



# Men jailed over Ally Pally cash machines smash and grab

By Janet Maitland

Six men have been sentenced for stealing £46,590 from two cash machines inside Alexandra Palace in the early hours of 19 August 2019.

The men used old-fashioned brute force, three of them using bolt cutters to force their way through the main entrance. Once inside, they severed the connections on the ATMs and prised them off the walls with power tools.

One of the cash machines was lugged outside and into the back of a waiting van driven to the spot by a fourth man. A fifth man in another vehicle acted as look-out.

Just before dawn, the same five men came back to the building to collect the other cash machine. They then drove to a secluded yard, found by a sixth man, where they smashed the machines to pieces.

Once emptied of cash, the

ATMs were dumped, one in Loughton and the other in Abridge, both in Essex. Both were spotted and reported by members of the public.

The vehicles were abandoned in Chingford where they were discovered by police on a routine patrol and subsequently linked to the thieves.

All six men were arrested and charged a few months later. They all pleaded guilty and were sentenced at Wood Green Court on 29 October 2021. Two were sent to prison for four years and two months, and one for three years and nine months. The others were given suspended 18-month custodial sentences and between 80 and 150 hours of unpaid work each.



Team effort: left to right, Sara Rojas, Natalie Blanks, Stephen Steppens and Muswell Hill Club owner Hussein Lalani. Photo Mike Coles

## Stephen's helping hand as he waits for a guide dog

By Lynn Winton

Blind since birth, Stephen Steppens had been refused membership at gyms which didn't want the responsibility of a blind man and his guide dog on their premises. However he has been a member of Muswell Hill Club, formerly The Manor Gym, since 2017.

An enduring friendship has grown between Stephen, who lives alone, and the staff, who walked his black labrador guide dog Owen and shopped for him during lockdown. He knows he can drop in anytime and they will help him with his post and anything else that requires a pair of eyes.

### Dangerous streets

Owen was 10 when he was retired from active service in September 2020, and Stephen is "counting down the days" until he is given a new guide dog. Whilst he is determined to venture out alone and keep active, he has spent over a year desperately missing the support and safety a guide dog provides.

Pavements are full of hazards like parked bikes, scooters and electric charger points; streets are full of "silent" electric vehicles that a guide dog can help him navigate much more safely. At the moment there is a waiting list of 40 visually impaired people in London waiting for a guide dog, and there is no indication when it will be Stephen's turn. His predicament has

inspired the gym to nominate Guide Dogs UK as their charity. Aware of the dire situation and how much Stephen's life is impacted without a guide dog, gym owner Hussein Lalani bought a magnificent Rituals beauty hamper to raffle in November.

**Helping Guide Dogs UK**  
"Hussein and the gym staff have always been amazingly

helpful and supportive to me," said Stephen. "Now they want to help support Guide Dogs UK in any way then can."

So if you are walking past the gym please give your support by popping in to reception and putting something in the Guide Dogs UK collection tin. If you would like to help their efforts you can call Natalie at the gym on 020 8883 0500.

## SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS

LOCAL POLICE, LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Jan Lovell, of the East Finchley Safer Neighbourhood Team, updates us on the latest crime news. Jan and the team can be contacted by email at: [EastFinchley.snt@met.police.uk](mailto:EastFinchley.snt@met.police.uk), or by phone on 020 7161 9014. Follow the team on Twitter @MPSEastFinchley.

### Covid scam

I personally received a very convincing email and link, seemingly from the NHS, regarding a Covid travel pass. It made sense as I had now had a booster vaccine and had had a Covid pass before so I could travel abroad last month.

All seemed good and the screen and questions asked matched my previous experience... until I was asked for my bank and card details on the grounds that should vaccination incur costs in the future I would have an account. That's when I knew it was a scam!

With the suggestion that some activities and venues as well as travel may only be allowed by those with a Covid pass, many of us will want to have such a facility.

So remember that a Covid pass is available through the NHS app (not to be confused with the NHS Covid-19 alert app) which can be used for many other NHS functions, and never asks for any bank details.

### How to report crime

Report crime by calling 101 or in an emergency call 999. You can also report crime online on the Met Police website: [www.met.police.uk](http://www.met.police.uk)

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