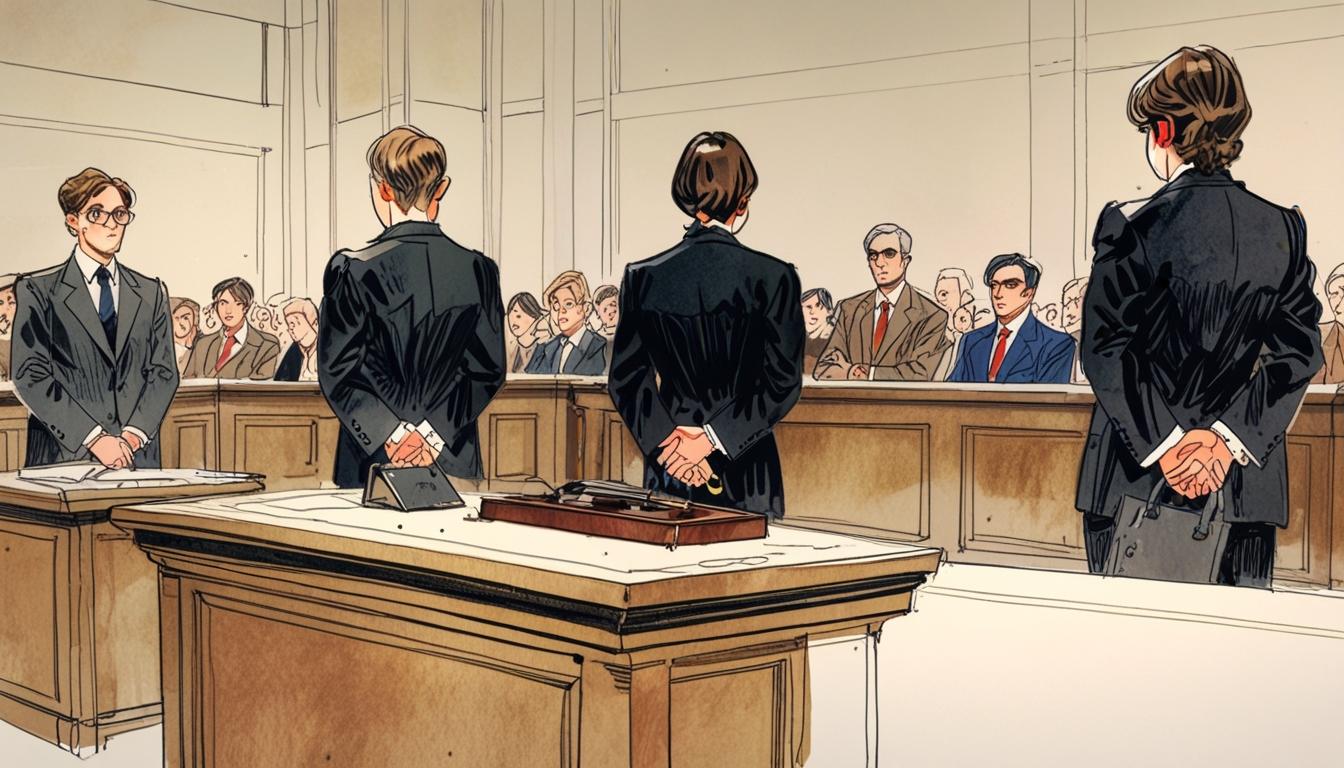
# Asylum seekers deny coercion in £70,000 Hermes haul from Knightsbridge store



A gang of asylum seekers living in a hotel has been accused of staging an audacious raid on the Design Exchange, an upscale department store in Knightsbridge, armed with knives and making off with Hermes handbags valued at over £70,000. The alleged incident, which took place on 20 October 2024, has highlighted growing concerns over security in London’s luxury retail space, where high-end goods have increasingly become targets for organised crime.

During the ongoing trial at Isleworth Crown Court, Ken Duncan, a 57-year-old fruit delivery manager, has been presented as the getaway driver. He allegedly transported three of the asylum seekers to Brixton post-heist, claiming to have been unaware that he was assisting a robbery. Notably, police reportedly discovered a Rambo knife and a pack of balaclavas in his vehicle, raising questions about the extent of his involvement. In a police interview relayed to the jury, Duncan described being oblivious to the bags of expensive clothing found in his truck, suggesting he was distracted and “probably ignorant” of the unfolding events.

The alleged robbers, Tyrease James and Akeem Lutchman-Singh, contended they were coerced into the crime by two older Caribbean men—Romeo Grannam and Acton Francis—whom they described as "extremely dangerous." Speaking in court, James expressed fear for his life, stating that both he and Lutchman-Singh were acting out of desperation and perceived necessity, given their precarious circumstances as asylum seekers.

This incident is not isolated. It coincides with a significant increase in high-profile thefts targeting luxury brands globally. Just a month after the Knightsbridge raid, another group in Glen Waverley, Australia, broke into a shopping centre and stole over $550,000 worth of Hermes handbags. Additionally, a December burglary in north-west London saw thieves pilfer over £10 million worth of bespoke jewellery and luxury handbags, including pieces from Hermes—demonstrating a worrying trend in audacious robberies affecting the luxury market.

