

IT'S FAIR TO say that most criminals are pretty lazy.

But they tend to have a bit more gumption than hapless Christopher Walker.

He carried out a pretty decent robbery, actually – stealing £25,000 from a security guard after hitting him with a stick as he delivered cash to a branch of Lloyd's Bank in Birmingham.

Lots of people saw it happen, and then watched in understandable astonishment as Walker ran off straight back to his own house – *which was literally across the road*.

He was arrested a few minutes later by police who knocked on his door. 'It was one of the easier cases I've been involved in,' one detective said.

Walker, 19, from Birmingham, was jailed for two-and-a-half years in November 2009 after admitting robbery.

*

FRANCIS GORMLESS GORMLEY, came up with a cracker of a plan – he wrote to Asda and threatened to poison stock in one of their stores unless they paid him off with £25,000.

His letter said:

'I regret to inform you that we have chosen your store, but chosen it we have. The scenario is simple. A number of food items have been purchased from your store. These food items contaminated (sic) with a range of poisonous chemicals are to be placed by us back in your store the results you can imagine. What we want is £25,000, a reasonable sum when weighed against the loss of business and inevitable compensation claims.'

The supermarket giant would surely fold, he reasoned, and he was right.

Asda dropped off the money when and where Gormley, 40, had ordered.

Obviously, they also mentioned it to the police, who lay in wait for the blackmailer to show up to collect his loot.

And it didn't take him long, which isn't a surprise – the designated place for the drop was a planter *in his own front garden*.

The cops – who had been geared up for a high-speed chase – were astonished.

'The idea that he would actually have the ransom money delivered to his own house was something we hadn't bargained for,' admitted a Greater Manchester Police source. 'It really was the height of stupidity, and laziness.'

Gormley, a mature student with gambling debts, was jailed for three years.

*

AN IMPORTANT PART of being a successful robber is choosing the right time and victim.

Jerome Blanchett chose to hold up a policeman at a Holiday Inn which was hosting a narcotics conference involving 300 other policemen – even though there was a big sign outside welcoming all the cops, and the car park was full of their cars.

This was not the right time or victim.

The 19-year-old dumbass followed the NYPD's John Comparetto into the toilets, produced a .40 cal semi-automatic handgun and told him to hand over his cash and valuables. Mr Comparetto did as he was told, and Blanchett then told him to drop his trousers – to hamper any attempt at a chase – and threatened to kill him if he tried.

But as soon as Blanchett had gone, Mr Comparetto pulled up his strides, took his own pistol from its hidden ankle holster, and went after him, with a load of other cops in hot pursuit.

They grabbed him as he was trying to get into a taxi to make good his escape, near the hotel in Swatara, Pennsylvania.

Blanchett was later sentenced to 52 to 104 years in state prison for a series of violent robberies of pizza deliverymen, and a further 30 on top for this escapade.

Mr Comparetto generously described him as ‘the stupidest criminal in the state of Pennsylvania.’

*

THE ROBBERS WHO attempted to raid the post office in the *Midsomer Murders* village of Stanton St John, Oxfordshire, definitely got their timing out.

The two men – who have not yet been caught – were wearing hooded tops and wielding a gun and a machete when they confronted shopkeeper Dennis Ingrey and ordered him to open up the sub-post office and hand over all the cash in the safe.

A bemused Mr Ingrey said, ‘I told them we didn’t have a flipping post office, or a safe. They were six months too late. It was really bizarre. At the time I thought they were idiots.’

Had they timed the raid a bit better they could have made away with about £6,000, he added.

*

NEIL MURRAY GOT the basics right as a getaway driver.

Nick a fast car for the purpose? Check.

Hang around outside the jewellers? Check.

Keep the engine running? Check.

It all went absolutely to plan, until the moment that his mates ran back out of Simon Pure Jewellery Design in Guildford, Surrey, with £60,000-worth of gems – after terrorising a female shop assistant – and leapt into the stolen Alfa Romeo yelling, ‘Go! Go! Go!’

