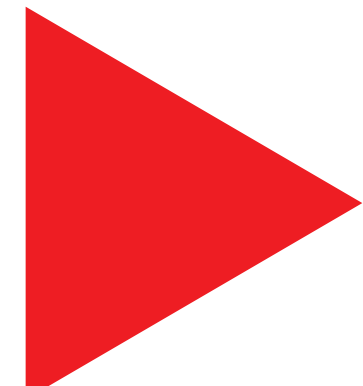


HUTCH ACQUITTAL

HOW THE STORY UNFOLDED



1



February 5, 2016 David Byrne, 33, is shot dead by the Hutch gang as he attends a boxing weigh-in with Daniel Kinahan at the Regency hotel.

2



February 20, 2016 Kevin Murray is identified as one of the gunmen in the Regency raid. Jonathan Dowdall is placed under surveillance.

3



March 7, 2016 Dowdall and Gerard Hutch are secretly recorded discussing the Regency attack as they drive to Derry to meet the New IRA.

4



August 12, 2021 Hutch is arrested in the Costa del Sol after spending months on the run. He is extradited to face murder charges. Dowdall, Paul Murphy and Jason Bonney are also charged.

5



September 2022 Dowdall agrees to turn state evidence days before standing trial for murder alongside Hutch. Dowdall pleads guilty to a lesser offence but Hutch is acquitted.



ENEMY



SHANE

Gardai failed to prove Gerard Hutch was responsible for the Regency hotel murder, but they did learn how the Dubliner's criminal gang had infiltrated the force. John Mooney reveals the inside details of the inquiry

Gerard Hutch had told his supporters to stay away from the Special Criminal Court when it decided his fate. He expected to be found guilty of murdering David Byrne, the 33-year-old drug dealer shot dead at the Regency hotel in 2016, but hoped an appeal might be successful. A pragmatist, Hutch was braced for the worst and feared he might die in jail. But then he was acquitted. The Dublin gangster known as the Monk is a free man. This is the behind-the-scenes story of what happened, compiled from witness statements, interviews and secret intelligence.

The structure, strength and resilience of the gang is difficult to define as it is not hierarchically structured but just a loose group of criminals loyal to a name, like the mafia. Their bonds have strengthened since their feud with a rival cartel. The gangsters are now seen as a threat to Ireland's national security as they have corrupted gardai to shield them from prosecution and identify informers. Officers fear they are behind the worst intelligence breach in the force's history.

OUT OF RETIREMENT

Hutch was assumed to have retired from a life of robbery when the assault on the Regency hotel in Swords took place in February 2016. The aim was simple: the conspirators wanted to kill Daniel Kinahan, the leader of a rival drug cartel. The Hutch-Kinahan feud was stirred up in September 2015, when the Monk's nephew Gary Hutch was shot dead by a pool near Fuengirola on the Costa del Sol.

His killing followed an attempt on Kinahan's life. The Hutch side thought the dispute was resolved by the payment of €200,000 in compensation. They had even let Kinahan shoot Patrick Hutch Jr in the legs to show Kinahan respect. But for criminals, murder is both a cause and a cure. As Kinahan continued to issue threats, the Hutch's pre-empted his next move. The plan was simple: they would murder Kinahan but make it look as if the IRA were responsible.

Hutch always had an ability to spot talent and recruit those vulnerable to corruption or willing to aid his gang. Jonathan Dowdall certainly fit the bill. A self-made businessman who used violence when necessary, Dowdall was known to the Hutch family since he was a teenager. He became a trusted associate, possibly laundering money for the gang. When Dowdall was elected as a Sinn Féin representative to Dublin city council, Hutch and his associates supported him and helped him politically.

Organised crime groups exist in the same ecosystem as violent groups such as the dissident iterations of the IRA. Some uphold the IRA tradition of using violence to oppose the British presence in Northern Ireland, regardless of the odium provoked, but also kill drug dealers for propaganda purposes. Sometimes their interests align with those of criminals.

It was into this world that Dowdall was dispatched to recruit gunmen to kill Kinahan on behalf of the gang, with the Sinn Féin councillor making various journeys to Derry, Armagh and Donegal from early January 2015. He sought help from his friend Pearse McAuley, an IRA gunman who had once killed a garda. Dowdall visited him in prison, where he was serving a sentence for stabbing his wife, the Sinn Féin TD Pauline Tully.

