

KING PIN?

A CASE STUDY OF A MIDDLE MARKET DRUG BROKER

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Abstract

This paper provides a detailed case study of a small, but extremely busy, 'middle market' drug distribution network in the North of England. It derives from a larger research project, commissioned by the Home Office, that explored 'middle market' drug distribution (Pearson and Hobbs 2001). Studies of drug supply are comparatively rare, as compared with studies of drug consumption. Where research studies of middle and upper level drug distribution are concerned, the evidence base is even more pitifully thin since most studies of drug supply are concerned with low-level retail dealers. Our research was therefore exploratory and innovative, with maybe only half a dozen previous relevant studies at this level of drug markets (cf. Adler 1985; Reuter and Haaga 1989; Dorn et al. 1992, 1998; Ovenden et al. 1995; DesRoches 1999; Natarajan 2000), together with a more recent study of Colombian involvement in cocaine trafficking in the Netherlands (Zaitch 2002a, 2002b).

The research strategy adopted for our short-term, exploratory study was to undertake fifty prison interviews with convicted offenders, and an equivalent number of interviews with enforcement personnel with relevant experience drawn from H.M. Customs and Excise, the National Crime Squad, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, and the police. On this basis we were able to generate

approximately 70 case studies of individuals and crime networks that operated in different ways within the upper and middle levels of drug distribution-- Turkish and Asian networks importing heroin and distributing it within the U.K.; those involved in the importation and distribution of cocaine from the Caribbean and elsewhere; regional distributors handling substantial quantities of amphetamine, Ecstasy, cannabis and cocaine, largely imported from the Netherlands; busy 'middle market' drug dealers supplying several thousand of Ecstasy tablets each week to lower level dealers operating in and around the club scene; etc.

Various attempts have been made to develop typologies of drug dealing networks (Johnson et al. 1992; Dorn et al. 1992; Natarajan and Belanger 1998). These have differentiated such networks according to tasks undertaken (manufacture; importation/smuggling; wholesale distribution; lower levels distribution etc.) or organisational form (free-lance; family or kinship based; corporate and hierarchical structures). In the British context such an approach would be barely credible and premature, given the paucity of the evidence base. What is needed, we suggest, is more detailed observation and description of drug distribution enterprises as a prior requirement to analytic typologies.

Accordingly, what follows is a case study of a middle level operation based in 'Coketown', a town in the North of England, which is taken from our wider research. There is a long tradition of using the case study approach in criminology (Becker 1970), and the approach has been used to good effect in studies of drug dealing (Dunlap et al. 1994; Natarajan 2000). While we acknowledge the limitations inherent in any single case study, given how little research there is into middle and upper levels of drug dealing a single case study can usefully illustrate a number of features of how drug brokerage operates at this level of the market. In particular, the immense complexity of this kind of operation and how a small two-man outfit could occupy a king-pin role, buying and selling large quantities of drugs and linking into various other individuals and networks.

Defining the 'Middle' Market

In its wider dimensions, our research identified any number of different 'middle-man', 'go-between' and brokerage functions within drug distribution and supply in modern Britain. It was also abundantly clear, both from interviews with offenders and law enforcement personnel, that there was no agreed definition of the 'middle market' and that different people used the term in radically different ways.

In interviews with law enforcement personnel, for example, the response was often: 'I don't think I'll be able to help you, our sphere of operations is above/below the middle of the market'. In the case of provincial drug squad interviews, the notion of 'middle' was sometimes assumed to be one which mirrored force structures: 'Customs deal with importation, the National Crime Squad deal with the middle, we operate below'. Or, drug squad officers might take the view that 'Customs and NCS deal with the high level, routine policing picks up arrests at the bottom, we're in the middle'.

In prison interviews, offenders also used the notion of 'middle' in different ways. Someone might see himself 'in the middle' in terms of handling the transport route between, for example, Dutch warehouses and domestic buyers. Or, in between importation and whatever went on below: 'We didn't import, we bought it off importers and sold it on... we were in the middle'. Or, 'middle' was understood at an even lower level, as explained by one young man who was a runner for a multi-commodity dealer: 'On the street, I was quite high; in terms of the business side, he was higher than me.... He was in the middle'.

