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Cab driver 'drugged and raped' passengers

Chris Greenwood, Tom Pugh • Wednesday 21 January 2009 14:14



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A taxi driver drugged and sexually assaulted a string of women passengers after pretending he had won the lottery, a court heard today.

John Worboys, 51, preyed on young women he picked up in London's West End, Croydon Crown Court was told.

He is accused of using date rape drugs dissolved in champagne to "stupefy" his victims before attacking them in the back of the cab.

Prosecutor Johannah Cutts QC said Worboys attacked 14 women during an 18-month reign of terror until his arrest last February.

She said Worboys cruised the streets of central London late at night in his black cab looking for single women to offer discount lifts home to.

Miss Cutts said: "His primary intent had nothing to do with taking them home. His primary purpose was wholly sexual in nature.

"His intent was to ensure that they were completely at his mercy and then to sexually molest them.

"Having each girl alone in his cab was a start but this defendant wanted to ensure that there would be no struggle, no difficulty in achieving this aim. How did he do that? He did it by drugging them."

Worboys employed date rape drugs to render his victims powerless and to make them forgetful, the court was told.

Miss Cutts said: "Mr Worboys made regular use of such drugs, administering them to female passengers in his cab in the hope that they would render them unconscious and thereby unable to resist his sexual advances.

"The additional benefit to him of using such drugs is that these drugs cause what is called anterograde amnesia. That is memory loss and the forgetting of events and experiences that occurred after the drug took effect."

The jury was told Worboys would tell passengers he had won a large amount of money either in the lottery or at a casino.

Miss Cutts said the cab driver sometimes showed passengers a carrier bag full of cash to back up his story.

She said: "He would begin by engaging the girl in conversation, asking about her night and the like.

"Once they were talking, he told her that he was glad that he had met her as he had experienced some good fortune that night in that he had won a quantity of cash.

"In most cases he said that this had been at a casino. Sometimes he said it was by way of the lottery.

"Sometimes he specified the sum that he had won. When he did so it was generally a substantial sum."

During the conversation Worboys would invite his victims to share a bottle of champagne and pour them a glass from the front of the cab, the court heard.

Miss Cutts said although some passengers did not want to drink, they felt it would be rude to refuse. Some just pretended, she added.

She said: "The drink was rarely poured in front of them. As the defendant often had a drink at the same time as the complainant, it seems likely that he added the drug at the point at which he poured the drink.

"In every case where the drink was consumed in any quantity, it had a powerful effect."

Worboys would then get into the back of the cab and engage his victim in further conversation, this time of a sexual nature, as he watched the drug take effect.

Miss Cutts said: "In each case he was able to see when his passenger became affected by the drug. Many of the complainants remember falling asleep or losing consciousness.

"Most have no recollection of what happened thereafter until they got home, or in some cases until the next day. Many are not able to say whether they were sexually assaulted or not.

"But the defendant's intent in drugging them was clear. Some of the complainants did come round a little in the cab having consumed the drink.

"Those that did come round remember the defendant touching them sexually in some way. One of them remembers him actually having sexual intercourse with her and was powerless to resist."

Worboys, of Rotherhithe, south east London, denies 23 charges including rape, sexual assault and administering a substance with intent.

When Worboys' home was searched, Miss Cutts said discoveries were made "which we say showed all too clearly his intent when he went out in his cab at night".

Pictures shown to the jury included Worboys' Fiat Punto, which was taken to a police compound and searched.

Inside the boot was found a "tool kit" containing what Miss Cutts said was everything he needed to stupefy and sexually assault a passenger, including four small bottles of champagne.

In a blue bag with Petroleum written on it were gloves, a beret, a map and a torch.

In addition, officers found a large number of plastic gloves, plastic cups and a vibrator in a box.

The vibrator was sent away for forensic tests and the DNA of one of his alleged victims was found on it, jurors were told.

The blue bag contained a further blue carrier bag, inside which was a single Durex condom and a box of mixed flavour condoms.

Also found was a strip of Nytol tablets, which jurors were told contains an antihistamine called diphenhydramine with sedative properties.

Miss Cutts said: "As you would expect, its effects include drowsiness as well as sometimes causing dizziness, fatigue, loss of co-ordination, blurred vision and dryness of mouth.

"Any sedation associated with the use of the drug is likely to be enhanced by the consumption of alcohol at the same time. Indeed, the tablets carry a warning to avoid alcohol."

An ashtray and spoon which was found in the bag were washed with solvent and tested, Miss Cutts said.

She said the drug diphenhydramine was found on both items, which was "significant" because traces were found in the urine of two of the alleged victims.

The drug, along with traces of Temazepam, was also found in a half-pint cup at Worboys' home, jurors were told.

That cup contained the DNA of a further alleged victim and, said Miss Cutts, was one of the drugs used by Worboys to stupefy the women.

Temazepam was found in urine samples provided by two women who had not knowingly taken it.

The Fiat Punto boot also contained wine boxes, bottles of Jack Daniels, whisky, gin and vodka in addition to bottles of wine.

"These too are significant," said Miss Cutts. "In every case the defendant began by offering the complainant champagne or home-made wine.

"But he also had other types of alcohol should, we say, the complainant be happy to accept his offer of a drink but not like champagne."

Miss Cutts said: "The combination of these items, many of which you would not expect together, in the bags in the boot of his car show how prepared the defendant was.

"Everything he needed for his enterprise was there.

"The alcohol - his celebratory bottle of champagne; the glasses in which to pour it; the additional alcohol in case it is preferred to champagne; the drugs - Nytol and Temazepam; the condoms and the vibrator.

"As we say, Mr Worboys was not opportunistic. He knew what he wanted and he was prepared."

The powerful sedatives left Worboys' victims insensible and with little memory of their ordeal, the court was told.

But one woman remembered being raped, a second woke up to find him with his hand up her skirt and a third said he exposed himself.

Miss Cutts said: "The prosecution say there can be no clearer indication of his intent in administering the drug than from his behaviour with these women."

Several women contacted police with similar stories, but it was not until last year that Worboys' "luck began to run out", the jury was told.

Police identified the cab driver after one woman, who was driven from London Bridge to Twickenham on February 5, contacted them with her concerns.

They linked her case to four other victims with remarkably similar stories and arrested Worboys 10 days later, Miss Cutts said.

Several more victims came forward to tell police their stories following press reports of his arrest.

Detectives discovered many of the women's journeys home took considerably longer than necessary.

They found he targeted women who had been drinking and on some occasions dropped off their friends before pouncing, the court heard.

Miss Cutts said: "He always waited until he dropped one off before he began to tell his utterly bogus story of winning cash to the one remaining."

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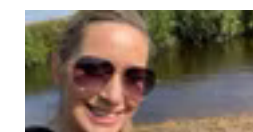


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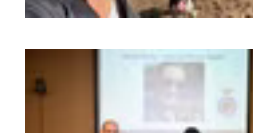
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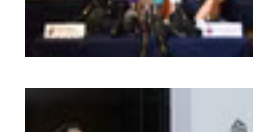
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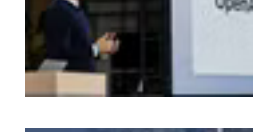
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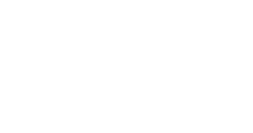
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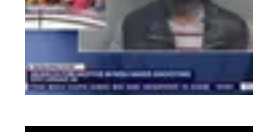
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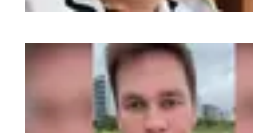
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