Hutch always had an ability to spot talent – Dowdall fit the bill

Hutch always had an ability to spot talent – Dowdall fit the bill



mediate before he decided to approach the New IRA for help, believing only it could enforce a truce between the gangs.

THE BUGGED SUV

Dowdall again travelled to Donegal on February 20, 2016, this time promising to deliver the assault rifles as a sweetener. "They were desperate and trying every avenue," a dissident source said. By this stage, garda intelligence was watching and listening to his every word, having planted an eavesdropping device in his SUV. This produced startling evidence, including his conversations with Hutch as they drove to Strabane on March 7. "We're throwing them up to them either way," Hutch told Dowdall, an oblique reference to the assault rifles. "You know well even if we split here and say we're not meeting again, there's a present, them three yokes."

In the chat, the Monk outlined his reasoning. "Twelve months' time, there's two RIC men dead there and them things are ballistically traced."

Dowdall finished his sentence: "Yeah, they're going to blame republicans on the Regency." The two joked about how the gardai had no idea what had happened. On that journey, the two men first drove to Lisburn to meet someone from the Continuity IRA, before meeting a paramilitary called Shane Rowan in Strabane, who took them to meet representatives of the New IRA's army council. They went to know about Murray, who took part for his own enrichment or to pay a debt. The New IRA told Hutch it would not get involved but would take the guns. The meeting spooked Dowdall, who became fearful of what might happen. When Dowdall dropped Hutch back in Dublin later that night, they agreed to hand over the weapons, blissfully unaware the gardai were listening.

Hours later, Rowan was arrested with the guns in Co Meath as he drove north. His home was also searched, where ammunition and contraband cigarettes were found. He would later plead guilty to IRA membership and possession of the firearms but he never served his sentence with republican prisoners.

The seizure prompted Dowdall's arrest and a search of his home on the Navan Road on the grounds he might have explosives. Dowdall had discussed using explosives to attack the Kinahans while travelling with Hutch in his bugged SUV. No guns or explosives were found – but a USB thumb drive holding a ten-minute video of Dowdall torturing and threatening to cut a man up "piece by piece" and shaving his head with an electric razor was discovered. The video had been filmed in January 2015, when Dowdall was still a Sinn Féin councillor. Like Rowan, Dowdall was sent to prison.

A SHADOW CRIME GANG

The investigation into the Regency attack revealed that the Hutch organisation had morphed from a local gang into a powerful and entrepreneurial force, though few were aware of its existence. There was intelligence to suggest it had penetrated the gardai. Rumours had circulated following the collapse of the case against Patrick Hutch Jr, who had been charged with being the gunman dressed as a woman, after the senior garda leading the case committed suicide. But the first evidence of corruption emerged in April 2021, following the issue of a European warrant for Hutch's arrest for Byrne's murder. To the alarm of the Irish and Spanish security services, when details of the warrant were circulated on the gardai's IT system Hutch – who had a flight booked from Malaga to Lanzarote – vanished.

The disappearance prompted a secret

inquiry which eventually linked the gang to a retired detective superintendent, John Murphy. Surveillance found that Murphy was providing confidential information to Thomas Savage, a convicted drug trafficker from Swords, who was then passing it to the Hutch gang.

The discovery was a disaster for Garda Headquarters as the full extent of the penetration emerged. Murphy was not just providing information but also organising the gang's counter-intelligence. He would ask former garda colleagues to run checks on people, cars and addresses linked to the Hutch gang to learn if they were under surveillance. It was a unique but effective form of counter-surveillance. Many officers began to suspect the gang was told there was no

surveillance on Kinahan on the day of the Regency raid. Murphy's identification as a mole accelerated the effort to locate Hutch, who was finally arrested in August 2021 by Spanish police at a café in Fuengirola. The arrest stunned the gang, who had assumed Murphy would be alerted if Garda Headquarters established Hutch's whereabouts. Savage died of a heart attack within hours of being informed of the arrest. Murphy was arrested days later with drugs and imprisoned.

Dowdall was nearing the end of his sentence for false imprisonment when he was charged over Byrne's murder along-

side Paul Murphy and Jason Bonney, two Dubliners who acted as getaway drivers for the Regency assault team.