We regard each of these definitions of 'middle' to be equally valid, for to an important extent, what is meant by 'middle' depends upon the individual agent's point of view. This refers to both enforcement personnel and to offenders, and what looks like the 'middle' to one actor will look like 'upper' or 'lower' to another.

All participants, both enforcers and offenders are only partially sighted. We noted that customs officers when asked what happens below a certain level of transaction would often say. 'We're un-sighted'. National Crime Squad officers would only understand a drug smuggling and distribution network up to a certain point, but not beyond. In both cases, whether 'above' or 'below', it becomes a matter of guesswork and inference. Offenders similarly frequently only understood limited aspects of the drug business network of which they were a part.

Drug markets, and perceptions of drug markets are highly fragmented, and in our study, we attempted to provide viewpoints and case studies from as many different positions and viewpoints as possible. There is therefore no one place called the 'middle'. The perspective of retail level dealers, who look upwards into a hierarchical market which they have only the faintest understanding of, proved to be as useful and valid as the views of upper level dealers looking downwards into the murky depths of the low-level retail trade. In one sense, they are all 'in the middle'.

A Busy Life: 'I was run off my feet'

Alf started working for Frank Robins when he was unemployed and doing odd-jobs, having previously worked in the building trade. Robins offered to pay him £400 a week. He also supplied a car and a mobile phone. Alf had some previous idea from local rumour what Robins' line of work was, and when Robins explained to him what would be involved he readily agreed. He also knew the risks, in that Robins told him he needed a new dealer because his previous one had been arrested by the police when he had also lost £150,000 in drugs seized. It gives some idea of the resilience of Robins' enterprise that he could bounce straight back from this.

The basis of Alf's work for Robins as a 'runner' was to collect and deliver drugs to different people at different times, often regular customers, on Robins' instructions.

For example, Alf supplied a retail level heroin dealer A who took 1 ounce of heroin every one or two days. There was another heroin dealer B who received 1 ounce daily; B also sometimes took samples of the heroin Robins had been supplied with in order to test its quality for him. Another regular customer was a man C from near Manchester who took 4-5 kilos of cannabis every couple of weeks plus 2,000 Ecstasy tablets. C was a colleague of D, a previous customer of Robins, who was now in prison although C was still allegedly working for D. Then, there was E who regularly received a few thousand Ecstasy tablets and who was known to Alf only as 'Salford Eddie'. Alf usually met customers such as these in pub car parks, or in the car parks of supermarkets or roadside restaurants such as the Little Chef or Pizza Hut. A man called F who was the uncle of one of Robins' associates, G, took 1 kilo of amphetamine base every 2 weeks; and Alf also delivered to Robins' cousin H who had ounces of heroin on a regular basis. Another man called J received twelve 9-ounce bars of cannabis every two weeks, and Alf also used to meet K from the Midlands in a pub car park every fortnight and supply him with 3-4 kilos of cannabis bush and 1,000 Ecstasy tablets.

In addition to these regular customers, there were times when Alf dealt with people who were unknown to him on the instructions of Robins.

On one of his earliest assignments, Alf met two men L and M in a red saloon car at a designated lay-by and handed over 1 kilo of amphetamine paste, and a few days later he met a man N in a white estate car and to whom he delivered four 9-ounce bars of cannabis. On another occasion, he met a 'lad' P from London with a 'Cockney' accent who was supplied with 5,000 Ecstasy tablets. Later, Q who Alf believed to be the 'main man' travelled up by plane from London where he

met an associate who had come by car, and they returned with 5,000 Ecstasy tablets and 2 kilos of amphetamine. On a further occasion, he delivered 1,250 Ecstasy tablets to a man R driving a white car whom he met at the Little Chef and who had a 'Scouse' accent. 'There was never a set pattern to when I picked up or delivered', said Alf, 'it was organised by Robins'. One time, having picked up and delivered some cannabis to his regular customer K from the Midlands, they arranged to meet the following day at the same place when he would supply 1,000 Ecstasy tablets. However, on the second day K didn't turn up, but Alf received a call from Robins saying that he should meet K at a later time and at the same location.