Reports of high-stakes thefts extend to far-flung locations, including Hong Kong, where a group of masked thieves stole an astonishing 66 Hermes handbags in just five minutes. Each incident not only raises alarms regarding the vulnerability of luxury retail outlets but also reflects an escalating threat level from organised criminal factions adept at executing quick, high-value robberies.

In response to the rising insecurity, retailers are under pressure to bolster their safety protocols. The owners of the Design Exchange, like many in the luxury market, face the imperative of protecting their high-value inventory from increasingly brazen thefts. The police investigations into these incidents remain ongoing, as authorities seek to stem the tide of luxury crime that has put both retailers and consumers on high alert.

As the Isleworth Crown Court proceedings continue, all four defendants deny the charges of aggravated burglary with intent, asserting their innocence while painting a picture of compulsion rather than criminal intent. The outcome of this case may have far-reaching implications, not only for the individuals involved but also for the larger discourse surrounding crime, security, and economic hardship within London's high-end retail sector.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 4, 5, 6, 8
2. Paragraph 2
3. Paragraph 3
4. Paragraph 4
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraphs 6, 7
7. Paragraphs 7, 8

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14700633/gang-asylum-seekers-armed-knives-stole-Hermes-handbags-Knightsbridge-store.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/melbourne-mornings/hermes-handbags-stolen-from-glen-waverley/104455250> - In October 2024, three male offenders broke into a Glen Waverley shopping centre in Melbourne, Australia, and stole over 20 Hermes designer handbags valued at more than $550,000. The thieves forced entry into the store and smashed display cabinets to access the luxury items. Victoria Police are appealing for information regarding the incident, which has raised concerns about the security of high-end retail stores in the area. The stolen handbags are part of the renowned Hermes brand, known for its exclusivity and high value.
* <https://www.wral.com/story/more-than-12-million-worth-of-jewelry-and-hermes-bags-stolen-from-london-home/21788288/> - In December 2024, a burglar targeted a residence in north-west London, stealing over £10 million ($12.5 million) worth of bespoke jewelry and Hermes Crocodile Kelly handbags. The intruder entered the property through a second-floor window while the residents were absent. Among the stolen items were a 10.73-carat diamond ring from Graff and various pieces from Hermes. The Metropolitan Police are investigating the incident, describing it as a brazen offense that violated the victims' home. The suspect is described as a white man in his late 20s to 30s, wearing a dark hoodie and baseball hat.
* <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/london-has-turned-into-something-crazy-devastation-of-luxury-shop-owner-after-50/> - In November 2024, a luxury boutique in Belgravia, London, was raided by thieves who stole designer handbags worth approximately £500,000. The incident occurred at the Sellier Knightsbridge store, where two thieves were captured on camera rifling through rails of clothes and grabbing armfuls of designer handbags, including Chanel and Hermes items. The owners expressed shock and devastation over the theft, highlighting the increasing concerns about security in London's luxury retail sector. The police investigation into the incident is ongoing, with the store appealing for witnesses to come forward.
* <https://www.archyde.com/66-hermes-birkin-and-kelly-bags-stolen-in-5-minute-hong-kong-heist/> - In November 2024, a group of masked thieves stole 66 Hermes Birkin and Kelly bags worth an estimated US$1.3 million from a boutique in Hong Kong's New World Tower. The robbery took place on November 30th, with CCTV footage capturing the swift operation. The thieves shattered display cases and made off with the bags within five minutes. The boutique, Ginza Xiaoma, confirmed that 21 of the stolen bags were entrusted to clients for resale, while the remaining inventory belonged to the retailer. The incident highlights the high demand for luxury items and the lengths thieves will go to acquire them.
* <https://stevevickersassociates.com/media/scmp-hermes-seller-shares-details-on-bags-stolen-in-hk-10-million-burglary-in-hong-kong> - Following the November 2024 burglary at Ginza Xiaoma's Hong Kong store, the retailer shared details about the 66 stolen Hermes handbags, including a Kelly 25 Epsom handbag valued at HK$198,000. The company emphasized its commitment to client compensation, stating that all affected clients, including those who had consigned their bags for resale, were fully compensated. The incident, which lasted only five minutes, involved three masked individuals breaking into the store and stealing the luxury items. The company plans to enhance security measures and purchase separate insurance for consigned goods.
* <https://www.eldictamen.mx/en/Luxury-thieves-steal-valuable-Hermes-bags/> - In November 2024, a group of thieves stole 66 Hermes handbags, valued at 200 million euros, from a boutique in Hong Kong's New World Tower. The attackers broke the glass display cases to access the luxury items and fled in a vehicle. The boutique specializes in the exclusive trade of Hermes handbags and accessories, offering a wide selection of expensive pieces. The incident has raised concerns about the security of luxury retail stores and the high demand for Hermes products.