

Cannabis hunt ended in Cornish smugglers' cove

A secluded Cornish cove, the haunt of smugglers long ago, was chosen by drug runners to smuggle cannabis worth millions of pounds from North Africa, a jury at the Central Criminal Court was told yesterday.

Mr Robert Harman for the prosecution, said that Talland Bay, between Looe and Polperro, popular with holidaymakers, was the ideal place to avoid customs men.

Early on September 17, 1979, watchers at a cottage saw the lights of a boat enter the bay.

The final chapter in a long story of drug-running on a huge scale ended that night with the capture red-handed of members of the gang and the subsequent arrest of organizers in this country and abroad.

The Guiding Lights, a converted fishing trawler, was equipped with secret compartments and radio receivers.

The gang used Rotterdam Cottage, on the beach, and a beach café which had a secret underground cellar to store the cannabis.

Eight men pleaded not guilty to being involved in a conspiracy to evade the prohibition on the import of cannabis resin and supplying the drug to others between January, 1974, and September 1979.

Six other men have pleaded guilty to their part in the scheme and a seventh has disappeared.

The alleged mastermind of the "British Connexion" was Robert Mills, a bookmaker, of Watford Way, Edgware.

The others accused are Trevor Coles, aged 40, financial consultant, of Aygarth Road, Dulwich; William Moon, aged 36 roofer, of Canonbie Road, Forest Hill; Thomas Lake, aged 37, salesman, of Abbey Street, Southwark, all of south London; Denis Madden, aged 29, builder, of Chestnut Avenue, Langley, Buckinghamshire

and Roger Howton, aged 33, salesman, of Camberwell Grove, Camberwell.

Two more accused, said to be the "Gibraltar Connexion", were Ambrose Vinales, a bank manager, and Edward Victory, a businessman.

Customs men lay crouched for hours. They arrested a number of men who landed just over two tonnes of cannabis worth "millions of pounds at street level". Officers recovered a further two tonnes from a house in Station Road, Penge, south London.

The drug runners had used Rotterdam Cottage which belonged to Roderick Eagleton, aged 33, who had pleaded guilty, and a beach café he ran nearby.

Mr Vinales was found to have had more than £3m paid into his account at the Midland International Bank in Gracechurch Street, City. The money was sent to Gibraltar and allegedly paid to Mr Victory.

The money was said to have been taken to the bank at the rate of £100,000 a week by Ronald Taylor, aged 43, of St Lawrence Drive, Eastcote, who had disappeared since his arrest and James Jones, aged 52, a former jockey of Ellery Road, Wimbledon, who is ill.

Those who have pleaded guilty to being variously concerned in the conspiracy are: Terence Goodship, aged 40, a property agent, of Eastcote Road, Welling, Kent; Roderick Eagleton, 33, a café owner, of Rotterdam Cottage, Talland Bay, Cornwall; and Reginald Jackson, 40, of Baylis Road, Southwark.

Others are: Malcolm Gardiner, aged 32, yachtsman, of West End Road, Bitterne, Southampton; Joseph Timmins, aged 45, driver, of Stanford Park Road, Altrincham, Cheshire; and Anthony Dugdale, aged 33, engineer, of the motor yacht Phoenix, Porchester, Hampshire.

The trial continues today.