Now he wanted out. He sent a message to the gardai but there were concerns from the start. Some in the intelligence community felt he was a double agent acting on Hutch's orders. Dowdall denied he knew anything about the Regency plan but the earlier warnings went unheeded, multiple sources said. "He invented a story which distanced himself from Hutch, organised crime and the Regency. The audio clearly showed he was involved in the attack and the Hutch gang. Gerard Hutch wouldn't have used him if he didn't trust him," a source said.

Ten days before the Regency trial was due to start, Dowdall agreed to make a

statement against Hutch, who learnt of this after he was arrested during an ongoing inquiry into Murphy. As part of the deal, Dowdall pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of facilitating Byrne's murder.

The state did not charge Hutch with possession or control of the guns in case it should lead to legal issues and expose intelligence-gathering operations against the wider Hutch group and dissidents.

Hutch fought to the Supreme Court to stop his trial being heard at the Special Criminal Court, as he wanted a jury. But it was the three judges at the non-jury court who gave him justice. And in a bizarre twist of fate, Dowdall helped his defence.

In delivering the verdict, Justice Tara Burns set out the reasons why.

● Dowdall had not found God but acted in his own interest and told lies

● The contents of the audio recordings of Hutch and Dowdall were far from clear

● Hutch had made references to the Regency, the feud and guns, but they did

not establish he was there. It was also possible Patsy Hutch planned the raid.

"A reasonable possibility arises on the evidence that the Regency was planned by Patsy Hutch and that Gerard Hutch stepped in, as head of the family, to attempt to sort out the aftermath," Burns said before delivering a not guilty verdict.

The story is far from over as Hutch is still a marked man. The Kinahan cartel have tried to kill him before and are likely to try again. After the Regency attack, Murray discovered he had motor neurone disease and died in August 2017.

As for Dowdall, he will start a new life under a new name in the witness protection scheme on his release from prison, if his assessment is successful.

@johnmooneyIRL

Advertisement for Ireland's Music & Arts Festival for Family & Friends, featuring Nile Rodgers & Chic, Gavin James, and various other acts.

Advertisement for the Regency attack, detailing the investigation and the role of Gerard Hutch and Jonathan Dowdall.

Advertisement for MCD Presents, featuring performances by SZA, Hans Zimmer, John Mayer Solo, NewOrder, Dermot Kennedy, Post Malone, Lionel Richie, and John Fogarty.

THE SUNDAY TIMES



Ex-Sinn Fein man involved in hotel killing to testify against the Monk

John Mooney

The former Sinn Fein councillor Jonathan Dowdall has agreed to testify against Gerry Hutch, the Dubliner known as "the Monk", who is due to stand trial at the Special Criminal Court this week for the murder of David Byrne. The killing at the Regency hotel in Dublin in 2016 ignited a gangland war that has claimed 18 lives.

Dowdall, 44, once considered a protégé of the Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald, is now living at a secure location where he is being protected by armed detectives pending his appearance at the non-jury court. He may be admitted to the state's witness security programme at a future date.

The former Dublin city councillor agreed to testify against Hutch, 59, after making a statement to gardai about his knowledge of the attack at the Regency, where a gang dressed as members of the garda's emergency response unit tried to kill the drugs cartel leader Daniel Kinahan.

Dowdall, a married father of four from Dublin, was himself due to stand trial for Byrne's murder alongside Hutch, but pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of facilitating the shooting at the Special Criminal Court last Wednesday. Dowdall left the courtroom via a secure exit accompanied by armed gardai, which was a signal of the changed circumstances.

His father Patrick, 65, who had



Jonathan Dowdall: testimony

similarly been charged in connection with the Regency attack, also pleaded guilty to facilitating the killing at the same hearing. Both will be sentenced tomorrow after the court hears mitigating evidence on their behalf.

Hutch was informed of the development on Wednesday night, according to several sources familiar with the unfolding events. The state officially confirmed Dowdall's new status as a witness for the prosecution when it furnished Hutch's lawyers with a copy of his statement and other materials on Thursday morning in accordance with its legal obligations ahead of the trial.

Hutch's lawyers are studying the contents of Dowdall's statement in

advance of the trial, which is expected to last for eight weeks.

Gardai across Dublin have launched a security operation to protect Dowdall's extended family and other witnesses as a precaution, given the history of the gangs involved in the feud. Eighteen people were killed between September 2015 and January 2018, including two who had no links to organised crime. The majority were killed by the Kinahan cartel.

