

Michael Nicholas "Mickel" Hurley

Lisa Davies, January 23, 2007

Michael Nicholas Hurley began his criminal life stealing chickens and selling them for \$1. Yet when the so-called "head honcho" of Sydney crime died from cancer on Tuesday, he was a man about whom much was suspected but little was proven.

Hurley, 61, succumbed to bone cancer in a Sydney hospital with his fiancée Genevieve Mullins and family at his bedside.

He was due to face a District Court trial next month accused of heading one of Australia's biggest cocaine importations.

Police alleged he and a co-accused paid corrupt baggage handlers to ensure 30kg got through Sydney airport from Argentina. Hurley denied the charge, along with the tag he has carried since the Wood Royal Commission into NSW Police – that he was Sydney crime's "head honcho". Friends and acquaintances – and indeed Hurley – instead portrayed him as Sydney's Robin Hood.

NSW Police sources have long believed he had well-connected contacts within the force who tipped him off when investigators got too close. Indeed, police allege Hurley was told by a source that a member of the syndicate known as "Tom" had been wearing a wire and was informing the Crime Commission of the group's activities.

Hurley and his co-accused fled just before police swooped, arresting more than 20 people allegedly embroiled in the drugs cartel in May 2005. Hurley was the one authorities wanted most and looked far and wide before arresting him eight months later in his own backyard in Pyrmont. His co-accused was arrested last November and is awaiting trial.

Hurley's solicitor Ben Archbold said it had only been in recent days that authorities agreed to grant his client bail when his matter returned to court on February 2.

Mickel, as he was known around his favourite haunts like The Kirk and the Pyrmont Bridge Hotel, has two sons and two daughters. Due to his illness, one of his daughters had brought forward her March wedding in the hope her father could be present.

The NSW Crime Commission believed Hurley's "gang" was involved in a "wide range of criminal activities, ranging from importing prohibited drugs, armed robberies, large-scale thefts and money laundering". He was jailed for perverting the course of justice after trying unsuccessfully to have seafood identity George Costi lie to the Crime Commission about their financial dealings.

But Hurley, who started working on inner-Sydney wharves at 14, had long claimed he was just a simple rubbish collector who was lucky enough to win the lottery twice.