As well as delivering drugs, Alf would also collect different kinds of drugs which he would sometimes deliver to Robins for storage, or take to his own home where he also stored drugs on Robins' behalf. For these purposes-- storage and supply-- Robins had other associates and heroin, for example, was invariably supplied direct to Robins. Where distribution was concerned, however, Alf was Robins' main man and he also sometimes acted as an intermediary with suppliers.

For examples, S regularly supplied amphetamine base to Robins which Alf collected on his behalf and which came in 2.5 kilo packets 'shaped like rugby balls and wrapped in tape', usually receiving 10 kilos at a time. S, who was a body-builder, also helped Robins out with various things from time to time. For example, when Robins' previous runner had been arrested, Robins went round to his house with S and another man to whom he also supplied drugs, to see why the runner had not delivered drugs to Robins' customers.

In addition to S, another regular associate of Robins was T who ran an electrical goods retail shop and who acted as an intermediary to arrange cannabis deals on Robins' behalf. Alf would also sometimes deliver drugs to T, or to one of his 'lads', and had also delivered money to T at the shop.

A third associate was V who Robins supplied with heroin and cocaine, and whom Robins sometimes used as his 'enforcer' or 'henchman'. V had a local reputation as a 'psycho', and it was rumoured that he had been involved in various shootings. Finally, there was W who supplied Robins with Ecstasy and cocaine on a regular basis, although cocaine was sometimes difficult to come by at the right price and in the right quantity.

Although Robins had regular sources of supply for most drugs, where Ecstasy was concerned a number of different suppliers were used.

Alf said that the first time he picked up Es was from 'three Scouse lads' that he met in a Toys R Us car park. After that, he met a man called 'Jimmy' in a different car park. On a third occasion, he picked up 10,000 Ecstasy tablets from 'two lads' in a taxi which he recognised to be from the Merseyside region.

Whether these Ecstasy deals were from different suppliers, or from the same supplier using different couriers, was not clear. Other Ecstasy deals had a more stable character.

Alf picked up Es several times from a man, X, either from a house or from a builder's yard where X worked and where the drugs were stored in a skip container. On one occasion he picked up 5,000 Es from T at the electrical good store, and on the last few occasions he had picked up from a man called Y who was also said to have access to a pill press and to a tester kit for tablets. Alf had also delivered drugs to Y's brother Z who also had access to guns and was said to have shotguns buried somewhere in a field on the outskirts of Coketown, and was rumoured to have been involved in an abortive armed robbery in conjunction with some 'lads' from Manchester.

'Before I knew it', Alf said, 'I was in at the deep end'. In addition to this alphabet-soup of regular or fleeting contacts, there were other people whom Alf came to know, including a major drugs supply competitor network in the same town. Alf's position within these complex networks was both central and marginal. Central, in that it was his leg-work that made Robins' operation click into place. Marginal, in that he was expendable, as the fate of his predecessor had demonstrated.

In some networks of this type that we identified in the course of our research, the relationship between drug brokers and runners more closely resembled that of colleagues or partners. There was a certain amount of 'profit sharing', and runners could set up side-lines with their own clientele. Or, they were at least allowed to make direct contacts with clients and to supply on a direct order principle (Pearson and Hobbs 2001, pp. 51-2, 68-9; Pearson 2001, pp. 185-6). In this case, however, Robins appeared to pull all the strings and Alf was literally steered about. 'Around Christmas', Alf said, 'I was delivering drugs all over the place sometimes till the early hours of the morning... I was run off my feet'.

Family, Friendship and Global Conspiray: The 'Glocal'

'Organised crime' is often depicted as a 'transnational' entity, spreading its global tentacles far-and-wide. And yet, as argued elsewhere, in spite of the global reach of both licit and illicit economies and commodities in the modern world, organised crime in Britain remains rootedly local, embedded in the haunts of the immediate neighbourhood (or 'manor'), the fraternity of men growing up together in the same schools and pubs (the 'local'), inter-crossing kinship and the traditions of the 'family firm' (Hobbs 1998, 2001). A case study approach is particularly useful for illustrating these local dimensions.