Dowdall, who ran a successful electrical contracting firm, served as a Sinn Fein councillor on Dublin city council from May 2014 to February 2015. McDonald supported his entry into local politics and actively encouraged his plan to seek election to the Dail.

It is now known that Dowdall, from Dublin's north inner city, was actively involved in organised crime while serving as a Sinn Fein councillor. He was convicted for imprisoning and threatening to kill a man in 2015 before he officially left the party, citing bullying and health issues as the reason he departed.

Last week Sinn Fein said it was not aware of Dowdall's involvement in criminality until gardai raided his home in 2016, more than a year after he had left the party. McDonald has also pointed out that he subsequently supported a political opponent of Sinn Fein in the Dublin Central constituency.

@johnmooneyirl

Full story, page 4



Vita Tsegelska and her daughter Maria are living in Kildare and waiting for a passport to return home

Passport delays at Ukraine embassy

Julieanne Corr

The Ukrainian embassy in Dublin is dealing with a backlog of passport applications, with about 30 refugees applying each day as an increasing number make plans to return home.

Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion were allowed to enter Ireland with any identification they had at the time, which meant many arrived without passports or had documents close to expiry.

The embassy in Ballsbridge said the current waiting time for a new passport was at least three months as the digital queue for applications was full until December. There are just three diplomatic staff working at the embassy, including the ambassador.

"The embassy experiences difficulties due to the lack of staff as there is only one consul and about 50,000 Ukrainians," it said last week. "Prior to the full-scale Russian invasion, there were around 6,000 Ukrainians. Unfortunately such a situation is not only in Ireland, but pretty much everywhere in Europe. All the passports are manufactured in Ukraine and there are obvious logistics issues."

Elena Mustachko, who arrived

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How a city councillor went from gangster to state witness

Ex-Sinn Fein member Jonathan Dowdall is believed to have made a statement to gardai, writes *John Mooney*

Jonathan Dowdall should be spending what might be his last weekend of freedom at his Dublin home as he awaits sentencing for facilitating the murder of David Byrne, a 34-year-old criminal who was shot dead at the Regency hotel in February 2016. Instead he has agreed to become a state witness and, in the context of a gangland feud that has claimed 18 lives, is at a secret location under the protection of armed gardai.

The first inkling that Dowdall had decided to turn state's evidence emerged last Wednesday when he and his 65-year-old father, Patrick, both pleaded guilty to "facilitating" Byrne's murder during a short hearing at the Special Criminal Court in Dublin. The pair admitted hiring a room used by the alleged killers.

Dowdall was due to stand trial for Byrne's murder tomorrow alongside Gerard Hutch, the Dubliner known as "the Monk", while his father and two others were due to stand trial for offences connected to the killing. But when both Dowdalls pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of facilitation, Jonathan left the courtroom through a secure exit accompanied by armed gardai after being granted bail.

The underworld put two and two together. Word spread quickly across Dublin that Dowdall had turned state's evidence and planned to testify in the Hutch case. Further proof of this came when Hutch's legal team was provided with copies of lengthy statements made by Dowdall against its client, so they could prepare for cross-examination. Hutch was later informed of the developments.

In all likelihood, Dowdall has probably been co-operating with the security services for some time while the authorities decided how to handle him. It is possible that at some future point, and given the backdrop of this violent feud, Dowdall could join the state's witness protection scheme, which offers participants a new identity and life abroad after testifying in court.

The programme, which is administered by the attorney-general and run by the Security and Intelligence branch at Garda Headquarters, was established in 1997 following the murder of the crime reporter Veronica Guerin. Participants are not paid to testify, but agree to give evidence once they have pleaded guilty to any crimes they have committed.

They usually serve out their sentences in solitary confinement in Arbour Hill Prison in Dublin, where they are housed on a secure wing. They are eventually settled abroad with their family, normally in an English-speaking country, and provided with a home similar to the one they left behind.

The guilty plea entered by Dowdall last Wednesday is being interpreted as confirming his commitment to assisting the authorities going forward.

Dowdall served as a Sinn Fein councillor on Dublin city council from May 2014 to February 2015. He was a protégé of Mary Lou McDonald, the party president, who supported his entry into local politics and actively encouraged his plan to seek election to the Dail.

CAROLINE QUINN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Dowdall pleaded guilty to facilitating the murder of David Byrne, above, on February 5, 2016 at the Regency hotel in Dublin

McDonald also attended community events with Dowdall, often using such occasions to endorse him as an up-and-coming Sinn Fein representative. Dowdall also rubbed shoulders with Gerry Adams, the former Sinn Fein leader. Photographs are now circulating of the three posing together before Dowdall's criminality came to light.

