

NEWS

15 TONS AND WHAT D'YOU GET?

The case had everything. Britain's MI6, Mexican intelligence, the Customs, the police, the IRA, 15 tons of cannabis, and Howard Marks.

On the night of December 29, 1979, the tugboat 'Karob' deposited the 15 tons on Scotland's West Coast, fresh from Colombia's ample dope fields. And it was that 15 tons that was to see Marks, Stewart Prentiss, and Hedley Morgan on trial for eight weeks at the Old Bailey.

Last Friday they were acquitted of smuggling the dope—valued at around £20 million—and dealing in it. It was a stunning conclusion to a bizarre trial, and meant that Marks' tales of MI6 and Mexican intelligence and his claim that he was searching for the end of the dope trail had been accepted by the jury. Five others were found guilty on dealing and possession charges.

At the outset prospects had looked bleaker for the defendants. From March 1980 the three men, and their associates—who pleaded guilty—had been trailed by the authorities and they were arrested in May of that year.

Marks was caught with detailed accounts of sales and income in his own handwriting.

Prentiss was accused of running the importation. He made a written confession.

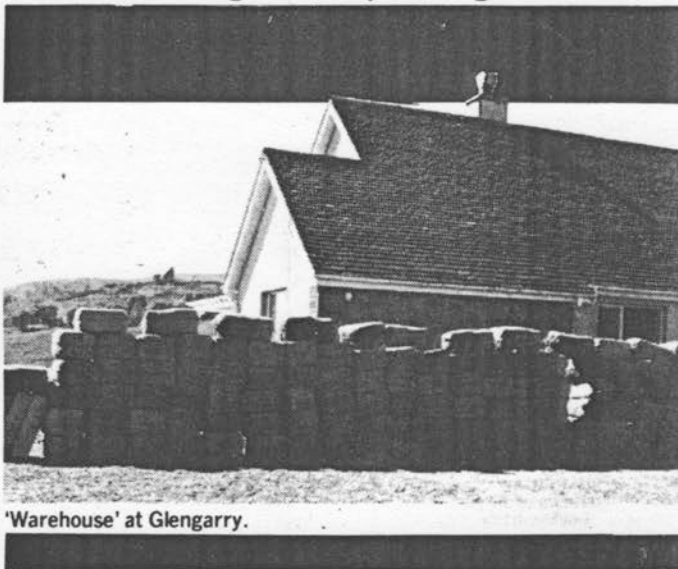
Morgan was responsible for counting and banking the cash from the sales, just under £2 million by the time of arrest.

The three responded in court. Prentiss claimed the Customs officers threatened to jail his wife—who had suffered a mental breakdown—unless he made a statement. Yes, he had transported some of the cannabis in his yacht 'Bageira' after the drop, but had done so because of threats from the American end of the deal. Either he co-operated or his children in San Francisco would be kidnapped.

Morgan explained that he thought the money had come from a tax avoidance scheme. He had been recruited by an old school friend, and Marks' brother-in-law, Patrick Lane.

Lane has disappeared. His role, said Marks, was 'banking the proceeds from cannabis, laundering it,

The acquittal of three men at the Old Bailey last week was almost the end of the biggest cannabis case in British legal history. **TIM MALYON** details Howard Marks' bizarre tango with Customs, Intelligence, dope and guns...



'Warehouse' at Glengarry.

and then transferring the proceeds to investors and exporters.

Morgan's defence was assisted by leading prosecution witness—and prospective Liberal candidate—Ron Banks. With his partner Barry Gregory he had channelled the banked cash out of the country, on instructions from, and in receipt of one per cent commission from Lane.

Banks admitted knowing that Morgan and Lane had used false names on paying in slips. He had advised Morgan to use false payee names on certain occasions. Banks recalled that when Lane had first handed over the money he'd been up all night counting and 'facing' £100,000 and needed his, and Gregory's, assistance to finish the job. 'He had started to hallucinate whenever he saw pictures of the Duke of Wellington,' said Banks.

But Marks was the pivot of the case. Before the trial he told the Customs that his work was 'of a secret nature'. He came out with 65 'no comments'.

During the trial Marks admitted that he had used false identities for the previous seven years. And he agreed that he smoked cannabis a great deal, and had no moral objection to cannabis trading, apart from other drugs.

In the only outburst from a defendant during the trial, Marks vehemently denied an allegation by a customs officer that he had agreed that cannabis could lead users on to other drugs in some cases. 'No I didn't, that's a lie,' he shouted.

But if that sincerity was part of the reason for the verdict other things may have entered the jury's mind, such as his involvement with MI6, the British external intelligence service, back in early 1973. At that time he was approached by a fellow student from Oxford, Hamilton McMillan, by then an MI6 agent.