Frank Robins and Alf had known each other since they were children, went to the same school together in Coketown, and played in the same football team. They were of roughly the same age, and Alf knew Robins' parents from a young age

and used to visit their house. Robins' mother had died some years ago since when his father had lived with his sister Mary, and Alf now had different reasons to visit the family home.

Alf would often collect drugs from Robins' father's house. He also described how Robins and his auntie Mary would dilute heroin with 'bash' (usually caffeine) in order to enhance his profits. When Robins obtained the heroin, Alf said that it was often 'rock hard' and first had to be broken down. It was then put through a sieve into 'tupperware' plastic boxes, and then mixed with quantities of the 'bash' using other familiar kitchen implements on the kitchen worktop. When the preparations had been finished, Alf would take the heroin to his own house to be stored awaiting delivery to customers.

There were other ways in which family and business intersected, involving different kinds of kinship link

Alf delivered heroin on a frequent basis to one of Robins' cousins, several ounces at a time. Robins also supplied parcels of amphetamine base to the uncle of a close associate. Some of the people with whom Alf dealt with, either as buyers or suppliers, also worked as part of a team with brothers or cousins. One of Robins' suppliers of ecstasy, known as 'Mad Eric', had a brother Cliff to whom Alf used to deliver drugs (cannabis and amphetamine) on a regular basis, meeting for this purpose in the car park of a local Toys R Us store. On another occasion, Alf was told to meet with Cliff and to collect drugs from a third party in a designated lay-by and to take them to an address unknown to Alf. Robins reassured Alf, 'It'll be OK. Cliff's Mad Eric's brother, there won't be no trouble'.

Alf's busy day thus often revolved around familiar locations and place names, the car parks of Pizza Hut, the Little Chef and Toys R Us, or local pubs such as the Merry Widow, the Craven Heffer, or the Lifeboat. The locations were frequently changed, however, and Alf would sometimes not know the people that he was

meeting, other than by sight. Indeed, sometimes Alf had received only a mobile phone message from Robins to meet someone driving a particular type of car, or with a distinguishing feature such as a tattoo over the left eye. So that Alf inhabited a hybrid universe of familiarity and subterfuge, the humdrum juxtaposed with exceptional risk, a global drug market enacted here at an extremely local level-- the 'glocal' (Hobbs 1998).

Cooperation and Conflict I: Business is Business

Drug markets are often depicted as extremely violent, prone to turf wars and prowled by vicious predators and hit-men. Violence is certainly always an available resource in crime networks of this kind, and we will describe how violence figured in Frank Robins' network in the following section. However, the general picture from our research into the 'middle market' is that violence is more commonly regarded as something to be avoided (Pearson and Hobbs 2001, pp. 41-47).

The intimidatory threat of violence in order to enforce contracts will always be there in an illicit economy without recourse to the law. Ultimately violence is a resource that ensures contract compliance, and is regarded principally as a means of ensuring that creditors do not default on debt. Where trust is fragile, violence is a valued attribute that is utilised to ensure that transactions are completed. Illegal enterprises are unable to turn to state agencies for protection (Reuter 1983), and criminals emerge as entrepreneurs of trust via the threat and utility of violence (Block 1983, pp. 235). But violence is bad for business, it leaves traces, attracts police attention as it is frequently regarded as a signifier of organised criminal activity (Hobbs 2002), and invariably leads to more violence.

Frank Robins was certainly not a man unaccustomed to violence. He had a local reputation as someone not to be crossed, and easy access to guns and ammunition. Indeed, on occasion Alf had been required to act as courier

collecting and delivering firearms between third parties. More typically, however, Robins' drugs brokerage network was one characterised by cooperation and harmony, run on strict business principles.

Alf described how on more than one occasion drugs had been sold to customers who were dissatisfied with their quality. On one of these, a batch of base amphetamine had been received from one of Robins' suppliers, S, a self-styled hard-man and body-builder known as Butch, that proved to be too 'runny' and was sent back. Alf had simply met up with two of Butch's 'lads' at a local pub and handed back more than 10 kilos of amphetamine paste with no questions asked. On another occasion, several thousand ecstasy tablets had been supplied to Robins that subsequently proved to be poor quality 'duds'. These had also been returned to the supplier, with the advice from Robins, 'I don't know where you got these from lad, but don't do any more business with the cunt, at least not if I'm in the frame'.

