

Kray cop's £100k will

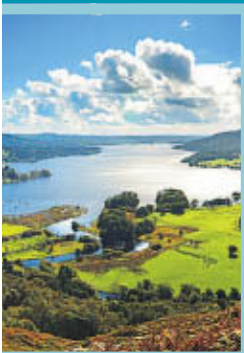
EX-POLICE chief Leonard "Nipper" Read, who brought down the notorious Kray twins, left £100,000 in his will.

Read, who died aged 95 from coronavirus in April, was a chief superintendent at Scotland Yard when he led a squad investigating Ronnie and Reggie Kray.

He got the East End gangster twins jailed for life in 1969 for murder.

Read, of Broxbourne, Herts, is survived by second wife Pat who worked with him on the Kray inquiry.

TOP TRAVEL



Great District



Fun on the runs

See pages 39-42

Early Xmas shop plea

BRITS are being urged to shop early for Christmas amid fears that social distancing rules will cause chaos at the tills.

Stores are launching an ad campaign aimed at spreading demand and preventing overcrowding at the year's busiest shopping time.

British Retail Consortium CEO Helen Dickinson said: "We're encouraging people to shop early and avoid the last-minute rush."

"It would give customers, staff and drivers the space they need to stay safe."

SCAMMERS TAKE MILLIONS FROM LOCKDOWN LONELY HEARTS

EXCLUSIVE

by Emma Pearson

LONELY Brits have been warned to beware of romance scammers poised to strike during a second lockdown.

Fraudsters hunt for vulnerable people who may be shielding in isolation before fleecing them out of life savings, leaving many too ashamed to contact police or even tell loved ones.

Cases rocketed to 600 a month in the first lockdown and victims lost £10,000 on average, adding up to £66.3million in the past year.

Now, with more virus restrictions looming, police want lonely hearts to take extra care when they go looking for love online.

Action Fraud, the national reporting centre for fraud and cyber crime, launched an awareness campaign after cases soared by 26 per cent year-on-year to August.

Alex Rothwell, a temporary Det Chief Supt with City of London Police, urged: "We want to encourage people to be careful. Lockdown is the perfect opportunity for criminals. People work from home so it's not easy to meet anyone."

Victim support experts say the scammers trawl social media and dating profiles to find vulnerable people such as the newly bereaved and those isolating.

They contact targets en masse, focus on those who reply, then spin clever lies that persuade the victim to "lend" them large sums. Today we highlight three people who were fooled and one who was not.

feedback@people.co.uk



WARNING:
Alex Rothwell

Conned by CUPID



SUSPICIOUS:
Married TV star Daisy May

'Barmaid Patricia' said she'd fly in and marry me. I was totally fooled

MIKE Curzon was scammed out of £21,000 by a trickster who posed as a love-struck American barmaid.

The divorced 60-year-old sold his car and van, wired over his £5,000 life savings and even borrowed £10,000 more from his brother for "Patricia" after she wooed him with saucy selfies, thought to be stolen from someone else.

As coronavirus wreaked havoc around the world the con merchant claimed to be a 36-year-old woman who was about to fly to the UK and marry Mike, but needed help to pay for PPE and to settle her bills.

Mike, of Selsey, West Sussex, was left suicidal after discovering the ruse in June. He said: "I was on my own during lockdown and I was really scared and lonely. She definitely took advantage of that."

"I was online a lot more and would sit up until 3am waiting to speak to her. I sent her thousands of masks and gloves. She said she needed to stockpile food and look after her mum and 11-year-old son. I loved this woman. I thought I was going to marry her and I just wanted to protect her."

Mike, who had been single for six years, met Patricia on Twitter and they struck up a friendship that quickly became romantic. Despite never meeting "Patricia", or even speaking to her on the phone, Mike transferred thousands to various bank accounts belonging to her "friends".

Mike, who had suffered a heart failure four years earlier, said: "She said she was divorced and that her ex-husband used to batter her. She said she had no bank account in her own name and told me that if she did it

would affect her claim for child support. She even got her son to message me asking to be his new daddy."

"It totally pulled on my heart strings and I was happy to go hungry to make sure she had everything."

"I even bought her a white gold diamond ring - we were going to have a big white wedding."