Naturally Sinn Fein is deeply embarrassed by the revelations that its former councillor was caught up in Dublin's gangland. "Had we known of his involvement in criminality, clearly he

would not have been allowed to be a member of the party, never mind a public representative," said a Sinn Fein spokesman last week.

From Dublin's north inner city, Dowdall purported to be a self-made man who, after graduating from Technological University Dublin, built up an electrical contracting firm that employed nine people. However, his wealth was also derived from organised crime.

Intelligence services linked him to the armed attack on the Regency hotel within days of Byrne's killing in the notorious ambush of February 2016.

Unknown to Dowdall, he had been the subject of intrusive surveillance by the security services, though he later publicly denied any involvement in the Regency attack after his home was searched by gardai.

In an interview with Joe Duffy on RTE Radio's *Liveline* after the search, Dowdall said that if he had any link to crime "it would have come out during the election", but acknowledged he knew people related to the Hutch family and theorised that this was why his home had been raided by gardai.

"You know how the inner city works, everyone knows everyone ... Some of them I'm proud to know, and there's plenty others I've never met," he told Duffy.

He was arrested shortly afterwards at Dublin airport while attempting to flee to Dubai, and charged with imprisoning and threatening to kill Alexander Hurley, a Dublin man who has since changed his name for his own safety.

The search of Dowdall's home uncovered a USB thumb drive that contained a ten-minute video of the former Sinn Fein man beating up Hurley, threatening to cut him up "piece by piece", and shaving his head with an electric razor. Dowdall overpowered his victim when Hurley visited his home in Carba to buy a motorcycle advertised on DoneDeal.

The video also showed Dowdall holding a tea towel to Hurley's face before pouring water over it in a simulation of drowning – copying the waterboarding technique used by the CIA on terrorist suspects. Analysis of the footage showed that it was filmed in January 2015, when Dowdall was still a Dublin city councillor.

Dowdall's father also participated in the torture session and was filmed



Dowdall, above, served as a Sinn Fein councillor on Dublin city council from May 2014 to February 2015, during which time he tortured Alexander Hurley

“Dowdall is said to have found prison life difficult

threatening to cut Hurley's fingers off with a pair of pliers "knuckle by knuckle". Both father and son received lengthy prison sentences for the attack.

The former Sinn Fein councillor is said to have found prison life difficult and was fearful of being murdered by the Kinahan cartel, which might explain his decision to co-operate with gardai, according to those who knew him.

Dowdall and his father were arrested and charged with Byrne's murder last year but granted bail, which was a surprise given his past. He was living openly at his home on the Navan Road in Cabra until recently.

In the wake of his decision to plead guilty to facilitating Byrne's shooting, his former associates, who are still freely operating, are believed to have pored over their past conversations and text messages worried about a possibility that they may face arrest.

One former associate yesterday suggested the events of the past week had opened Pandora's box. @JohnMooney1RL

Vacancy tax won't apply to 22,000 derelict homes

Aoife Moore
Political Correspondent

An estimated 22,000 derelict properties will be exempt from the government's new vacant homes tax (VHT), which was introduced in last week's budget to help raise the supply of residential properties to buy or rent.

Several exceptions to the tax have been announced by the Department of Finance to ensure that property owners "are not unfairly charged for temporary periods of vacancy with genuine reasons". The reasons for exemption include properties that were recently sold; that are listed for sale or rent; that are vacant because of an occupier's illness or long-term care; that are vacant because of significant refurbishment work, or are derelict.

In the GeoDirectory Residential Buildings Report for the second quarter of this year, prepared by EY, the professional services firm, 21,897 addresses were

classified as "derelict" last June. The report noted that the number of vacant residential properties fell by 5.9 per cent in the year to June, with 86,708 dwellings classed as vacant nationally.

Preliminary figures from the 2022 census show there are 166,752 vacant homes. The new tax will apply to buildings designated as "residential" for the purposes of the local property tax, which applies only to habitable residential properties, not derelict or uninhabitable properties.

VHT is not being regarded as revenue-generating as the estimated yield is between €3 million and €4 million. Instead it is an attempt to incentivise the return of vacant homes to the market.

