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Organised crime gang sentenced to 70 years in jail


They have been found guilty of drugs offences, money laundering and fraud

An Aylesford man was sentenced to nine years in jail at Maidstone Crown Court on Thursday 15 October for drugs related offences, money laundering and mortgage fraud.

Nicholas John Yates, a 37 year old engineer from Salisbury Road, Aylesford, Maidstone was found guilty on 12 August this year of conspiring to supply 22 kilos of amphetamine sulphate worth £1 million between 14 November 2007 and 11 November 2008. In addition, he pleaded guilty to two counts of money laundering, totalling £127,780, and a mortgage fraud valued at £807,500.

Yates was the Kent ringleader of a large, very sophisticated, international organised crime gang that has been dismantled by Kent Police.

Listen online

 Detective Superintendent Tim Smith talks about the investigation and the results.

Family members punished

Most of the 18 family members and criminal associates, from Kent and Teesside, have already been punished for a range of serious drug offences, money laundering and mortgage fraud. But like Yates, three others were sentenced on Thursday 15 October.

Three others sentenced

The three also sentenced were:

- **Richard Neil Wheeler**, 43, builder, Calcroft Avenue, Ingress Park, Greenhithe who pleaded guilty to four counts of money laundering the proceeds of crime; three counts of possession with intent to supply more than £1 million worth of cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamine; the importation of 2.3 tonnes of cannabis resin worth £2.5 million and conspiracy to supply 22



Richard Neil Wheeler



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kilos of amphetamine sulphate worth £1 million. He was sentenced to nine years four months in jail.

- **Neil William Hoban** (Teesside ringleader), 40, shop manager, Tanwell Close, Stockton, Teesside who pleaded guilty to conspiracy to supply 22 kilos of amphetamine sulphate worth £1 million. He was sentenced to five years seven months in jail.
- **Martin Paul Lewis**, 28, unemployed, Braid Crescent, Billingham, Teesside who pleaded guilty to conspiracy to supply 22 kilos of amphetamine sulphate worth £1 million. He was sentenced to 20 months in jail.

Five people sentenced

Those who were previously sentenced at Maidstone Crown Court include:

- **Martin Winter**, 46, driver, Reddy Road, Erith pleaded guilty of conspiracy to supply ecstasy, cocaine and amphetamine sulphate. He was sentenced to five years in jail.
- **Mizelli Friend** (girlfriend of Yates), 29, unemployed, Queen's Road, Gravesend pleaded guilty to a mortgage fraud valued at more than £142,000. She was sentenced to a year in jail suspended for two years.
- **Helen Louise Friend** (sister of Mizelli), 24, sales rep, Queen's Road, Gravesend pleaded guilty to a mortgage fraud valued at £152,000. She was sentenced to a year in jail suspended for two years.
- **Delvinna Sylvester** (partner of Richard Wheeler), 38, unemployed, Calcroft Avenue, Ingress Park, Greenhithe pleaded guilty to a mortgage fraud valued at £200,000. She was sentenced to a 12 months supervision order and 150 hours of community service.
- **Dean Austin**, 32, plumber, Olivers Mill, New Ash Green, pleaded guilty to possession of cocaine. He was sentenced to a two year conditional discharge at Dartford magistrates' court.

Multi-agency investigation

Kent Police led the multi agency investigation, which began in November 2007, into the gang members who smuggled drugs into Kent from Spain and other European countries via France. A complex web of family members and criminal associates in both Kent and Teesside underpinned the large-scale drugs enterprise that also included money laundering and mortgage fraud.

Since the investigation began 31 men and women have been charged - nearly half of them from Kent - and this sentencing brings the trial phase of the investigation to an end.

Sixteen people have been sentenced to a total of

70 years and one month in jail.

Head of Major Crime at Kent Police, Detective Superintendent Tim Smith, said: 'It's hugely rewarding to see these tangible results after such a long, complicated and multi-faceted investigation.

'We've taken out the ringleaders of a very organised and dangerous crime gang whose members stopped at nothing to fuel their greed for money and the high life through the illegal drugs trade.

'But they seriously underestimated the determination and resources of Kent Police and the other law enforcement agencies that worked with us both in the UK and overseas.

'Our work isn't over because we're pursuing the gang's money and assets but the sentences mean we've broken the back of what has been one of the biggest operations ever led by Kent Police.

'But the most satisfying thing of all is that we have saved some people from certain death and enhanced the quality of life of others by taking these gang members out of the community and allowing the criminal justice system to punish them.'

Items seized

The investigation peaked last November when 270 enforcement officers and detectives from Kent, Teesside and London arrested 31 people and searched 50 residential, commercial and rural locations. Among the many items they seized were:

- £262,000.00 in cash
- six kilos of almost pure cocaine (£500,000)
- three tonnes of cannabis (£2.5 million)
- 22 kilos of amphetamine sulphate (£1 million)
- 4,130 ecstasy tablets (£20,000)
- one kilo of crystal MDMA (£25,000)
- two handguns (one linked to an attempted murder)

Head of Crime Operations for Cleveland Police, Detective Chief Superintendent Mark Braithwaite, said: 'Organised drug cartels wreak massive harm on vulnerable individuals, on families and on communities both in Teesside and elsewhere.

'The higher level players are greedy, very often violent and devoid of social conscience. All they are bothered about is making a fast buck on the back of other people's misery.

'There are some who argue that enforcement interventions are not the answer. To those people I say go and live next door to a dealer and see what impact it has on your quality of life.

'There is a responsibility on all agencies to tackle this complex problem through education, treatment and support but there is also a public expectation that law enforcement should do just that - disrupt

supply networks, enforce the law and protect communities.

Kent Police is now actively pursuing the gang's money and assets through the legal system so that the proceeds of their criminal activity can be ploughed back into fighting crime. So far £2.375 million has been confiscated.

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Victims of crime

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