

THE ROLEX

Snow had lain for several days. Matching perfectly the impoverished environment it fell upon. Thomas Ellis emerged from the stair well of his flats, into the courtyard, then cursing the terrain made his way slowly to the pavement of the busy Old Kent road.

Hailing a cab, his outstretched arm holding a large shopping bag bearing the name of a prestigious Bond Street store.

"Bond street, please driver" and soon he was comfortably seated and they were on their way. As they crossed Westminster Bridge, Ellis politely asked the cabbie if he would mind ,after a brief stop in Brook Street, to then go on to Liberty in Great Marlborough Street.

He quickly added, as re-assurance, "I'll leave my bag in the back", and at that point held up the Bond Street bag which reflected in the driver's rear view mirror.

"Not a problem", the driver casually replied, even though he would sooner not have waited. But glancing at the meter already showing eighteen pounds, he was suitably mollified.

When they reached Brook Street, a smart road in the heart of London's west end, he asked the driver "Stop just past Lancashire Court please", then alighting the cab said "I'll be two minutes, my bag's in the back, please lock the doors," before walking away and in to Lancashire Court.

The cabbie activated the central locking system, a dull click confirming the doors were locked, then he opened his newspaper.

After five minutes Ellis had not returned to the waiting cab. Five minutes is not a long time but with twenty three pounds already on the meter and no sign of his passenger, the taxi driver started to feel a little anxious.

Five minutes later, ten minutes in total, the cabbie climbed into the back of his cab and discovered the worst. The shopping bag was empty, it was merely a bilkers prop.

Ellis had emerged some while ago from the other end of Lancashire Court, into Bond Street. And was safely on his way to Regent Street by now.....

Our taxi driver looked wistfully at the thirty two pounds showing on his meter, re-set it to the 'For Hire' mode and eased into the traffic.

Ellis was on his way to Carnaby Street and rich pickings amongst the tourists and innocents.

There was no triumph or celebration in respect of duping the cab driver. He was a past master con-man, pick pocket, fraudster, and so the free cab ride was simply part of his day, his way of life.

In his mind, his need justified his actions. A common philosophy among the criminal fraternity.....

He was barely in to Carnaby Street when he spotted a potential victim. The woman in front of him. A gift! The Mulberry bag hung over her shoulder, the zipper tag foolishly at the back, easily slipped forward and the purse lifted, Smooth as silk, in one action, then the contents taken and purse discarded. Easy!

And this is how his day progressed, until he was assured of his stake. A stake to support his passion.

Gambling!

Little excited him, the scams were merely a means to an end, for the turn of a card the spin of a wheel. The mug's game, that saw him hours later, at 2 am, step into a silent street; dejected, penniless

The rank of empty cabs outside the casino doors was a melancholy sight. Drivers lost in reverie, occasionally inclining towards the casino doors, willing movement from within.

Dave Roberts was on point, first cab on the rank. He was the exception to the rule. Dishonest, the one bad apple that contaminates the barrel that poisons perception of an entire profession.

Ellis gave him instructions, "Old Kent Road, I'll tell you when to stop", then slumped into the back of the cab, re-living his night's misfortune, never once considering the plight of his victims

Normally a ride to the Old Kent Road at 2am would be anathema to a cab driver, but for Dave Roberts it was ideal.

He lived in Blackheath, just ten minutes on from the Old Kent Road. "Result" he mumbled as he calculated the fare.

Throughout the journey neither party spoke, until Ellis called above the engine's noise, "Next left driver".

Roberts obliged then, when stationary, applied the foot brake, not the hand brake. This kept the rear doors locked.

Ellis tried to alight. "I can't get out mate "

"No you have to pay first "

The meter showed a £32 fare, an expensive ride at thenight rate.

"I've got to nip indoors for the cash. I live at number forty two. I'll be straight back "

But Roberts didn't trust him, he didn't trust anybody. It was every man for himself wasn't it?

Strangely enough Ellis really did intend paying him. Too close to home to pull any strokes. But the situation was resolved when Ellis offered his watch as security while he went for the money.

It was an expensive Rolex Oyster. "Look I'll leave this with you till I get back, all right? "

Roberts responded, "How do I know it's genuine?"

Ellis could hardly tell him he knew because he stole it in the first place so, to convince him he passed it through the partition window, "There's no way that's a fake drive', look".

Roberts coveted such a watch and immediately formulated a plan. Feigning reluctance he agreed,

"OK' but make sure you come back"

Ellis handed over the watch more readily than if he hadn't been drinking or dwelling on his run of misfortune at the tables, but Roberts had been convincing in his priority of the fare over the watch.

He smiled as he watched Ellis cross the courtyard and make his way up the stairs.

He glanced at the watch in his lap, and as Ellis entered number forty two, he drove off.