

Prison sniffer dogs detect drugs hidden in fake legal documents

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An elaborate plot to beat security at London's largest prison using fake solicitor's letters to smuggle drugs has been foiled by guards.

Two inmates at Wandsworth prison were sent "Rule 39" packages – which can only be searched in exceptional circumstances under rules to protect confidentiality between inmates and their solicitors – bearing the stamp of a well-known legal firm.

Prison officers at the jail became suspicious of the correspondence when dogs trained in drugs detection indicated the presence of drugs in the two packages. They were opened and both contained letters on headed notepaper from the same firm of solicitors, together with a plastic laminated enclosure.

Security staff found the laminated covers contained carbon paper-wrapped packages containing drugs – believed to be herbal cannabis – and SIM cards. The carbon paper was a sophisticated attempt to evade detection by X-ray equipment.

A source told the Standard: "This was a well-planned and elaborate attempt to use legal correspondence to smuggle drugs into a prison.

"Hard drugs are the scourge of the prison system and some inmates will try anything to get them inside as they are worth a fortune on the jail market. The dealers on the outside obviously thought the packages would go through because they were covered by legal privilege, but they forgot about the dogs.

"Once they had indicated the presence of drugs, prison officers had the right to open them. Then the game was up."

The headed notepaper is believed to have been stolen from a reputable London-based firm of solicitors.

An investigation has been launched and the Ministry of Justice is so concerned it has sent a warning to prison governors in jails across England and Wales.

The smuggling took place in the summer and follows similar attempts to evade security at Home House jail in Stockton-on-Tees.

A Prison Service spokeswoman confirmed that the plot had been foiled. She added: "This find is an excellent example of how vigilant staff can disrupt the supply of drugs and mobile phones into prison.

"Prison security procedures are rigorous, dynamic and intelligence-led. Governors deploy a comprehensive range of robust search techniques and security measures on everything entering prisons, including mail."

Recent inmates at Wandsworth, a Victorian-era jail housing 1,600 people, include Julian Assange, the man behind WikiLeaks, and David Chaytor, the first MP to be convicted in the expenses scandal and Charlie Gilmour, the 21-year-old former public schoolboy jailed over the student riots.

Crooked solicitor caught smuggling phone and drugs into prison in an oversized pair of Size 12 shoes

A crooked solicitor who smuggled drugs and mobile phones into two prisons by hiding them in his oversized shoes is facing years behind bars.

Ritesh Brahmhatt, 31, was caught out by sniffer dogs as he entered north London's Pentonville jail in size 12, wide-fitting shoes stuffed with contraband.

A search found that he was carrying three-inch packages containing skunk, the illegal stimulant 'meow meow' and even electronic scales in his slip-ons.

The lawyer was planning to pass the items to inmate David Sterling, 28, who was wearing a full-length Muslim robe.

Blackfriars Crown Court had heard how the black, metal-buckled slip-ons three sizes too big for Brahmhatt were purchased just days before in a branch of High and Mighty, which specialises in outsize menswear.

Brahmhatt, who is currently suspended by the Solicitors' Regulation Authority, admitted two plots between March 1 and September 17, 2009.

He also admitted a further charge of conveying a mobile phone into Winchester prison while on bail for those offences, on February 2 this year.

Jurors heard evidence he had been planning another smuggling operation just five months after he was caught the first time, and returned to the same shop to put in an order for more massive shoes.

Prison officer Lucy McLaren noticed Brahmhatt's suspiciously high number of legal visits to Sterling and arranged a surprise sniffer dog operation.

Ms McLaren said: 'He came up the stairs towards and looked shocked to see we were doing a search as they would normally be done out-of-hours.

'I told him we were going to be conducting a dog search on all visitors and there would be a slight delay.

'He went very pale and started to pat his jacket pockets as though he'd forgotten something.'

The handlers told the officer both dogs had given their signal that he 'had been near or was in possession of a controlled substance'.

She said that when she told Brahmhatt he was embarrassed:

She said: 'He asked me to close the door so that none of his colleagues could see that he was being held.

'Mr Brahmhatt at first didn't want to remove his shoes,

'However eventually he took them off. There were two packages inside his shoes.

His right shoes held a clingfilm package containing a mobile phone, earphones and accessories, a pair of electronic scales and a small quantity of mephedrone, commonly known as meow meow.

A second package containing 25g of skunk cannabis was found in his left shoe.

Officers also found 27g of skunk and 53g of cannabis in his trousers.

Prisoner Desmond Brown, 26, his girlfriend Danielle Porter, 24, and 26-year-old Calvin Chance were involved with the operation alongside Sterling and Brahmhatt.

Nearly £20,000 passed through bank accounts belonging to Brahmhatt, Porter, and two others before the racket was smashed.

Rufuz D'Cruz, prosecuting, said: 'Ritesh Brahmhatt entered into a crude criminal conspiracy to smuggle prohibited items into prison with his clients, Sterling and Brown, who at that time were serving prisoners, and Chance and Porter.

‘Over that six month period in 2009, Brahmbhatt, Chance and Porter worked on the outside, covertly conveying into prison drugs, mobile phones and mobile phone parts, during the course of a series of visits to both Sterling and Brown.’

Brahmbhatt who worked for Holloway law firm Mordi and Co, had ‘abused his position of trust’ as a lawyer to use legal visits to bring in items in return for cash bungs.

Sterling and Brown, Bromley-by-Bow, east London, Porter, of, Barking, Essex, and Chance, Leytonstone, east London, all denied two charges of conspiracy to convey articles including drugs, mobile phones and components into prison and were unanimously convicted.

Brahmbhatt, of Ilford, admitted two conspiracies, each relating to drugs and phones, in to prison, and a further charge of conveying a mobile phone into Winchester prison.

They are all awaiting sentencing.