A property will be considered vacant for the purposes of the tax if it is occupied for less than 30 days a year.

Some opposition politicians have criticised the exemptions. Rebecca Moynihan, a Labour Party

senator, said the scheme paid "lip service to a systemic issue that the housing minister has no interest in resolving".

She said: "Properties left empty for long periods must be taxed to incentivise owners to bring the stock back into the market."

The government does not hold data on the number of derelict sites. The Department of Finance said that Revenue data and preliminary census results "show that vacancy lies within a range that is considered to be in line with a functioning housing market".

The Derelict Sites Act 1990, which is part of the housing minister's remit, imposes a duty on every owner and occupier to take all "reasonable steps" to ensure land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site.

The Department of Finance said it had been advised that the Department of Housing "continues to liaise with local authorities on the operation of the act".

High proportion of transgender patients found to suffer from mental health issues

Seán McCárthaigh

Almost half of all young adults attending gender services provided by health authorities over the past six years suffered from depression, according to a new medical study.

Researchers found that a high proportion of transgender patients aged 18 to 30 attending the National Gender Service (NGS) suffered some kind of mental health issue.

The study also found significant demographic changes among people seeking gender services in the Republic, with transgender males, people who were assigned as female at birth, now accounting for the majority, in contrast to a decade ago.

The research reviewed the charts of 167 patients attending the NGS, which is at St Columcille's Hospital in Loughlinstown, Co Dublin. It found almost half (49 per cent) experienced depression with a further 15 per cent

MODEL RELEASED/GETTY IMAGES



Trans women are outnumbered by trans men seeking aid

having a low mood and 26 per cent having anxiety.

In addition, roughly one in eight (12 per cent) reported having engaged in deliberate self-harm, while 15 per cent reported suicide ideation and 3 per cent had actually attempted suicide.

The study also revealed that 11 per cent of patients were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and another 3 per cent had clinical features of ASD,

contrasting with the estimated rate of 1.2 per cent among the general population of young adults.

Researchers from the NGS and UCD School of Medicine found that trans men now account for 62 per cent of patients attending the centre, with trans women, or those assigned as male at birth, representing 35 per cent. The remainder were transmasculine/non-binary individuals. This represents a

reversal of the trend from 2005-14, when trans women accounted for 73 per cent of patients, with the remainder being trans men.

The study also showed that almost three out of four patients were on either gender-affirming hormone therapy or GnRH blockers, while 16 per cent had undergone surgical intervention.

All but 3 per cent of young people declared at their initial assessment that they wanted hormonal treatment, while 86 per cent said they desired some form of gender-affirming surgical intervention. The most common surgical procedures were bilateral mastectomies, which accounted for 22 of the 27 patients who had surgery.

Only four of the operations were performed in Ireland, with the most common country for referral being Poland, followed by the UK. All gender-affirming genital surgeries were performed in the UK, while all hysterectomies and

mammoplasties were carried out in Ireland.

The study said a further 30 patients were referred for surgery, while another 32 had submitted a request for a referral for assessment.

The annual number of new referrals for gender services at St Columcille's has risen steadily, up from six in 2005 to 287 in 2020.

Seán Kearns, one of the report's authors, said among the "most glaring challenges" was the waiting time for a first appointment. The average time among the cases reviewed was 16 months.

The study, published in the *Irish Journal of Medical Science*, said waiting times had lengthened due to a sixfold increase in numbers accessing the service.

"There is an opportunity to explore additional, non-medical, gender-affirming services and initiatives while people are waiting to be seen, recognising that medical and surgical interventions are not the sole means of gender affirmation," Kearns said.



ILLUSTRATION: HAYLEY DALRYMPLE

Revealed: How Kinahans washed their drug cash... by the man who helped

The adviser who assisted the drug cartel family with hiding their billions through fine wine, crypto and priceless art, says they left him high and dry. Now he's angry enough to lift the lid on how they did business



JOHN MOONEY

The man on the other side of the screen is dialling in from Bangkok. His identity cannot be revealed – but the people he is speaking about are the Kinahans family, one of the world's most notorious criminal cartels.

The man on Zoom, who we shall call Opel, says he was part of a conspiracy to launder €200 million for the Kinahans.

Over the course of three months, in calls, messages and emails with The Sunday Times, he described in meticulous detail how the gang's operation works. "I never met the Kinahans. I thought they were ultra-high-net-worth clients of a guy I knew. My function was simply to set up banking schemes so they could invest substantial sums of money in various jurisdictions around the world. We are talking about investments in art, wine, crypto, whisky and stocks around the world," Opel says.

