CARD CROKS CAUGHT IN CANNES

British fraudster lived jetset lifestyle as he ran smuggling operation

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John Coxton, 41, from London, and Marshall Aashtar, 32, from Essex, were caught with ‘cloned’ bank cards which they used to buy massive quantities of cigarettes destined for the black market in Britain.

Coxton, believed to be the ring-leader, has been living a “jetset lifestyle” since arriving on the Riviera in April.

Local police were tipped off by a French bank in early October after cigarettes worth €20,000 were bought with a fraudulent bank card.

Then last week Aashtar was arrested in a Cannes tobacconist while trying to buy more. He had come specially from Britain to pick up the contraband and take it back to sell on the black market. Soon afterwards Coxton was arrested at his luxury apartment in the town’s desirable La Croix-des-Gardes district.

A Range Rover and a top-of-the-range BMW were found parked outside. Both had been stolen in the UK and had false number plates.

The men are now in Grasse Prison, facing fraud charges after they were found with no less than 40 counterfeit cards between them.

Commissaire François Farinelli, head of the Cannes SIR, the police special investigations unit, said “I received a phone call from a bank, and then from the tabac where Aashtar was arrested. Coxton was the chief of the business here.

“He paid for his lavish lifestyle – taking helicopters to Monaco and St Tropez and staying in top hotels in Paris and other places – with fake cards.”

French bank cards use ultra-secure smart card technology – card holders simply punch in their pin number to authorise a purchase. Foreign cards are processed by swiping the much-less secure magnetic stripe. One card fraud expert told The Riviera Gazette how a ‘mag stripe’ bank card can be copied using equipment freely available on the internet and a card made from a cereal packet and a length of video tape.

But police sources say the cards found on the two men were well made fakes and related to real accounts belonging to individuals in the UK.

The case is being handed over to police in Nice, who will continue their investigations in the UK.

Commissaire Farinelli told The Riviera Gazette “Cigarette trafficking to the UK is big business, and this is only a drop in the ocean.

“We believe there is a highly professional and organised structure in the UK making fake bank cards and then sending people to France and other countries to use them.”

Do you know anything about these men? Please contact the SIR in Cannes on 04 93 06 22 22.

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REMEMBRANCE Sunday was observed all over the region last weekend.

At Holy Trinity Church in Cannes, members of the local branch of The Royal British Legion turned out to remember those that gave their lives for their country.

Old soldiers from Britain were joined by former French freedom fighters, including Monsieur Brault, a decorated war hero who joined General DeGaulle’s Free French movement in June 1940, and fought in the special forces with the Special Operations Executive – the forerunner of the SAS.

“‘I was parachuted into France twice to help the resistance’ said the war veteran, whose medals include a Croix de Guerre and the Légion d’Honneur, the highest award given by France.

Then on Monday, the British Legion was represented at a remembrance ceremony in Mougin by flag-bearer Peter Durlacher and Colonel David Alexander, who laid a wreath at the war memorial.

Cannes’ branch of the British Legion, a charity which safeguards the welfare, interests and memory of those who’ve served in the armed forces, is keen to recruit new members.

“‘You need not have military connections to join,’ said Peter Durlacher, ‘and we offer a social programme that includes two or three lunches each year, as well as a couple of interesting expeditions.

‘Last year we toured Europe’s biggest military base, and we’ve got something exciting lined up soon, again on a military theme, that I can’t quite talk about yet.’

Find out more by calling Brian Harris on 04 93 64 29 79.

BMW shootout

TWO crooks carjacked a BMW in Valbonne last week, threatening the owner at gunpoint.

Later the same day the pair were stopped by police in Le Cannet but, after firing at the cops, ran off into the woods. They then attempted another carjack and Mandelieu police took up the chase, only to abandon it after being shot at 15 times.

“These two dangerous criminals are still at large and we are actively looking for them,” Le Cannet police told The Riviera Gazette.

Security alert

FRENCH Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy has called on people to be on their guard for potential terrorist activity this week.

The warning comes as both the UK and France went on Red Alert amongst fears there is a very real threat of a terrorist attack.

Locally, security at Nice airport and at cruise ship ports has been tightened.

France woos UK

THE French government is in talks with UK Treasury officials in a bid to persuade Britain to join the Euro.

France believes getting the UK into the Euro zone will strengthen the currency, and is prepared to sweeten the pill by offering an advantageous Sterling-Euro conversion rate.

Booted out

FRENCH antique dealers and licensed second-hand traders want vide-greniers banned.