In addition to Robins, there was another major drug dealer in Coketown named Colin Percy, who operated in a very similar way to Robins and at a similar level in the market. Popular depictions of organised crime (and those by some enforcement agency sources) would make this a recipe for 'turf' conflicts and gangland warfare. However, both Robins and Percy were running profitable businesses, and as free-trading entrepreneurs found cooperation to be more congenial than conflict.

Alf described a number of ways in which Robins and Percy conducted their affairs. Percy had two men working for him, one named Wayne who occupied a similar role to Alf as Percy's main runner, the other Davey who lived in a house that was used as Percy's main 'safe house' for drug storage and Alf often picked up or dropped off large amounts of drugs there. Robins and Percy appeared to have different networks of suppliers, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. So that, although Robins bought the caffeine for his heroin 'bash'

from a man from Manchester, he sometimes found it more convenient to be supplied by Percy.

Alf and his 'twin' runner Wayne normally operated quite separately. 'What I did for Frank, Wayne did for Percy. We was the same', said Alf. However, Alf would sometimes deal directly with Percy on Robins' behalf and collect drugs from Percy's flat, or from Percy's mother's council house which Percy also used as a base, or from the main warehouse supervised by Davey. Alf also sometimes delivered drugs to one of Percy's addresses. On other occasions, however, the cooperation between Robins and Percy consisted not of fleeting trading relations such as these when one or other was short of drugs and needed a prompt supply. It was altogether more complex.

One morning Alf was told by Robins to follow one of Robins' associates T, who often arranged cannabis deals on Robins' behalf, to a location where he would pick up 30 kilos of cannabis from a man driving a white Ford van. The cannabis was handed over in a large bag at a pub car-park, whereupon T left. On his way home, Alf received a call from Robins to say that he should drop off 80 of the 9-ounce bars (20 kilos) at Percy's safe house, and pick up Wayne on his way there as he was also to visit Percy's mother's house after delivering the cannabis. This done, Alf and Wayne visited the mother's house and collected 2.5 kilos of heroin which Alf took to his own home for storage along with the remaining cannabis. The following day, Alf met Wayne at Percy's own house and picked up 1 kilo of cannabis bush for K a regular customer of Robins, and then re-visited the safe house where he collected £10,000 in cash that he later delivered to T in the evening. In the meantime, Alf had delivered the kilo of cannabis bush to the regular customer K at their usual meeting place.

Transactions such as these do not fit easily with notions of ruthless turf wars and the violence normally associated with organised crime. Nor do they imply that Robins and Percy were essentially part of the same 'firm'. Rather, they are the

actions of two busy entrepreneurs who at times, and as the occasion demanded, found it useful to cooperate in a series of linked exchanges of drugs and cash in order to supply a busy market place. Alf also pointed to the fact that many years before he had started working for Robins, there had been someone called Sammy who had done the same job as himself as a 'runner' for Robins but who had decided to branch out on his own . Rather than regarding this as betrayal, Robins still kept in touch with Sammy, and Alf had frequently supplied drugs to him on Robins' behalf --- at a price of course.

Cooperation and Conflict II: Violence and Business

As noted above, our research on middle market distribution found that although busy drug dealers tended to avoid violence, there was a ready recourse to violence and intimidation where necessary. There were three main types of violence.

The first was essentially external, and involved violent predators who found the members of drug dealing networks to be lucrative targets for robbery. This is because drug dealers, and those who work for them, will often have in their possession large amounts of cash and/or drugs. Drug dealers are not usually thought of as the victims of crime, but the phenomenon has also been noted by researchers in the USA (Jacobs 2000; Topalli et al. 2002).

A second type of violence is encountered when someone centrally placed in a local drug supply scene has been arrested and sent to prison. Sometimes, it is possible for the imprisoned individual to continue running his drug network from his prison cell by means of intermediaries. This was the case with one of Robins' customers to whom he supplied 4 to 5 kilos of cannabis and 2,000 Ecstasy tablets every couple of weeks, and who worked for a man who was in prison in the North East of England. When an imprisoned dealer is unable to keep control of his corner of the market, however, and this is taken over by someone else,

violence can ensue when he is released from prison and wants to re-take possession of his business. This kind of violence can be thought of as a form of middle market 'turf war'.