Today, the group controls a large part of cocaine importation into Europe, as well as arms smuggling, cybercrime, extortion and money laundering. Clients include Mexican cartels, jihadists in Asia and, more recently, Iran's intelligence services, dealing in military technology and aircraft.

Europol believes they have murdered at least 20 people in Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain. The US is currently offering a collective reward of \$15 million for information leading to the arrest of Kinahan, his sons and other figures in the group.

Having fled their palatial homes in Dubai, they are now the subject of sanctions and an international manhunt. Daniel and his trusted associates are moving between Qatar and other countries in the region, but others have relocated to Asia, South Africa and Brazil.

Here, Opel tells the story of his recruitment by representatives of the cartel.

During interviews he provided a detailed insight into the Kinahan cartel's tactics of laundering money into the international banking system.

Opel discovered that his work was tied to the notorious Irish gang last spring after the American sanctions took hold, yet he acknowledges that he had long known that the middleman had criminals among his clientele.

"He told me himself many years ago that he was working for a father and son team that were supposedly the biggest drug dealers in Europe. This was long before the Kinahan name was widely publicised," Opel says.

Transnational crime groups such as the Kinahans rely on professionals willing to launder money into the financial system alongside legitimate investments in return for handsome commissions. That involves passing hundreds of millions of euro through offshore accounts, trust funds, companies and investment schemes. If done properly, it is hard to detect and even harder to prosecute.

From opulent homes and offices in Dubai, Christy and his two sons are reputed to have amassed a personal fortune of €1 billion, managed by a small army of advisers.

If this figure is accurate, the investment scheme which Opel was asked to set up was designed to launder one fifth of the cartel's total wealth.

Opel was approached in about 2020 to help invest tens of millions of euro initially, but this soon increased. The middleman's instructions were clear: the clients and his associates needed to move money from Hong Kong. The €67 million sum grew to €225 million.

The group was on the hunt for shrewd investments and needed to "clean the money" held in Hong Kong, which represented the proceeds of property investments, Opel says.

Previously, he had worked in international finance, investments and private-aircraft broking.

"Everything was to be administered by an accountant based in Hong Kong. I was essentially to be his investment adviser but only he would be able to execute transactions."

The scheme was simple: Opel suggested setting up a series of accounts on trading platforms in tax havens around the world that would give the clients immediate access to their funds.

To begin, money would be transferred in small amounts from Hong Kong to an array of offshore accounts to avoid drawing unwanted attention from the Chinese government.

Opel was told he was officially working for three Irishmen, who moved between luxury apartments in Bangkok and the island of Koh Samui, in the gulf of Thailand.

"I would be working directly for the accountant who had the €200 million. The middleman would talk about Danny and Christopher. He was constantly flying to Dubai and sometimes Spain and other countries in Europe to sort out problems for them," he adds. "The money just kept going up and up."

worth \$16 million, and a painting by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama being auctioned for \$2.8 million.

Opel's information reveals not only the astonishing scale of the group's vast wealth but also the nexus between transnational crime and international banking.

He has known the middleman, a German or Austrian national who moves between Asia, the Middle East and Europe, for two decades.

"He had a million euros' worth of watches. When he would fly to Switzerland, he would buy them for his associates," Opel says.

So why is he talking about this now? "He embezzled money from me," Opel answers. The middleman – and the Kinahans – "vanished" when the US government imposed sanctions against the cartel last April, he adds.



Banksy's Sunflowers from Petrol Station was suggested for Christy Kinahan, far right, and his sons Daniel and Christopher Jr, left

SOME OF THE FUND MANAGERS HANDLED HUGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY. OPEL SAYS ONE MANAGER HE RECOMMENDED PERSONALLY HANDLED MORE THAN \$29BN

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TAPING CONVERSATIONS TO PROTECT HIMSELF

From the start, Opel suggested investing in traditional financial instruments such as equities, bonds and funds that would be purchased and held through platforms in the Cayman Islands, Mauritius, the Isle of Man, the British Virgin Islands, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Labuan, the international offshore centre controlled by Malaysia.

He wrote scores of emails to the middleman outlining potential investments. "I asked him [the middleman] if they had considered property investment in the US and he told me that they would never consider investing in the US, which I thought was strange as it can be a very lucrative market and not difficult for foreign nationals to engage in, if set up properly," Opel recalls.