McMillan wanted foreign branches of Marks' dress shop, 'Annabelinda', to be used as fronts for MI6 agents. And he knew, possibly through Dutch intelligence

reports, that Marks was an acquaintance of Irish arms dealer James McCann.

MI6 wanted information on McCann. Marks obliged, but may well have told McCann of his MI6 contact.

In November 1973 Marks' long involvement with the law began. He was arrested by the Dutch for cannabis possession. Shortly before this, the prosecution claimed at the trial, MI6 severed contact. Marks denies this.

The British authorities were already interested in Marks for alleged drugs offences. So two British Customs officials went to Holland to interview him, and Marks agreed to return. He didn't have to, since he couldn't have been extradited under Dutch law for a drugs offence. Perhaps he believed that MI6 would protect him...

Back home, Marks was charged with exporting cannabis from Europe to the United States. Out on £50,000 bail he disappeared, looking a very frightened man on April 19, 1974, eleven days before his scheduled trial.

Marks says he was kidnapped, and the police agree he was very probably frightened into not appearing. Both agree that the United States 'dealing' organisation to which those charges were related was involved.

Two somewhat conflicting stories now emerge about the attitude of the relevant police force, Thames Valley, to Marks at that time. Last weekend the Sunday Times claimed the force was suppressing reports from an informant about Marks' constant involvement with cannabis in Oxford.

Not so, says Martin Pritchard, who was then an undercover officer with the Thames Valley drugs squad. They knew little of Marks then, but from early 1971 Dutch secret police reports were being sent to England about Marks. The reports were concealed from both the Central Drugs Intelligence Unit and British Customs.

Whatever the truth, Marks' disappearance attracted immense interest. It was the theme of the Lennon and Littlejohn affairs. Lennon had been murdered, allegedly by the IRA, for being a double agent. The Littlejohn

brothers had been arrested in the Republic on robbery charges linked with British intelligence.

The press pumped out reams about Marks, much of it straight from police sources. Heading the queue was the Daily Mirror's Edward Laxton. He printed letters from Marks to his girlfriend 'in the possession of police in Britain'. He tracked down and pestered Marks' sister Linda in Italy, and he reported on alleged finding of the supposedly secret 'Fairweather Report'.

Superintendent Fairweather of Thames Valley police had prepared a lengthy dossier on the case.

So where was Marks? Italy had been his apparent destination, but by 1975 he was back in London and living under an assumed name. In April 1975 the Customs hit the flat, accompanied by Laxton. Marks wasn't there.

Yet the Daily Mirror managed to print a picture of Marks, captioned 'on the run in London last week'. One wonders who was talking to whom. Marks was forced to change his identity yet again, and

was to remain out of the public eye for four more years. But his name didn't. In 1978 Mirror Books published 'Busted', on Martin Pritchard's career. Co-written by Edward Laxton and Pritchard, the Thames Valley drugs officer.

An entire chapter was devoted to Marks, and Pritchard referred to the 1975 customs raid.

By 1979 Marks had become Donald Nice, and was working on a film, 'Life After Elvis' with PJ Proby.

But others were making films too, London Weekend Television for one. It was about Howard Marks

At the last minute the programme was dropped, with LWT explaining they needed more time 'to consider the advice of their lawyers'.

LWT had managed to establish Marks' presence in Britain. A researcher went drinking with one of Marks' friends, who denied having seen him. The researcher slipped a photograph of Marks across to the barman. He recognised a regular customer.

LWT also relied on Dick Lee,

former head of Thames Valley Drugs Squad, and colleague of Martin Pritchard, as a researcher. Lee, who had run the 'Operation Julie' LSD investigation quit the force in disgust because neither the investigation nor his squad were continued after the massive trial. Lee was apparently fascinated by Marks.

None of which helped Marks' movie making. He dropped the film and changed name once more. He feared, he says, reprisals from the IRA or McCann.

McCann had troubles of his own. In August 1979 he was arrested in Naas, County Kildare. The police claimed he was seen armed next to a load of bananas and 850 pounds of 'Thai Sticks'.

So how did McCann get in such an unfortunate predicament? He claims he was set up by British intelligence, and that Marks had been involved in drugs dealing in Ireland. McCann has frequently boasted of his arms dealing exploits to the press but denies the dope charges.

During his trial Marks came out with a different story. He had been

told, he said, by McCann's associate Michael Clarke, that McCann was planning to import cannabis into Ireland from Thailand and Colombia.

Marks claims that he passed the information on to his alleged MI6 contact. This was Anthony Woodhead, former husband of Anna Woodhead, the 'Anna' in 'Annabelinda'. Hence the arrest of McCann.

Marks told Clarke that he 'would be looked after'. Arrested at the same time as McCann he pleaded guilty to cannabis possession and received a one year sentence.

