



## East Anglian Bonnie and Clyde 'leave trail of unpaid pub bills'

**Couple accused of charming their way out of paying for food, drink and accommodation**

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The original Bonnie and Clyde cut a swathe across America, holding up a series of banks and gas stations before going down in a hail of bullets. Their alleged 21st-century equivalents in the east of England have set their sights a little lower.

But after an audacious middle-aged couple were accused of visiting at least a dozen venues in Norfolk and Suffolk to eat steak, drink doubles and charm their way out of paying the bill, landlords and restaurateurs have joined the dots – and they are out for justice.

The couple are accused of operating under a consistent modus operandi in a nine-month spree, often claiming to be looking for a property to buy in the local area. They are alleged to have used their real names before offering to pay with a card, which is declined, and leaving false contact information.



Their alleged victims told the Guardian the couple were highly plausible and apologetic, appearing to make phone calls to try to get money put into their accounts or offering to return the following day and settle up.

One landlord did become suspicious enough to put a steering wheel lock on the couple's car to extract payment – only for the man to apparently fake a heart attack to escape in an ambulance.

Julie Penney, who owns the Swan Inn in Monks Eleigh, Suffolk, with her husband, Stephen, was visited by the couple in October. "We trust people," she said. "Nothing like this has ever happened before. It wound up being so embarrassing that we found ourselves apologising to them." After drinking doubles all night, the couple even took a bottle of wine away with them.

But when Penney visited the address given a few days later, she was told that one of the alleged fraudsters had been evicted in March – and nobody knew where he had gone.



Stephen and Julie Penney of the Swan Inn. Photograph: Triangle News

At that point, the case appeared to be a one-off. "I was so angry with myself for being scammed," Penney said. But then she posted the details on a pub-owners' Facebook group and heard from several other local landlords.

Most of the venues had given up on tracing the debt. But with more allegations and new CCTV footage emerging, Suffolk police said in a statement that they were already looking at three cases which they believed were "linked to the same individuals" and said that "inquiries are ongoing".

John Raines, the landlord of the Angel pub and hotel in Lavenham, managed to recover £1,100 from the couple after a week-long visit in July, supposedly house-hunting in the area. "I smelled a rat halfway through," he said. "They liked the good stuff. They were constantly offering to buy me drinks, buy regulars drinks, and racking it all up on the room bill."

When he asked to be paid, the couple said they were awaiting a deposit in their account but could offer their car as security. "I thought they might have another key so I went and got a steering wheel lock," Raines said. He found dirty towels and a tent in the back of the vehicle, and now wonders if they were sleeping rough between hotel visits.

The story got stranger. "When it came time for them to go, he claimed he was having a heart attack," Raines said. "I thought, there's some other reasons you should be going in that ambulance."



He called me up that afternoon having made a miraculous recovery demanding his car back. But his partner came back the next day with her mother in tow, and she paid on their behalf.”

The woman claimed to be disgusted – but the couple are alleged to have struck at least four more times since.

Stevie King, the manager of SugarBeat Eating House near Norwich, hosted the couple at his bed and breakfast for 10 days. They paid for just three.

“Even while they were here, I got a call from a police officer after they couldn’t pay a bill at a restaurant nearby, confirming that they were staying with us,” he said. “But they said it was all just a big misunderstanding.”

The couple said they were recently engaged, which led staff to give them a free bottle of prosecco, and were in the area looking for a new home. “But as time went on I was getting concerned,” King said. “They were very reassuring, they said they were waiting for his redundancy pay to come through and they had used the money in their account for a deposit on a house. They said they could pay me on Monday morning. Little did I know that on Sunday night they’d gone down the road and done yet another place for £160.”

After they left without paying, King said, he managed to get hold of the woman’s ex-husband. “He said they were renowned for doing this. I’ve never known anything like it. It’s just so brazen. It’s Norfolk – you don’t get that sort of thing round here.”

Greg Morgan, the owner of the Waterfront Bar Bistro in Ipswich, described the couple as “very clever, very believable – well-dressed, polite, the last people you would think would do this”. He later paid a visit to the village of Long Melford, where a driving licence was registered, and was told by a publican that the couple were notorious in the area.

Penney, whose Facebook post led fellow publicans to figure out the alleged scam, said the police had only now become interested.

“It seems like it’s affected half the pubs in the area,” she said. “So many people have been conned. I just think: why should they keep getting away with it?”

audacious, charm, modus operandi, plausible, wind up, fraud, scam, smell a rat, disgusted, renowned, notorious, con, get away with

What would you like to ask this couple?

Do you think dine and dash is a serious crime?

What should be this couple's punishment?

Have you ever not had enough money when you went to pay?

Do you think audacity is a good character trait?

Have you ever been conned?

Do you trust people?

When have you smelled a rat?

\_\_\_\_\_ is notorious for \_\_\_\_\_.

When have you gotten away with breaking the rules?