

# The Herald

## Edinburgh diamond theft linked to woman wanted across Europe

The theft of a £15,000 diamond ring from a shop in Edinburgh has been linked to a series of raids by an international thief who dresses as a wealthy Muslim woman to steal thousands of pounds' worth of jewellery.

The woman, wearing a headscarf, coat and gold-framed glasses, either swaps gems for replicas or distracts staff while posing as a customer. She has been dubbed the "high magician" of crime in France and is on a pan-European most wanted list.

Police now believe she may be responsible for the theft of a £15,000 ring from the Lime Blue Diamond Store in Edinburgh and a £115,000 six-carat diamond ring from Abrahams jewellers in Hatton Garden, London, after CCTV footage appeared to show it was the same woman who has struck at stores in Paris, Berlin and Frankfurt.

Lothian and Borders Police said last night the inquiry into the theft at the Lime Blue Diamond Store in November last year was ongoing. A woman and a younger female accomplice entered the store in George Street in Edinburgh and asked to see a range of rings, brooches and necklaces from the window display.

After browsing the store, the pair told the assistant they would like to buy one of the pieces from the display. As she took the goods to the counter for wrapping, the thieves simply walked out of the shop. Staff were suspicious and discovered that a ring worth £14,995 was missing. The woman's crime spree is believed to have gone on for at least seven years and she always has an accomplice, usually a younger woman but on other occasions a man.

The theft at Abrahams in London occurred on October 9 last year. Victoria Abrahams, co-owner of Abrahams jewellers, said: "The women came in saying they were from Saudi Arabia and claiming they did not speak any English.

"They looked like a mother and daughter which I suppose can subconsciously put you off your guard, rather than two men, for instance.

"They asked to look in one of the cabinets and one them started putting her hand on my shoulder and getting very close to me.

"I felt very uncomfortable and after they left I mentioned to my husband Charles that it had been a very strange experience. He decided to double-check the cupboard and it was only then we realised the ring was missing."

Leonard Ormonde, of M&N Insurance Ltd, said it was the most unusual series of robberies he has come across in 30 years in the industry.

He said: "These are very professional people and have been all over Europe

including England, Scotland, Germany, France and Switzerland.

"The number of thefts we are talking about and the period of time it has gone on for is remarkable. The value of jewellery they have stolen could run into millions.

"By hopping from one country to another they are keeping one step ahead of the law. But we are now in the process of alerting all the jewellers across Europe to be on the look-out for them."

One case which is being investigated is the theft of a ring worth £189,000 from Tiffany in Frankfurt in September last year. In another incident in Paris last November, the woman allegedly stole a 5.5 carat diamond ring worth £574,000 from Cartier after entering the store with a man.

French newspaper Le Figaro has dubbed the woman one of Europe's "high magicians" of crime while the Internationaler Juwelier-Warndienst - a crime prevention network for the European jewellery businesses - has put her on its list of most wanted suspects.

After the Edinburgh raid, on November 13, police issued descriptions of the two suspects.

The first was between 60 and 70, 5ft, of medium to large build, with wrinkled dark tanned skin and frizzy black hair tied back.

The second woman also had dark tanned skin, was in her early 30s, 5ft 9in, slim, with black hair. She was well groomed and wore a lot of make-up, and was wearing a black or brown short fur coat and black trousers. She was carrying a brown leather bag.

Police last night reiterated their appeal for information on the theft.

12:35am today

By *CAROLYN CHURCHILL*

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