Car boot sales have been infiltrated by professionals, they say, who have no overheads and are undermining legally registered traders’ business.
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**Aussie filmmaker visits Valbonne**

VALBONNE’S Festival of Australian Cinema featured a special guest appearance from the continent’s first indigenous filmmaker, reports Alison Coadock.

Wayne Jowandi Barker, a renowned Aboriginal cinematographer and musician, presented a short biographical film and gave a didgeridoo recital after Saturday’s screening of the award-winning film *Lantana*.

The Valbonne-based film appreciation group ‘Les Visiteurs du Soir’ features a different country for its festival each year. Australia is yet to be chosen, but India and South America are both hot favourites at the moment.

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AMBADASSADOR — Wayne Jawandi Barker, Australian film maker, with Marc Latouche, president of Festival organiseurs Les Visiteurs du Soir

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**Riviera Gazette**

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**Xmas airport strike threat**

CO-ORDINATED strike action by firefighters and security staff at major UK airports could cause travel chaos for Riviera residents and their UK-based families hoping to get together for the festive season.

Airport workers are set to strike on Thursday November 28, Monday December 2, Tuesday 10, Sunday 15, Monday 23 and Thursday January 2.

Each day of action will run from 6am to 6pm. Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted will be worst hit, with Southampton, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh airports targeted too.

Services from Nice to Luton, Liverpool, Bristol and East Midlands should be largely unaffected by the action, although they could suffer knock-on effects as aircraft and crews have to be re-positioned away from the strike bound airports.

Andrew Dodgson, spokesman for the Transport and General Workers Union, told *The Riviera Gazette* “Airport fire and security staff have had a huge work burden since September 11th. The British Airports Authority pays our members very poorly and we hope to negotiate a decent rate of pay. “ Airlines will have to close without firefighters or people to perform security checks,” he continued. But BAA claims pay rates are “actually very competitive” and said “We are very disappointed by the threat of strike action but we are hoping to resolve it. We are optimistic that we can keep the airports open.”

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**Stealth cops to get on their bikes**

MENTON’S gendarmes have come up with a plan to tackle night crime with bicycles, writes Jenny Paul.

Officers equipped with mountain bikes and infra-red night vision goggles – as used by the SAS – will sneak silently around the town during the crime-prone early hours.

The idea comes from the town’s Gendarme Capitaine, who wants to address the growing night time crime problem.

He contends that the bicycle-borne crime-fighters will be more stealthy and alert than their colleagues in patrol cars.

“It would be an excellent solution to the problem we have with burglars and other wrong-doers” said a Menton Gendarmerie spokesman.

If given the go ahead, the scheme will cost €17,000.

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**Vice workers face street restrictions**

**Nicé** mayor Jacques Peyrat has revealed a plan to limit the areas in which the town’s street walkers can tout for business.

The ladies of the night will only be allowed to work on specific streets at specific times.

Sarah Long, who lives in Nice, told *The Riviera Gazette* “I feel intimidated by them. When walking on my own, I worry that kerb crawlers may try to approach me.” But one vice girl, known just as Tallyah, told *The Riviera Gazette* “I’m really upset by this, I won’t be able to work on the Promenade des Anglais during the day, and will be forced into the hard-to-find Avenue Gattammara instead.”

The new restraints will become law “before the end of the year” according to Peyrat.
Prisoner’s claims halt murder case

THE surprise testimony of a prison inmate has halted the trial of an Antibes man charged with the murder of three people, reports Andrew Campbell.

Sixty-year-old formeruer Michel Pinneteau and his wife, Joselle, 45, appeared in court last Monday in connection with the grisly killings of two men and a woman in February 1999.

The decapitated and dismembered bodies of the victims, two of whom were known drug traffickers, were found weeks later by road workers near Toucon in the Esteron.

Pinneteau had known one of his alleged victims, 50-year-old Ben Mohitar, for thirty years.

After convict Laurent Romeo made his testimony, court officials immediately moved that the case be adjourned whilst the examining magistrate studied the statement.

Romeo’s statement alleges corruption by local officials and makes mention of six million francs changing hands “between friends”.

Defence lawyer Eric Dupond-Moretti told the court Romeo is ready to identify four people he claims are connected to the killings.

Moretti told the court Romeo is “ready to identify four people from the top of the van”.

The man who emerged had been found unable to carry on.

The 68-year-old King has a home in the town, from where he frequently tours the countryside on his bike.

A ROUTINE inspection by motorway police last week led to the discovery of ten illegal immigrants hidden on the roof of a van, reports Susannah Hickling.