Because that was the point when Murray, 34, decided – for reasons only he could explain – to become the world’s most law-abiding driver.

Mirror, signal, manoeuvre... and off we go.

Keeping strictly to the speed limit – which was 30mph for much of the way – or even dipping under it, Murray gave the increasingly anxious gang of desperados zero chance of eluding the cops, who had been called by passers-by who had noted down the Alfa’s number.

They were all duly arrested within half an hour.

In mitigation at Guildford Crown Court, John Warrington, defending Murray, said, ‘The ordeal for the woman lasted less than a minute, and – far from a fast getaway – the police noted that, at times, the car was going under the speed limit.’

The gang got a total of 20 years, with Murray picking up five of them (though he kept his licence clean).

*

AT LEAST MURRAY reached 30mph – that was 10 times quicker than our next gang managed.

Four thieves who broke into 16 boats at a boatyard in St Ives in the early hours of July 2009. They caused £2,500 of damage, pinched a variety of expensive electrical items, including flat screen TVs and generators, plus a lot of booze and a captain’s hat, and loaded them onto their getaway... er... punt.

Huntingdon Magistrates’ Court heard how they almost topped 3mph as they made good their escape.

They thought they were home and dry, but were nabbed by police officers who used night-vision goggles to watch them floating serenely down the River Ouse.

James Parkinson, 26, and Khushmet Bardell, 24, were jailed, while their teenaged accomplices were ordered to do community work and pay compensation to the owners. Parkinson and Bardell asked for 16 similar offences committed at the boatyard to be taken into consideration.

*

DRUG MULE KAYTI Dryer came up with an innovative place to hide a kilo of cocaine worth £83,000 when she flew into Manchester Airport from the Caribbean.

She – or whoever she was working for – had cut open the hollow shafts of a set of golf clubs, packed the coke inside, and then rewelded them together.

And she might have got away with it, but for one small problem.

As the clubs were taken from her to be x-rayed, the customs officer asked the obvious question: 'So... what's your handicap?'

Any golfer would instantly understand, and any intelligent criminal would have taken the trouble to learn a bit of golf lingo.

But Dryer was stumped. 'Er... what do you mean?' she replied.

Clearly, she wasn't a golfer... So why did she have a set of clubs with her?

The officer soon found the welds, and then the drugs, and Dryer was on her way to court and a four year spell in prison.

An airport source told the *Daily Mail* that she claimed she'd taken the clubs on holiday to Montego Bay in Jamaica. 'When asked about her handicap, she looked blank and asked them to repeat the question. She had no idea it was even a golfing term. She thought they were asking her if she had a disability.'

*

CONVICTED CONMAN PETER Clarke and his girlfriend, Sharon Arthurs-Chegini, suffered an extreme case of poetic justice when they pinched a luxury yacht from Villa Nore in Portugal and sailed off into the Atlantic.

They were on bail for a series of frauds – Clarke had already been to prison twice – and the theft of another yacht in Cornwall when they fled to the continent and stole the second boat, the *Skipper VII*.

Unfortunately, they forgot one thing – neither of them knew much about sailing.

No-one heard from them until several months later, when their badly decomposed bodies were found aboard the yacht, which was drifting off the coast of Senegal in western Africa.

It was thought that they might have been killed by pirates, but a 2009 inquest in Truro heard that the pair had probably died from dehydration.

Arthurs-Chegini kept a diary which said they had resorted to drinking their own urine, and had not eaten for four weeks.

‘The lights are going out in my heart,’ she wrote. ‘I dream of my mum’s steak-and-kidney pie, roast dinner and sausage and mash.’

*

DERRICK KOSCH strode into the Village Pantry convenience food store in Kokomo, Indiana, at 4.30am one January day in 2008 with evil in his heart, and a gun in his hand.

