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Caught after 30 years: the man who conned Springsteen and the Triads

- Fraudster could serve life for \$14m Ponzi scheme
- 30-year career saw scams over three continents

By Sandra Laville, crime correspondent
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For more than three decades he left a string of casualties from China, through Europe and to America. He was wanted by the FBI, the Inland Revenue, the French police and the Triads. Each time he was on the verge of being discovered he slipped the leash, leaving those he had duped believing - in the words of his most famous victim Bruce Springsteen - that he was born to run.

But in a Los Angeles Court the extraordinary criminal career of Nottinghamshire-born Rodney D Tringham finally appeared to be over.

Joseph Akrotirianakis, assistant US attorney, applied for 64-year-old Tringham to be detained in prison over a massive Ponzi investment fraud which totals more than \$14m and could see him jailed for the rest of his life.

To victims in his native Britain, the news that the authorities had finally caught up with Tringham was met with delight and relief. For decades Tringham had persuaded people to part with millions in property schemes, music ventures and financial deals which never existed.

Prominent amongst his victims was Springsteen, who travelled to the High Court in London to fight Tringham after the conman released two unauthorised CDs of his music. The rock star was seeking £2m in damages from him, and in 1998 after a two year battle, the court found in his favour. Shortly afterwards, Tringham did a disappearing act.

"He is a genius really," said Doug White, who was conned out of £150,000 by Tringham after being persuaded to set up a property company developing land in Florida for luxury waterfront apartments.

"He finds a market where people want to make money quickly and prices are rising. He offers the quick big deal but provides all the paperwork, the lawyers, the documents to make you feel comfortable about it. Then when you want to find him and ask where your money is, he's gone.

"Loads of people went after him, even the Chinese Triads were looking for him at one time and we found out there was an extradition warrant on him in France."

White spent six years pursuing Tringham, and eventually employed a private detective who tracked him down to a Manhattan apartment.

As his agent was about to serve a writ on Tringham he bumped into FBI officers who told the writ server they had the conman under surveillance.

In 1989 Tringham had been convicted of 13 counts of deception, forgery and fraud - but somehow managed to make all reference to his criminal record disappear.

Born Rodney on 4 May 1945 in Baslop, Nottinghamshire, he set up home with his family in Knebworth, Hertfordshire, and used the name Robert and other aliases to travel freely in and out of the US, returning to the UK to carry out more cons to fund his lifestyle.

White eventually got his money back, suing the UK firm of solicitors who advised Tringham. But while he was pursuing him, Tringham was busy moving from Florida to California to set up a whole new fantasy world.

From around October 2005, Tringham was setting himself up as a licensed securities dealer, except he was not licensed and did not own the companies he claimed to be running, US documents state.

Purporting to be the chief executive officer of First National Bancorp (FNB) he spent three years persuading people to invest millions of dollars to trade in bonds. Investors were given websites to access their accounts, promising 4% or better on each trade.

But the money the investors saw increasing in their accounts was simply that of other victims being moved around by Tringham to facilitate the con.

Instead he used the \$7m he earned from the scam to buy a luxury home, cars, clothes and fund his glamorous lifestyle in Diamond Bar, a suburb of Los Angeles.

He did the same with another company Finbar Securities Corp, claiming he was registered by the Securities Exchange Commission, the equivalent to the UK's Financial Services Authority, and promising returns of 30% a year. In this scam he conned American and European investors out of \$6.4m.

Tringham appeared today in a court in Los Angeles seeking bail as he awaits trial on an 11-count indictment for fraud. Akrotirianakis applied for him to be detained indefinitely.

Back in the UK one victim - who would not be named - was surprised to hear of Tringham's name again.

"There were so many people out to get him I really thought he'd be dead by now," he said.