When gardaínes patrolling the A8 near Saint-Maximin in the Var stopped an Italian-registered van carrying large rolls of bamboo fencing on its roofrack, they thought they were dealing with a simple case of a grossly overloaded vehicle.

“We were questioning the driver,” said a police spokesman, “when one of the squad saw a man climb down from the top of the van.”

What police found next was a graphic illustration of the extreme lengths to which migrants will go to reach the destination of their dreams.

Hidden inside four rolls of fencing were ten Moroccan men, lying inside what can only be described as coffins. Each of the two-metre-long fence rolls was hollow, the shape held in place by a metal frame.

Incredibly, inside each were two men lying head-to-toe. Their travel needs were served only by a small bottle of water and a nappy.

A police spokesman described the conditions as “inhuman” and “sordid”.

The decision to be sent back to Morocco.

A van’s driver, Abdessamad Mackchad, appeared before the criminal court in Draguignan last Thursday. Under a fast-track procedure used for clear-cut cases, he was sentenced to five years in prison.

Winter of discontent

A SERIES of industrial disputes is set to herald a winter of discontent. In addition to road blockades planned by truckers for four to five weeks from November 22, electricity and gas workers are set to strike today. Public sector workers including France Telecom staff, postmen and train drivers will demonstrate on November 26. Local public officials are planning a national strike on December 5 and education workers and parents are staging a national rally on December 8.

Truant alert

A NEW initiative to stop truancy is on trial at four schools in the Var and the Alpes-Maritimes.

The schools have installed a computer system which sends text messages to parents’ mobile phones if their children don’t turn up to school.

The scheme has proved popular with both teachers and parents. Pupils are not so happy, however. “What about the kids whose parents haven’t got mobile phones? Those children are able to run riot and do as they please. It’s not fair,” said one disgruntled local pupil.

New heliports

ST TROPEZ is to get its new helicopter ports in time for next summer.

The move follows concerns over the number of helicopters setting down in unauthorised landing spots.

Royal pain

KING Albert II of Belgium broke his ankle in a motorbike accident near Châteauneuf-de-Grasse last week.

The 68-year-old King has a home in the town, from where he frequently tours the countryside on his bike.

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The Riviera Gazette Thursday 14 November 2002
Hall how a ‘why not?’ turned into a mission to educate... 

...and bring professional actors to the local inter-profit association and we don’t get any different things. We’ve done Shakespeare, buoyancy to keep things going. Company performing George of the Royal Shakespeare Riviera? ’Would you like to come to the French did a lot of research and called actors, ask — was scary as hell to hear myself say that! I been doing in Hong Kong and Tokyo, it going to run a theatre group in the south of what was next, I’d say, very confidently, ‘I’m there, so I asked,’Do you rent out your the — and said, ‘Pourquoi pas?’ Just like that. 

Back in Hong Kong when people asked what was next, I’d say, very confidently, I’m going to run a theatre group in the south of France. Even though this was what I’d been doing in Hong Kong and Tokyo, it was scary as hell to hear myself say that! I’d done a lot of research and called actors, asking...
Local roads
- The RN7 is closed on the Longueville to Villefranche sector and the RD103 from Biot to Nice. Apartments are in the village centre until Dec 19.
- Villeneuve-Loubet: Long-term
- Delays at Pont Saint Jean until Dec 20, and on the Quai des Etats from Nov 27 to Dec 20, 2003.
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- VINTAGE Fri 04:15
- CALLAS FOREVER Fri 19:30
- A BEAUTIFUL MIND Fri 00:00
- SPOOKY Tuesday 14 November 2002

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**CONFIDENTIALITY**

- In case of any doubt as to the identity of a person seeking to publish a free offer, please apply to the Editor. Payment due on publication. Free offers will be published in first available issue. In addition, Midweek Tuesday
Thursday 14

- Tennis fans can see heroes of yesterday in action at the Grimaldi Forum from Monday 17 to Friday 21. Novak Djokovic and ten-time Monte-Carlo winner Pete Sampras will be making an appearance. For ticket details call 04 92 97 49 65.

- The Grande Braderie de Monte-Carlo opens at Place Fontvieille today until Saturday, with stalls selling pre-Christmas fare. Free entry, from 10am to 9pm daily.

- The Théâtre de la Cité Performs at the Théâtre de la Cité, Villeneuve-Loubet until Nov 17. Call 04 93 93 82 69 for tickets.