Brandishing the semi-automatic pistol and putting on his best bad-boy face, the 25-year-old demanded cash and cigarettes from the terrified shop assistant – who meekly did as she was told, and handed over the loot.

‘Damned straight!’ snarled Kosch, jamming the pistol into the waistband of his trousers.

That’s when things went slightly awry.

As he inserted the gun, he inadvertently pulled the trigger, and shot off his own right testicle. (The CCTV footage is still available online, and makes amusing watching.)

Yelping and hopping about in pain, with the round still embedded in his thigh and blood gushing everywhere, he limped to his granny’s house, leaving a handy trail for the highly-trained local police to follow.

When he got there, he told her that someone had been trying to rob *him*, but she was a wise old bird and didn’t believe a word of it. Her scepticism was rewarded a few moments later, when officers arrived and arrested Kosch, taking him to jail (via hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery).

He later claimed that he carried out the robbery after losing his job and car, and because he felt ashamed at leeching off the woman he lived with.

He served three years for the offence, and on his release told reporters, ‘It was shameful and embarrassing, and I think anyone with a good heart would feel that way about it.’

*

OBVIOUSLY, THAT WAS an isolated incident.

Not.

The exotically-named Trinidad Ramos shot at a woman in the doorway of her apartment in Salem, Oregon in June 2010, with one of the rounds hitting her in the leg.

Then he ran back to his white Lincoln Towncar, climbed inside and shot himself in the groin – in much the same way as Mr Kosch.

He was rushed to hospital, and arrested on his release on suspicion of attempted murder, being a felon in possession of a firearm and attempted assault.

In December of that year, he was jailed for 15 years.

*

THEN THERE WAS David Leroy Blurton.

He also shot himself in the groin – this time in the street in Dillon, Colorado.

No-one – including him, he was smashed out of his face at the time – knows exactly why he took the Makarov 9mm pistol from his truck on the evening of May 29, 2009. He'd been on the razz with a chum to celebrate being paid a large sum of money for a job he'd finished. Next thing he knew, he was waking up in the street with a stranger peering over him saying, 'That looks nasty!'

Blurton later claimed he had been the victim of a mugging, but this was not borne out by CCTV images, and there were no witnesses.

He pleaded guilty to the felony charge of reckless discharge of a firearm and the lesser offence of being drunk with a gun.

He was looking at up to three years in prison, but the prosecution settled for probation and the removal of all weapons from his house.

*

RAPE IS NEVER funny – with the possible exception of when the rapist accidentally shoots himself during the act.

THICK AS THIEVES



Sadly, Washington pervert Jon Newman didn't hit himself in the same place as the aforementioned trio, but still...

Newman snuck up on his victim as she made a mobile phone call outside her house late one night in June, 2009.

Whipping out a pistol, he held it to her head and forced her inside.

In the ensuing struggle, he shot himself.

Unfortunately, the bullet only went into his arm – but it was enough to make him forget all about his rape idea and leg it, howling.

He was later caught, convicted on rape, robbery and gun charges, and jailed for 12 years.

*

JOHN GIBBS WENT one better than all of the above – or, from his point of view, one worse – when he staged a heist at the upmarket Clarke Cooke House restaurant in Newport, Rhode Island, in August 1975.

The 22-year-old ne'er-do-well pulled a nylon stocking over his head, and burst into the office above the famous waterside eaterie and pointed a revolver at manager Jan Buchner.

'Open the safe!' he yelled.

Mr Buchner did as he was told and handed over a roll of quarters and some banknotes, but as Gibbs was stuffing them into his breast pocket he somehow pulled the trigger of his pistol and blew his own head off.

*

FROM THE REUTERS news agency, August 2010:

'A GERMAN bank robber led his pursuers straight to him after taunting police in an email over their efforts to catch him. Authorities in the southern city of Wuerzburg said on Wednesday the 19-year-old

sent emails to police and two newspapers to point out factual errors in the report of his bank raid in the town of Roettingen a week ago.