His suspicions were first aroused when money bounced back from a flagged account in Nairobi, but he quashed his niggling doubts because he felt "lucky".

Eventually, the deception came to light when Patricia asked Mike to withdraw £1,500 that was going to be transferred into his account by another man, before sending it to her via Bitcoin.

"I said, 'How long have you been chatting with another man to get him to part with £1,500?' She couldn't answer that. It was the final straw and I went into the bank to tell them everything."

He reported the scam to police and was able to recover £1,500 from the bank, but in the end he was left with £10,000 of debt.

Mike said: "I was totally heartbroken. My whole world just came tumbling down around me."

"I felt like such a fool."

Officers from Action Fraud told him that although his case was assessed by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, there wasn't enough evidence for them to take it further. So the con artist behind "Barmaid Patricia" has got away with the heartless scam.



LOST:
£21,000

She said she was divorced and her husband used to batter her

'Michael' needed cash to quit Africa

CANCER survivor Joan Thornton lost almost £15,000 to a fraudster posing as a single dad from London on dating website Match.com.

The widow, 71, was targeted days after lockdown began in March as she shielded alone at home during her recovery from bowel cancer.

"Michael" claimed to be a solar panel fitter trapped in Ghana after a job when coronavirus restrictions were applied all over the world.

He wooed Joan, of Tameside, Greater Manchester, with daily messages and calls, before persuading her to plunder her life savings, leaving her with nothing.

Lonely Joan said: "After everything I'd been

through I just wanted to find companionship with someone special. His calls in the morning and evening gave me something to look forward to."

She had no qualms about paying what he said he needed for healthcare, plane tickets, housing, food and even a Netflix subscription.

She was asked to use a payment app called Taptap Send and what she handed over quickly spiralled up to £15,000.

The truth came to light in June when her son overheard her on the phone to "Michael" and reported the scam to Greater Manchester Police.

"It sounds so stupid but he got inside my head," said Joan. "It all felt so realistic."



LOST:
£15,000

Hunky 'sea captain' targeted award-winning telly actress

NEITHER fame nor acclaim give you immunity from being targeted in a romance scam by a lying con artist.

Married BAFTA-winning actress Daisy May Cooper, 34, was approached by a "sea captain" who got in touch via her Instagram account, which was verified and had more than 400,000 followers at the time. Using a profile picture of a handsome

sailor, he claimed to be a huge fan of Daisy May's and showered her with compliments.

He soon proposed meeting up and even marriage, only to then beg for £1,000 for an urgent operation he said he needed.

The co-writer and star of BBC Three's This Country, who is expecting her second child with husband Will Weston, was never interested and

had her suspicions from the start. But she initially played along before exposing his scheming in a series of detailed posts for fans online.

She even mocked up an image mocking their potential romance by superimposing their faces on to those of the doomed lovers Jack and Rose, played by Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet in the blockbuster film Titanic.

I met my bogus 'Romeo' in person

NHS worker Rachel (not her real name) was scammed out of £58,000 by a man she met on dating app Tinder at the beginning of lockdown.

She was living alone and suffering from depression when she joined and began talking to "Romeo", who said he was a Canadian mechanic aged 34, the same as her. Unlike today's other victims, she met her fraudster in person when he flew to Manchester to visit relatives.

He romanced her with love poems and talk of marriage and children. Convinced that love was in air, she began a non-sexual relationship with him and took out £52,000 in credit cards and loans to pay for his accommodation and other needs during lockdown. The scam came

LOST:
£58,000

to light in July when she fell asleep on the sofa and woke to discover he had run off with £4,000 worth of her belongings.

He had also hacked into her devices to drain her bank accounts of the remaining £6,000 available before deleting digital records, pictures and texts of himself, leaving little evidence for police.

She is now penniless, at risk of losing her home and too ashamed to ask friends or family for help. "It's left me suicidal," said Rachel. "I feel so stupid and ashamed. He's ruined my life and I don't know how I'm ever going to pay back this money."

Action Fraud investigated but could not continue the case due to lack of evidence.

Victim Support revealed that one in four fraud cases reported to them since lockdown related to romance scams, but warned that the real figure could be much higher. For support on romance scams, call Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or Victim Support on 0808 1689 111.