And what of McCann? In March 1980 Justice Gannon directed a Dublin jury to acquit him. It does appear that McCann's alleged cannabis links have angered the IRA. He was badly beaten up in jail while awaiting trial.

But things were still complicated for Marks. He claims that having heard from Clarke that McCann had planned to import 30 tons of Colombian marijuana into Ireland he was particularly interested to hear from his sister-in-law Natasha—sister of Patrick Lane—that there were plans to import 30 tons of Colombian grass into Scotland.

Marks explained that he wanted to find out who was behind the shipment, and suspected McCann. He was asked to do the accounts for the operation, he told the court, by Patrick Lane, because of a serious financial dispute between the American dope ring investors and the British distributors.

Why was Marks interested? He told the court that from 1976 he was working not only for MI6 but for Mexican intelligence, tracing connections between right wing terrorist organisations, and the arms, heroin and cannabis trade.

'I'm a fanatic advocate of the legalisation of cannabis,' Marks testified. 'I feel it is essentially harmless, and because of the illegality of it, we have a situation whereby extremist terrorists can fund themselves from it.'

The jury's views may also have been influenced by the absence of any of the American 'investors' at the trial.

The trial hovered between theatrical tragedy and high farce. When 28 pounds of Colombian and ten kilos of black hash were escorted into court, the judge, Peter Mason, known in the trade as 'Penal Pete', sniffed one of the cigar shaped buds and complained of the lack of aroma.

'That goes off after a while,' explained the prosecution.

'How do you get the drug into the system?' asked the judge. A couple of jurors barely concealed grins, whilst a solicitor's clerk asleep at the back of the court with his head in a briefcase sat up with a start.

It wasn't just theatre. Last Monday, five players, the accountant and storekeepers for the organisation, were sentenced to a total of 22 years. Penal Pete said he was being lenient. Marks was sentenced to two years, the maximum, for his passport offences.

Lord Hutchinson, counsel for Marks, summed it up: 'If ever there was a case for the legalisation of cannabis, this is it.'

• See Agitation: Friday, for Legalise Cannabis Campaign Benefit.

"Operation Cartoon" - or, an illicit view from the Public Gallery & Elsewhere*



Mexican intelligence agent and five ex-convicts salesman extraordinaire, of del R., gives evidence in camera!

Jury member passing the

I find it extraordinarily difficult to follow even with notes. How the jury comes I just don't know



FOR PRESS USE

Marks (left) holding baby



Hssssst! Wake up you! Where do you think you are? The judge is working right as good

*Despite the mannered theatricality of the courtroom, it is illegal to draw in courts and such drawings are liable to be confiscated by court attendants. These drawings are unlicensed.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY RICHARD ADAMS

Marks For Beginners

MI6 agent and cannabis-smuggler extraordinaire, Howard Marks, pleaded guilty on Tuesday to conspiring to import cannabis into the United States in 1973.

London Recorder Judge Miskin sentenced him to three years imprisonment. Marks allegedly used a non-existent rock band as a front and helped fly out equipment from Holland packed with 800 pounds of cannabis.

A New York sniffer dog checked out one of the overweight speakers and wrecked the plan. Marks was arrested in Holland.

Marks' conspiring occurred while he was working for MI6. He was tracing connections between arms dealing and the cannabis trade, in particular this concerned one arms dealer James McCann, alleged to have been supplying the IRA.

Marks disappeared shortly before his 1973 trial, either kidnapped or under pressure. At that time he commented to his landlady that 'it would all come out in court—the lot, the Mafia, MI6, everything.'

After six years on the run, Customs officers once more clapped handcuffs on him in 1980 in relation to 15 tons of Colombian weed. He was acquitted but ordered to stand trial for the 1973 allegations.

Following an attempt to throw out

the charges against Marks there was an afternoon of intensive plea bargaining before Tuesday's scenario.

There is doubtless relief that a full trial has been avoided. The authorities feared that a top-secret police report on Marks already widely publicised would receive yet more coverage and that more information on MI6 and cannabis smuggling would come to light.

The report's author, former Thames Valley Detective Chief Superintendent Fairweather, stabbed himself to death at the beginning of December, having been threatened, according to one report, with prosecution under the Official Secrets Act.

One section of the report also reveals that the security services had 'an extensive file' on Christopher Hill, Master of Balliol College Oxford, Marks' old college, due to 'his left-wing activity.'

Marks himself is a strong public advocate of cannabis legalisation, a rare stance for those involved in the business. During the two years in prison to date he has written a long, carefully researched, document on why the law on the herb should be changed. His conclusion: 'there is no fury like a vested interest masquerading as a moral principle.' (Tim Malyon)



Howard Marks before his arrest.











DUBAI 79 KM ٧٩ كم
SHARJAH 101 KM ١٠١ كم
RAS AL KHAIMAH 168 KM ١٦٨ كم