According to the daily newspaper *Bild*, he mocked the police for getting his age, height and accent wrong, and then pointed out that he had escaped in a car, not on foot.

Police traced his email and arrested him in a gambling hall in Hamburg just a few hours later.

“He was completely shocked,” the spokesman said.’

*

THE FOLLOWING COURT case made national news in December 2009 – and not just because the protagonist is a former under-16 billiards champion.

Peter Gamblin – who is clearly two balls short of a frame (or is that snooker?) – decided to mug a chap called Jonathan Franke, who was in the middle of a mobile phone call to a mate, one Joe Dale.

Mr Dale heard a voice say, ‘Give me some money!’ just before the phone went dead as Jonathan was punched to the ground.

He then re-dialled, and Gamblin answered.

Mr Dale asked who he was speaking to, and the idiotic mugger gave his nickname – ‘Gambo’ – and his home address.

Lincoln Crown Court later heard that this was because Gamblin, then 24, was ‘full of bravado’, and wanted to take his victim’s mate on in a fight.

Mr Dale kept him talking for the next 42 minutes, as Gambo swaggered home. This might have been more of that famous bravado, the court heard – or it might have been because ‘he did not know how to hang up.’

Either way, it kept him occupied while the police were alerted and made their way to his house to arrest him.

The whole thing earned Gambo a well-worn accolade from *The Sun*: ‘Britain’s daftest robber.’

Jailing him for three-and-a-half years, Judge Ebrahim Mooncey told him, ‘You were the one who used violence. Your arrogance continued, you announced on the phone, “My name is Gambo, if you want to make something of it come to this address.” And, lo and behold, the police *did* attend.’

And they made something of it.

*

THERE’S A WONDERFUL TALE on the internet about the cross-dressing robber in California who plastered himself in heavy make-up to make CCTV identification harder... but was identified by the lip-print he left on the glass exit doors as he ran into them on the way out of a bank.

Unfortunately, it seems to be apocryphal – I certainly can’t find a source.

But it may well be based on the story related by forensic scientist Tony Tambasco to the International Symposium on Human Identification a year or two back. That concerned an unnamed armed villain from Mansfield, Ohio – where Tony runs the local police department laboratory – who robbed a corner shop. This creep was, indeed, identified by the prints made by his lips as he ran smack into the exit door in his hurry to get out of the place with his spoils.

He confessed to the offence when caught and presented with the evidence.

*

IF YOU’RE A CRIMINAL, it’s probably best not to commit your plans to paper. But if you really must, you’ve got three options when it comes to dealing with the incriminating evidence: you can destroy it, you can hide it – or you can leave it somewhere detectives will find it.

Hmmm. It’s a tricky one.

When police raided getaway driver Jonathan Ochola's flat, they quickly came across his notebook, which contained the following entry for Saturday June 12, 2010:

Go Porsmouth ~~robbery~~ robbery happens.

Porsmouth was 'Portsmouth' – spelling not being Ochola's strong point (he'd also had two goes at 'robbery', as you can see).

His target was a branch of Ladbrokes, where his accomplice, one Rashad Delawala, waved a fake gun around the place and ordered the frightened staff to hand over the contents of two tills – a meagre £500 or so. As they made their getaway, Delawala dropped his balaclava at the scene. This contained traces of his DNA, and that quickly led detectives to his house. Faced with this evidence, he admitted his part in the fiasco, but 21-year-old Ochola, from Dagenham in Essex, insisted he had been at home watching football at the time of the robbery.

One of the officers found the incriminating plans he'd written, at which point he suddenly remembered that he *had* gone to Portsmouth with Delawala for a night out – but that he had known nothing about the robbery. In fact, he'd been in another shop buying cigarettes and sweets while his mate carried it out.

A jury at Portsmouth Crown Court took just 40 minutes to find him guilty. Delawala was jailed for two-and-a-half years, Ochola for three.

'When we found the diary we thought it was unusual,' said Detective Constable Mel Sinclair. 'You don't normally get evidence like that.'