Friday 15

- Red Pear Theatre presents An Evening of Romantic Opera and Songs with tenor Justin Lavender (Royal Opera, La Scala), Glyndebourne and mezzo soprano Louise Coindre at the Athènes theatre, Antibes, tonight and Saturday. Tickets are €23 from 04 93 63 01 71. See also ‘MY Riviera’, page 6.

- Ready for a show high in colour, fun and poetry? A hugely rare French comedy musical La Rue looks at famous figures in France during the first half of the 20th century, and is on at the Salle des Fetes de Valbonne at 8.30pm. Call 04 93 12 90 92 for tickets.

- Foodies will love the Saveurs et Terroirs de la Méditerranée food market this weekend at the Palais des Congrès Europa, Mandelieu-La Napoule. Grab Christmas goodies from fresh walnuts, paté and fine wines to aperitifs at producer prices. From 10am to 9pm today and Saturday, 10am to 7pm on Sunday. Entry is €5.

- The Baroque en Musique season continues in Nice tonight with a Marins Maritimes performance at the Chapelle du St Sauveur at 8.30pm and 9.45pm. Tickets start at €9, call 06 03 37 36 28 or 06 03 37 36 49 to book.

- Monaco plays Aix-en-Provence in a French league division 1 football match at 8pm tonight at the Stade Louis-II. Monaco call 06 97 95 37 54 for tickets.

- Continuing today are the Toddler Legends of Monte-Carlo tennis tournament, the Tour de Rhum, the Grande Braderie de Monte-Carlo and the Festival des Arts Russes.

Saturday 16

- Cagnes-sur-Mer hosts its Chestnut Festival today in Place de Gaulle. Enjoy roasted chestnuts and other products, plus local folklore entertainment.

- The Rallye Historique du Haut-Pays takes place this weekend with historic cars touring along Nizza Promenade des Anglais at 1pm today, before heading into the hills.

- The 4th No Finish Line charity run, in aid of children’s charities, begins today and continues until Nov 24 from Monaco’s Port Hercule. Call 09 93 19 96 00 to join in.

- The South African Club are on a mushroom hunt today near Lés Adrets de l’Esterel. Call Judith Kraly on 06 15 35 50 30 to go along.

- Spend today on a farm in Tourrettes-sur-Loup, where local folklore and food is on offer. Local produce, olives, honey and other items at the farmers’ market in Valbonne town centre from 11am to 5pm today.

- The regular second hand goods and craft market takes place today in Boudent-sur-Mer’s Port de Plaisance.

- Continuing today are the Toddler Legends of Monte-Carlo tennis tournament, Saveurs et Terroirs de la Méditerranée, the Tour de Rhum, the Rallye Historique du Haut-Pays, No Finish Line and the Festival des Arts Russes.

What’s On and Where To Go...

The Riviera This Week

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Rates and data available on request.

The world’s top long distance runners will be on the Côte d’Azur for the Monaco marathon today. The route follows the coast from Monaco through Menton, to Ventimiglia and back. 1,700 runners will take part. Register at Marathon Village at the Stade Louis-II or at the jogger shop, 33 rue Girod, Nice. The race starts at 9.30am.

Monday 18

- Monaco’s Fête National takes place today and tomorrow with events celebrating the principality’s heritage. Highlights include the changing of the guard ceremony at the Palace at 11.30am tomorrow. Call +377 92 16 01 11 for a full programme.

- Continuing today are No Finish Line and the Festival des Arts Russes.

Tuesday 19

- The British Chamber of Commerce meets for lunch today at La Bonne Auberge, Le Hermitage des Marsas at 12.30. Tickets cost €32. To book or to find out more about the association, call Sehyny Glock on 04 94 47 06 28.

- Continuing today are No Finish Line and the Festival des Arts Russes.

Wednesday 20

- The Vard branch of the British Association meets for lunch today at La Bonne Auberge, Le Hermitage des Marsas at 12.30. Tickets cost €32. To book or to find out more about the association, call Sehyny Glock on 04 94 47 06 28.

- Tickets go on sale on Monday, Nov 18 for the not-to-be-missed Christmas pantomime performances by the Drama Group of Monaco at the Salle des Varettes, Monaco. This year’s production is The Quest for the Golden Haggis. Call 06 83 37 36 24 or 06 83 37 36 49 to book your tickets before they sell out!

The rallye historique du haut pays takes place today, starting at 9am from Monte-Carlo’s Port Hercule. Further stops along the coast include the french league division one match between Nice and Monaco at Stade Louis II, and the Formula 1 Grand Prix of Monaco. Both events are hosted at the circuit de Monaco. For more information, call 04 93 09 66 43.

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