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Albanians admit killing Britons on Greek island

TWO Albanian farm workers have confessed to the killings of a British couple at their retirement home on the island of Cephalonia. Greek police said yesterday.

It also emerged that Roy Eccles, 55, and his wife Judith, 49, had been stabbed to death with a knife and a pitchfork after waking as the intruders broke in. Police had originally said that Mr and Mrs Eccles were killed as they slept.

The men, in their twenties, were arrested on the neighbouring island of Levkas after a tip-off from a member of the Albanian immigrant community on Cephalonia. Detectives said the pair had admitted stabbing the couple, then ransacking their house in the hill village of Kaminarata, in the hope of finding cash. They fled with nothing.

Police last night named one of the Albanians as Labros Pappas, 22, who had lived in the same village as the

Police say farm workers confessed to stabbings after bungled break-in, writes Adrian Lee

Eccleses. Police sources said that in a confession one of the two men claimed that they had never intended to kill the couple and took a knife only to prise open the patio door. But the window broke, waking them.

Police were waiting for the results of DNA and forensic tests before bringing charges. Blood found near a broken balcony door at the murder scene is being tested for a match with one of the suspects and police said they also had fingerprint evidence.

Since the killings on Thursday, more than 100 Albanians have been questioned and fingerprinted. It emerged then that the two men, who had applied for residency of Cephalonia, were missing. They were arrested at gunpoint in the town of Nidri after a brief chase on foot on Saturday afternoon, and signed confessions yesterday at the police station in Lixourion, a few miles from the murder scene.

The breakthrough was welcomed by British expatriots but the Eccleses' closest friends, Richard and Jan Coward, said they intended to sell their home in Cephalonia and return to England.

Mr and Mrs Eccles of St Neots, Cambridgeshire, moved to the Greek island in October, building a house about 300 yards away from the Cowards' home. Mr Coward, 52, a former builder, said: "If I stay I have got to look out on a memory from my kitchen



Coming home: Richard and Jan Coward, the Eccleses' closest friends, are leaving their villa in Cephalonia

window every day. The dream we had was for the four of us to live here together."

He said Cephalonia was being ruined by an influx of Albanians and the once crime-free island was no longer safe. Each morning, up to 70 gather on the seafront seeking casual labour for £15 a day.

Police said the crime was probably linked to a burglary at the home of another British couple, Richard and Debbie Dawes, after Christmas. "It had got round that there were rich pickings from the British," a senior detective said. The Dawes lost property and £25,000. They said they now

slept with a knife under their pillows after the killings.

Judith Eccles' brother, Derek Wooding, and her sister-in-law, Sandra, who arrived for a three-week holiday on Cephalonia last Tuesday, will fly home today.

Yesterday, a procession of Greek villagers arrived at the

Eccleses' home, which has spectacular views to the coast, to lay flowers at the door and offer sympathy to the remaining Britons. Vaitis Maroulis, president of the village council, said: "The whole village is sad because they were very good people who wanted to spend their lives here."

The truth behind the new 'mafia'

FROM JAMES PETTIFER IN TIRANA

THE Albanian mafia has become a legend in Greece, the Balkans, Italy and the US. Like all legends, it has a mixture of truth and fiction. The Sicilian Mafia originated as a protection network for the poor. The Albanian networks have inherited the same protective instincts.

Albanians are at the bottom of the economic and social heap in Europe. Their history has not encouraged anyone to trust state institutions very much. The family and its codes are everything. The Besa, or Oath of Trust, puts deep obligations on every family member. When Albanians emigrate, they take the code with them. The criminal element take the places other upwardly mobile mafias have vacated.

Many Albanians in Greece are treated appallingly by Greek employers. Some feel that they need protection links to survive.

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