The third type of violence, which is probably the most common at this level of the market, involves kidnap and sometimes torture. It is essentially used as a means of debt enforcement, and probably occurs more often than is commonly realised - since drug debtors are unlikely to report such offences to the police.

In one instance known to Alf, Robins had used one of his 'henchmen' to kidnap someone who owed him money. It had not been a particularly serious debt, but Robins had felt that he could use it to his advantage since the person involved was locally known as a waster, someone vulnerable with few if any loyal friends. Without any 'back up', there was therefore little likelihood of any retaliation. The man had been kidnapped, and beaten, and submitted to a variety of humiliations. In the process, Polaroid photographs had been taken of him in these humiliating and degrading circumstances. These photographs were then shown around to local people, and those with whom Robins had dealings. At one level, it was all 'a bit of a laugh'. At another, the message was clear: 'This is what happens if you mess around with us'.

In the above example, the violence employed may seem merely gratuitous and sadistic. It did nevertheless serve a function as an intimidatory device in regulating the local drug market, ensuring that others would be less likely to step out of line, and reinforcing Frank Robins' reputation as a serious player. Indeed, if one takes into account both his capacity for the clinical use of violence and his demonstrated ability to cooperate effectively in stable trading relationships such as that with Percy and his associates, Robins would appear to be an exemplar of rational, if ruthless, calculation.

However, although 'rational actor' models of criminality have enjoyed some popularity (Cornish and Clarke 1986) as Jack Katz has reminded us in his book Seductions of Crime (1988), crime in its various manifestations is a sensual activity. That is to say, people 'get off on it'. Those involved in successful, lucrative criminal activity such as drug brokerage at this level develop a sense of exaggerated personal power and invulnerability. While some invest the profits of crime in 'rational' and 'sensible' ways-- Percy had bought a number of properties that he was doing up with the help of friends in the building trade-- they are as equally likely to spend money with abandon, in an 'easy come, easy go' manner of 'fast lane' conspicuous consumption (Shover and Honaker 1992; Hobbs 1995). So that while Robins, a married man who was officially on the dole, still lived a modest lifestyle in a council house, he also had a lavishly furnished house elsewhere where a girlfriend lived, and where he hoarded his collection of expensive 'laddish' toys such as flashy motorbikes and jet-skis.

It was, in fact, this sense of invulnerability and omnipotence that brought down Robins' drug business, when he was drawn into a foolish and unnecessary macho conflict with the part-owner of a local nightclub, with whom he had gone to school. Robins had visited this venue, 'Night Riders', and the owner had tried to throw him out saying that he did not want 'trash' in his club. It was probably a conflict that started in the playground, and Robins threatened revenge. A few days later one of the doormen of the club was shot in the legs, and in the ensuing pandemonium with the police on the alert and informants eagerly touting their wares, one of Robins' associates was identified as the gunman. Subsequently, his 'empire' collapsed like a house of cards.

Conclusions: Complexity and Order

There are a number of points of interest to be drawn from this case study, with potential importance for law enforcement efforts. Quite obviously, what we have described is not usefully characterised as a hierarchical, 'mafia' type of organised

crime. Rather, it conforms more closely to the small, flexible networks and partnerships of free-trading entrepreneurs described by Reuter and Haaga (1989) in their study of high-level drug markets in the U.S.A.

We do not claim that this case study describes a 'typical' form of middle market multi-commodity drug distribution network, although we did identify directly similar forms of operation in different parts of Britain. One important form of variant is where operations of a similar scale had 'leap-frogged' across the supposedly normal hierarchy of importation-wholesale-middle market-retail, and had linked up with warehousing systems in Continental Europe and were using their own transport systems to import drugs, typically from Belgium and the Netherlands (Pearson and Hobbs 2001, pp. 62, 66, 69-70). In this case, however, the Coketown drug brokerage networks appeared to be buying exclusively from wholesale distributors based on the British mainland who would either have imported drugs themselves or bought direct from importers and/or their agents and middle-men.

