

## **RONALD PRIESTLEY** **1994 to date**

Yorkshireman Ronald Priestley first came to the attention of the law in the 1940s. He moved into counterfeiting big-time when it started to become seriously profitable, and has convictions for the production and sale of counterfeit goods dating back to 1994.

More recently, police raids on his home and factories near Huddersfield netted hundreds of thousands of bottles of fake fragrances and Spanish sparkling wine, re-labelled as Champagne, leading to a conviction in 2002 for conspiracy to sell counterfeits, at Bradford Crown Court.

A confiscation order was made under the Proceeds of Crime Act to recover £2.2 million, the criminal benefit he was found to have gained from making and trading in fakes. He appealed unsuccessfully against that order, but succeeded in getting his prison sentence reduced and was released early from prison.

When the time was allowed to pay the confiscation order elapsed and receivers were appointed to realise his assets, it was realised that, in order to generate sufficient funds, Priestley had resorted to forging £20 notes, in a massive operation across the country, with two accomplices.

Thousands of pounds were spent on equipment and premises in Birmingham to get the operation off the ground. They bought top-of-the-range printers, scanners, guillotines and inks to produce the highly sophisticated fake notes.

Priestley was arrested in the Midlands on June 29, 2004 after a painstaking investigation by West Yorkshire police, whose searches found £8million-worth of fake bank notes.

Priestley was granted bail and absconded in August 2005, while awaiting trial. In his absence, in February 2006, a jury at Leeds Crown Court returned a unanimous guilty verdict against him for conspiracy to produce counterfeit notes. The judge sentenced him to eight years' imprisonment.

Now 69, he was re-arrested in Spain in October this year (2009), as one of the targets of Operation Captura, a joint Police/Crimestoppers initiative to identify UK criminals on the run there. The Serious Organised Crime Agency worked closely with Spanish law enforcement and the British Embassy to follow up on the identifications, and Priestley was the 25th to be captured out of 50 wanted men.

Officers from West Yorkshire Police's money-laundering team brought Priestley back to England on October 22 2009 and - in addition to his original sentence - he has been sentenced to a further 32 weeks in prison for failing to appear in court. He is also due to be penalised for failing to pay the confiscation order.