I suppose you don't normally get robbers as dim as Ochola.

*

THAT SAID, THIS book is packed with idiots, and Tommy Franks must be somewhere near the top of the tree.

He was arrested and searched by police in Crawley, West Sussex. The cops found 21 grams of cannabis, and a bizarre to-do list.

Crawley magistrates heard that the note read:

Sell push bike, go on the rob, sell weed, get a job.

A noble sentiment, that last.

The 19-year-old – who pleaded guilty to possession of cannabis with intent to supply – said he wrote the list as an aide memoire, because he was ‘desperate’ for money to fix his PlayStation buy a new suit for a job interview.

Iain Starke, defending, said Franks disputed the amount of the cannabis found by the police, but admitted he was supplying.

A Sussex police source said, ‘To be fair, he didn’t have much choice. It was all there in his own writing.’

*

SUSAN BARCOCK WAS another dummy who couldn’t help dobbing herself in – this time *via* her own diary.

The 52-year-old worked as a volunteer at her local Cancer Research charity shop, where everyone thought she was one of the good guys, selflessly giving up her own time to help raise money for a great cause.

In fact, she was shamelessly robbing the shop by skimming takings and donations – and helpfully keeping a neat record of her iniquity.

Here are some of her diary entries, which were found by the police and helped land her a four-month jail sentence, suspended for 12 months, plus a curfew and a supervision order.

‘Bloody good day at shop £213. Man brought bag of coins in – £75 for shop £35 for me, well I had to count it.’

‘A good day as far as I’m concerned. £50. But not so for shop.’

‘Good day @ shop for me. £60. So got money in bank for tomorrow £35 to spend. Oh yes.’

‘I was in charge @ C Shop and it was a good day for me £91. Oh yes.’

'Good day in shop £124, £80 for me. Oh yes!'
'Dead £37 for shop £15 for me hee hee.'

Not so much of the 'hee hee' now – especially after Barcock's ugly mug was plastered all over the papers.

She got away with over £2,000, and also stole thousands of pounds from an elderly widow. It was that low crime which first led the cops to Barcock's door – they were called in when the 78-year-old noticed money was going missing from her house and bank account. It turned out that Barcock had stolen £6,356 from her. And it was while searching her house that detectives happened upon the diary...

Martin McRobb, prosecuting, told Warrington Crown Court, 'When confronted, the defendant could do little more than admit to the police she had stolen this money. Had it not been for her personal diary entries, there would have been no evidence against her.'

*

ANTHONY GARCIA TOOK it further still, and had a detailed tattoo of the *murder* he had committed etched across his chest.

Garcia belonged to the brutal Los Angeles Rivera-13 gang, and had shot dead a rival, one John Juarez, outside a liquor store in 2004.

The police had no clues to go on, and later admitted that they would never had caught the killer – but for his own deep stupidity.

In 2008, Garcia was arrested during a routine traffic stop on suspicion of driving without a licence, and his photograph was taken when he was booked in.

On his chest was a complicated though childlike scrawl of blue ink. Under the heading 'RIVERA KILLS', a peanut-shaped man is shown being killed by machine gun bullets fired from a helicopter outside a branch of Ed's Liquor.

A year or two later, a sharp-eyed LA cop, Kevin Lloyd, was checking through various mug shots when he noticed this one and was intrigued by the detail.

TATTOOS

YOU MIGHT FEEL
A LITTLE PRICK!



He checked back through old unsolved cases in the city's Pico Rivera district, and came across the Juarez murder. When he cross-checked crime scene photos with the tattoo, he found that a streetlamp, a road sign and a string of Christmas lights were in the same position in both – as was the body. Moreover, 'Peanut' was a derisive term used by Rivera-13 thugs for gangsters from Juarez's Pico Nuevo outfit, while Garcia's street name was 'Chopper' – hence the helicopter.

