

# Drug dealer tried to call Howard as trial witness

by Martin Bright  
and Pete Sawyer

AS HE walked away from HMP Kirkham, an open prison just outside Preston last Thursday morning, Simon Bakerman looked for all the world like any other anonymous ex-con taking his first steps of freedom. In fact, Bakerman, who had spent just over a year in jail for running an amphetamine factory at a Liverpool warehouse, is a cousin of the new Tory leader Michael Howard.

In an extraordinary coincidence, he was released just hours before Howard's 'coronation' as the official leader of the opposition. His emergence into the light is set to cause deep embarrassment to the former Conservative Home Secretary.

Howard's connection with Bakerman has dogged the senior Conservative politician since 1996, when he authorised a royal pardon for two Liverpool heroin smugglers, John Haase and Paul Bennett. The two men were released after just months of an 18-year-sentence after customs officers from Merseyside contacted their trial judge saying the two men had provided useful information about drugs and arms caches. The judge, David Lynch, then took the extraordinary step of writing to Howard as Home Secretary to ask the queen to use the royal prerogative to release the men.

Bakerman, already a known drug dealer, was an associate of Haase and Bennett and boasted of his relationship with his more famous cousin. He even carried a photograph of Howard in his wallet. His mother, Freda Bakerman, told reporters at the time that Howard would drop in for tea on his way to watch Liverpool FC at nearby Anfield.

Liverpool MPs have been calling for an inquiry into Howard's decision to pardon Haase and Bennett, who continued their criminal activities in Liverpool. The information they supplied to Customs

about hoards of drugs and over 150 weapons, including Armalite and Kalashnikov machine guns was later found to be entirely spurious. Merseyside Police now believe Customs, the trial judge and Howard himself were duped by an elaborate plot by Haase and Bennett, who arranged for the drugs and guns to be planted where the authorities could find them.

In 2001 the Treasury Minister responsible for Customs, Dawn Primarolo, answered a question about Haase and Bennett from Liverpool Walton MP Peter Kilfoyle. Her response suggested that Haase and Bennett had not turned out to be useful to the authorities. 'The persons named have not given evidence in any Customs prose-

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cution,' she said. 'As a result of a joint customs/police investigation John Haase is now serving 13 years for his part in a conspiracy to supply drugs and guns. No further investigations are planned. It is not policy to confirm or deny whether any person is or has been an informant.'

An *Observer* investigation can reveal that Haase, now in Full Sutton high-security prison, tried to call Howard as a witness in his 2000 trial for firearms, drugs and money laundering offences.

Documents seen by *The Observer* confirm that Haase discussed Bakerman with his barrister, Lord Carlile QC. In a letter written to Haase in December 2000, Carlile says his client believed there had been a conspiracy involving Michael Howard, customs and police. 'Michael Howard's involvement is not wholly clear from your instructions,

but apparently includes his alleged connection with a supposed relative of his who has a criminal record.' Carlile said he would resign as Haase's barrister if he continued to insist that there had been a conspiracy: 'In my professional judgment there is absolutely no basis of evidence and therefore no reasonable grounds to justify the Michael Howard conspiracy allegation.'

Haase wrote back to Lord Carlile denying he suggested there had been a conspiracy and that he just wanted Howard to explain his extraordinary decision in 1996.

After Haase and Bennett's arrest in 1993 the customs officer in charge of the investigation, Paul Cook, was approached by their solicitor Tony Nelson, who suggested that in return for their providing information, Customs would undertake to bring any help they gave to the notice of the trial judge, so that they could seek a reduced sentence.

In January 1994 Haase and Bennett were registered as confidential informants by Customs and Excise. A meeting took place between Cook, Nelson, Haase and Bennett at which the two men discussed what information they could give. Cook promised to return with a 'shopping list'.

In February 1995 Haase pleaded guilty to supplying heroin and in August 1995 Cook wrote to the judge explaining the assistance given by the two men. He stated: 'The number of arrests made do not do justice to the quality of the information given by these defendants.'

However, in August 1998, because of the continuing interest in Haase and Bennett, Cook was directed by his senior manager, Steve Rowton, to have no further dealings with them or their representatives. Rowton wrote: 'As you know there is a sustained political interest in the activities of Haase and Bennett. In order to safeguard our position we must maintain our distance.' The two men had become an embarrassment.