunk cannabis.

Fowler's address was used as a 'safe house' for cash and drugs by the gang and was equipped with two cash counting machines.

Fowler even paid Hanley's living expenses and school fees for Hanley's son, totalling £20,000 in the year 2012.

Minadaki, who was a famous TV presenter and media baron in Greece before the

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economic crisis in that country, arranged the sourcing of 'cover loads' of fruit and vegetables and the transport to the UK.

While staying in London she took out a lease at the Sloane Club and paid £78,000 for nine months' rent at 35 Cadogan Square in Belgravia.

She was one of Hanley's two mistresses at the time and described him in court as "the perfect man".

The judge told her: "You found Hanley attractive, as did he you, and you used every end you could to support his scheme to import cocaine.

"You created an aura of respectability to allow his schemes to flourish.

"Hanley could not have done what he did on the scale that he did without your help.

"You lied from the beginning, claiming to have been a vulnerable victim of grooming by Hanley but that can't be the case - you are no naive girl but a hard-headed businesswoman who did nothing you did not willingly choose to do."

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