Lloyd tracked Garcia down and had him arrested. While he was in custody, undercover officers posed as fellow gang members and approached him to ask about the distinctive tattoo. To their delight, he started bragging that it showed his first killing.

In 2011, the tape of this confession was played to a jury and earned Garcia, 25, a conviction for first degree murder and 65 years-to-life in jail.

LA Sheriff's Department Captain Mike Parker told the *Los Angeles Times*, 'Sergeant Kevin Lloyd's incredible observation of Garcia's extraordinary tattoo, combined with great investigative work, is one of the reasons why Sheriff's homicide investigators are known as The Bulldogs. Fate and tenacious police work brought this convicted murderer to justice. Think about it. He tattooed his confession on his chest. You have a degree of fate with this.'

*

PERMESWAR KAULLYCHURN barged into a betting shop in Walthamstow, east London, pointed an imitation handgun at manager Carina Goffe, and ordered her to take him to the safe.

She wasn't impressed, unfortunately.

'What kind of robber are you?' she scoffed. 'There are cameras and microphones in this shop, and you haven't even covered your face.'

It was true that he was missing that most basic item of robbery kit – a mask – so Kaullychurn fled in confusion and, probably, embarrassment. As he went, he helpfully dropped a series of letters and bills which contained his name and address.

But all was not lost. Kaullychurn had an insider working with him – his girlfriend, Saveena Dooboreea, was the branch deputy manager.

She turned up to work that afternoon as normal – though she left after 90 minutes and took £6,500 with her, which was not normal.

Detectives found the couple, from Mauritius, in a hotel at Heathrow Airport the same day. Kaullychurn – who had telephoned Ms Goffe at work to berate her for dialling 999, and to tell her that her two-year-old son was ‘going to know about it’ – was snorting cocaine at the time, and told officers, ‘Life is too stressful here. Five grand is enough for a new life back home.’

They had been planning to fly home to Mauritius. Instead, they got 10 years as guests of Her Majesty somewhere slightly less sunny.

(Months after the raid and subsequent court case, I put ‘Saveena Dooboreea’ into Google and up popped her Facebook page, still listing her job as deputy manager at Coral Racing and there, on the right, was a plug for another networking site under the line ‘See who searched for you.’ I like to think that if Dooboreea had checked the site it would have come up with the answer ‘The Metropolitan Police’.)

Under the *Daily Telegraph’s* version of the above story, by the way, there’s the following brief but tantalising filler: ‘A thief who raided a Poundland store in Sutton, Surrey, was caught on CCTV after he returned to wipe his fingerprints from the till. The thief took a handful of change on August 1. The police are still looking for him.’

*

KENNETH MORGAN IS ONE of several crims to have been nominated in the Press for the accolade of ‘Britain’s Dumbest Crook’, and, in a strong field, his entry is not without merit. This halfwit was jailed for six years after leaving his passport, mobile and keys at a burglary.

As if that wasn’t enough, he also left his abandoned backpack, with his birth certificate and a signed tenancy agreement.

And his mug shot – on a prison ID card.

The 48-year-old wriggled through a window when his intended victim returned to his home in Acton, west London, but left all his stuff behind. According to *The Sun*, ‘an investigation by giggling police lasted seconds.’

Morgan later claimed the backpack had been stolen and planted at the scene by some other burglar, but the judge at London’s Isleworth Crown Court called this defence ‘preposterous’.

I’m not so sure. You can see why a chap might take his house keys on the job – he’ll need them to get back inside his own home (burglars can’t leave their front doors unlocked, what with all those burglars out there). But his passport? His birth certificate? *His prison ID?* Why take those with you?

Maybe the poor bloke really *was* set up?

Ah, hang on a second. After the jury took just an hour to convict him, it emerged that Morgan had 23 burglary convictions dating back 25 years, and had been out of jail for just three weeks before this latest bungled effort. An unnamed source was quoted in *The Sun* saying: ‘He has got to be the UK’s dumbest crook.’