Most striking is the fact that although the vertical structure of drug markets (that is, what are usually described as 'pyramids') often seems quite simple and 'flat', with a small number of links in the chain from importation to the level of retail purchase by consumers, what we see here is a massive amount of horizontal complexity. That is to say, a large number of financial transactions, drug exchanges and connected networks, albeit organised around a small number of key personnel.

We suggest that it is convenient to think of those who operate at this level as drug brokers-- that is between wholesalers and retail dealers-- as occupying a vital part of the 'middle market', connecting upper-level traffickers with retail outlets. It is also important that they operate as multi-commodity brokers, whereas both upper-level traffickers and wholesalers and lower-level retailers

will often (although not always) deal in single commodities, and certainly in a smaller range of commodities.

This point about the range of commodities in which people trade at different levels of the market is somewhat contentious, with enforcement agencies sometimes arguing that there is a trend towards upper-level traffickers dealing across the range of commodities, and importation involving 'cocktail' loads of many different drugs.

Through Alf's testimony it is possible to be precise about the kinds of people to whom he was supplying and delivering drugs, and the types of drug network they were themselves involved in. These would nearly always be people operating as retail-outlet dealers, either single-handed or as a small team. One can infer this from the quantities of drugs that they were purchasing on a regular basis. It is also notable that they tended to be single commodity purchasers, or purchasers in a narrow range. For example: an ounce of heroin every day or so; a few kilos of cannabis every few weeks; a few thousand Ecstasy tablets every two weeks; a kilo of amphetamine every fortnight; a few kilos of cannabis and 1,000 Ecstasy tablets every couple of weeks; etc.

Not only were Robins' customers buying a limited range of commodities, these were also invariably repeat-trade customers, buying the kinds of quantities of drugs that a retail dealer could handle. On those occasions when quantities of drugs were delivered on Robins' instructions to people whom Alf had not met before and would not meet again, it is reasonable to assume that these were either acting as agents/couriers for retail dealers already known to Robins, or for other drug brokers who were temporarily short of a particular type of drug to supply their own customers. It is highly unlikely that Robins would have authorised Alf to hand over valuable quantities of drugs to people unknown to him.

It is not possible to be so precise, however, about the sources of the drugs that he collected on the instructions of his employer. In other words, whether the supply-side of this drug brokerage network was as stable and consistent as dominant elements of its demand-side. Cannabis purchases appear to have been arranged through an intermediary, and it is possible that neither Alf nor his employer knew the source. Amphetamine base was nearly always supplied by the same source, however, whereas Ecstasy tablets seemed to have come from several sources-- although it is possible that this was the same source employing different couriers. Subsequently, Alf did collect Es on a regular basis from one source of supply, and an alternative interpretation is that prior to this Robins was dependent on several suppliers either because (a) the Ecstasy markets was unstable and chaotic; or (b) it was highly competitive in terms of price, and he could afford to shop around; or (c) his previous supplier had gone out of business and he needed to depend on a variety of sources until he could re-establish a stable source of supply.

The over-riding impression given by this network of drug brokerage activities, in spite of its horizontal complexity, is that of order, stability and trust. This appeared to be the case across the board of the customer and supplier base, but in particular exemplified through the stable and cooperative links with the directly comparable network operating in the same town. This network, according to the logic of 'turf wars' and a tendency towards 'monopolisation' in 'organised crime', might be thought of as a direct competitor. Cooperation, however, clearly offered more mutual benefits than conflict. Cooperation might, for example, offer economies of scale in the form of quantity discounts when the two collaborated in purchasing drugs. It was also noticeable that, when one was short of particular drug supplies, the other did not attempt to jump in and 'corner the market'; rather they traded drugs between each other according to availability and need. Perhaps the over-riding consideration is that the market was big enough to allow both of them to prosper; a declining market might lead to something different. But this in itself suggests that market conflict and violence is a consequence not

of expansion and success in organised crime, as is so often supposed, but a symptom of failure, disorganisation, market dysfunction and instability occurring when competitiveness is threatened by the breaking down of established systems of trust (Gambetta 1988; Reuter 1983; Lupsha 1986).

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