He started taping some of his conversations and documenting everything to protect himself. These recordings give an insight into the personalities involved in the cartel.

In one, the middleman says he is calling from Ireland where he is with "one of the worst motherf**ers in the world". He adds: "I tell you the guy is mental, mental, mental" after one of the criminals had offered to kill someone on his behalf. "They are more dangerous than anyone else. One day they love you, a day later they hate you," he says.

Other recordings contain fleeting references to Daniel Kinahan's friendship with Tyson Fury, the British heavyweight boxer.

Kinahan was at the time considered one of the most influential figures in the sport and acted as a confidant to Fury, who once posted images on social media of the pair in Dubai.

In one of the recordings, the man tells Opel that the cartel's representatives in Thailand had flown to watch Fury fight at Wembley.

Some of the fund managers Opel introduced the middleman to were handling astronomical amounts of money. In one message, Opel writes to say that a fund manager he had recommended personally handled more than \$29 billion.

How do billionaires that demand discretion make shrewd investments? They diversify, Opel encouraged the clients to split their investments by purchasing wine, fine art and cryptocurrencies.

OPEL'S EMAILS TO MIDDLEMAN

SEPTEMBER, 2021

To: [REDACTED] Cc: Bcc
Subject: [REDACTED]

You can't go wrong with any of these over the long term. All of them can be purchased through Mauritius. Once everything is set up, they will have direct access to the fund managers that manage those funds. If they just want to discuss anything on the phone or Whatsapp, Skype, whatever, this can be easily arranged

JANUARY 2022

To: [REDACTED] Cc: Bcc
Subject: [REDACTED]

I personally like the idea of the trust as it is impenetrable and can house any and all other investments. Including Art, Wine, Whiskey, Real Estate, Crypto as well as the traditional investments purchased and held through the platforms in Mauritius and elsewhere in the event they wanted to open other platforms such as in the Cayman Islands.

FEBRUARY 2022

To: [REDACTED] Cc: Bcc
Subject: [REDACTED]

I just got off the phone with Amsterdam regarding the Whisky portfolio and have calls scheduled with New York to get more information on the Art investments... [I've attached 3 Bial Sheets of art pieces that are currently on offering process including a Banksy]

and installation. A Banksy was also considered.

"Kusama is in the top three most expensive living female artists in history," Opel writes, attaching a promotional brochure to invest in an acrylic on canvas.

A memo sent to the middleman outlines how each and every investment they made would be structured and held within a single trust in Luxembourg.

There was only one condition: clients had to pass all the consultants' and platform's know-your-customer (KYC) and anti-money laundering (AML) requirements, which he said were very thorough. Once this was achieved, the trust would be "impenetrable" to law enforcement and could be maintained for generations.

In Opel's dealings with the middleman, secrecy and security was paramount. "He used this USB device which encrypted his phone. It could wipe the phone," Opel says.

When the pair spoke about the Kinahans, it never sounded like the man was "intimidated", Opel says. "He spoke about Daniel's relationship with Tyson Fury. He couldn't stop bragging about it."

The plan to launder the money fell apart last April after the US imposed sanctions on the cartel, prompting the collapse of the deal.

This led to Fury – who has no involvement in criminality – and others distancing themselves from Kinahan. The sanctions forced the gang to go on the run.

Christy and his sons abandoned their homes in Dubai. The security services believe Daniel is moving between the Emirates, Qatar and Jordan.

Other figures attempted to travel to Asia under assumed names as the international manhunt to bring them to justice commenced.

"When the warrants were issued and were published by the US State Department, all meetings were called off and everybody scattered. That's when everything went south," says Opel. "All lines of communication went dead. All the numbers they used stopped. That's when I realised without a doubt that the clients were the Kinahans."

"They've just disappeared now. The last communication I had with him was in September last. He said he knew exactly where Daniel Kinahan was and then he vanished."

Opel says he is not afraid of the Kinahans. "I couldn't care less about them. Let the DEA deal with them."

"I was supposed to earn a commission of 1.2 per cent on their investments but I've ended up with nothing. I just want their representative to pay for what he did to me. If exposing him makes his life a living hell – mission accomplished."

@JohnMooneyIRL

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THE HUMAN LEAGUE

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• ABEL SELAOCOE

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