*

FROM BRITAIN’S DUMBEST crook, to the world’s thickest terrorist. Mohammad Ashan was a mid-level Taliban commander in eastern Afghanistan.

In April 2012, he walked up to a joint US Army-Afghan police checkpoint, brandished a ‘Wanted’ poster showing his own face and demanded the promised \$100 dollar reward.

The soldier he spoke to, Specialist Matthew Baker, was obviously doubtful that anyone could be that much of an imbecile. ‘We asked him, “Is this you?”’ Baker told the *Washington Post*. ‘He answered with an incredible amount of enthusiasm, “Yes, yes, that’s me! Can I get my reward now?”’

Sadly, he was to be disappointed.

Even when their man was in custody, the US military understandably had its doubts, so it carried out biometric tests which confirmed that



the man in custody was indeed the Taliban commander, who was wanted on suspicion of plotting attacks on Afghan security forces.

‘Officials have guessed at what the unusual details of Ashan’s arrest might tell us about the state of the insurgency – its desperation, its lack of resources, its defiance of law and order,’ the *Post* mused. ‘But, for now, the consensus has landed on the singularity of Ashan’s act, and the intellectual calculus that led to it.’

Which is an elegant way of putting it.

*

THERE’S SOMETHING VERY important that you must never leave on your own death certificate, if – say – you’ve just faked your own untimely demise.

As Hugo Sanchez discovered.

This story begins back in 2003, when Sanchez decided that he’d had enough of life in boring old Farnham, Surrey, and his boring old job working as a web designer for HMV.

So he notched up a series of huge credit card debts and took out £500,000-worth of life insurance, and in 2005 his tearful wife Sophie informed the authorities of an awful tragedy – her 57-year-old husband had died from a heart attack while in Ecuador.

Sadly, no-one could see the body because Hugo had been cremated.

Besides the life insurance policies, and the credit card debts which were automatically written off, Sophie netted a further £112,000 in death benefits from HMV, plus pension payments.

Not a bad little earner, all told.

The ‘grief-stricken’ Sophie moved to start a new life in Sydney, Down Under – along with Hugo, who was actually very-much-alive and not-at-all-cremated.

Where they might have got away with their fraud, had it not been for The King.

Back in the UK, a friend had tried to use Hugo’s old HMV staff card to obtain a discount when buying one of Elvis Presley’s CDs.

Given that he was dead, this raised something of a red flag on the store computer. The staff stalled the friend while the police were called; meanwhile, the friend – who wasn't in on the major scam – tried to call Sanchez. He got through to him, but the fraudster hung up the phone.

This surprising turn of events raised all sorts of questions at HMV headquarters and with Thames Valley Police.

Hugo's death certificate was sent for and examined, and on it was found something peculiar: *the dead man's own fingerprints*.

Sanchez was tracked down using the number called by his mate and extradited from Australia (where he had been living the not-very-high life, surviving on takeaway chicken and chips, under the not-terribly imaginative alias of 'Alfredo Sanchez').

In May 2012 he was sentenced to five years, after admitting 12 fraud offences. Sophie Sanchez, 41, got two years. They had to give back all the money, too.

*

EWAN MCKENZIE and Stuart Bryce were locking up their restaurant in Perth at 11pm when they were attacked by three men in masks. Mr McKenzie was hit over the head, and both were forced to the ground. The raiders made off with cash, vouchers, seven money belts and a tin containing more cash coming to £4,000.

But they left an important clue behind for the police – a sweatshirt.

And in the pocket of the sweatshirt was a map of the area showing their target, the location of CCTV cameras, and escape routes.

And on the map was a name: Hubert Kowalczyk.

Kowalczyk was a 19-year-old from Poland who was already known to police, and it wasn't long before he was arrested, along with brothers Mateusz and Aleksander Gawinski. At their home, the police found plenty more incriminating evidence, including £3,000 hidden in a wardrobe and some home-made masks.

They each got 34 months' jail and a recommendation for deportation to D'ohland.