



Incidences at Secrets Camden strip clubs

4 Police Reports GBH

Club Breaches Section 21

Sexual Contact

Pimps

Chain £ millions in debt

3 Trading Standards Reports Financial Fraud

Summary

Secrets, Eversholt Rd [2008] Sexual contact, assaults: Lap dancer

[Secrets Eversholt Rd](#) [2011] Touching even when performing for women: Journalist

[Secrets Eversholt Rd](#) [2013] Chain goes to court to try to allow dancers to touch themselves sexually

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[Secrets, Eversholt Rd](#) p2 Licensing hearing: Council unaware of 2016 assault at next licensing hearing

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[Secrets, Eversholt Rd](#) App. 10 [Jan 2017] GBH against lap dancer, club do not inform police: Police Report

[Secrets, Eversholt Rd](#) p 149 [May2017] Drunk customer complains of assault, police not called: Police Report

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[Secrets, Eversholt Rd](#) App.9 [2018] Rampant Sexual Contact, no club intervention: CCTV/Police Report

[Secrets, Euston](#) App. 9 [2019] Rampant Sexual Contact, no club intervention: CCTV/Police Report

Secrets All branches [ongoing] Sexual contact only ever seen once on council inspection of premises/CCTV

Secrets/Sophisticats Eversholt Rd: License transferred to Sophisticats, but trades as Secrets Camden Ltd

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About this Report

This report details incidences at the 3 Camden Secret's strip clubs. This information was obtained from Camden council's minutes and report packs of licensing hearings, including one held in early 2020. However Camden's licensing committee appeared to have no knowledge of these incidences at the 2020 licensing hearings for these clubs. Nor would it allow this information to be (re)presented for consideration at these hearings.

GBH

There have been 4 reports of GBH at the chain. It is likely that a great many more incidences go unreported. Many of these reports centre around highly intoxicated customers. Since it is an offence to serve alcohol to anyone intoxicated, these reports indicate a breach of the Licensing Act as well as GBH.

2016 Secrets Eversholt Rd

One customer assaults another: [2018 Licensing Report Pack](#) p 148

It is concerning that the council were unaware of this at the subsequent licensing hearing:

representations received. There were four crime reports mentioned in the Police submission, one of which dated from before the previous renewal but licensing officers **had not been aware of it** at that time.

[2018 Licensing Report Pack](#) p 2

Jan 2017 Secrets Eversholt Rd

GBH against a lap dancer, who is sexually and verbally abused and then hit with a glass on the forehead. This required 8 stitches. The club did not inform the police:

to. The suspect slapped the victim across the bottom with one of his hands. The victim turned around and said to the suspect, "what are you doing?" The suspect had his face slightly in hers so she pushed his face away from her with one hand and went to walk away. The suspect has then stood up and aggressively said, "WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?" The suspect has then gone to punch the victim in the face using his right hand but has missed. As the victim went to walk away the suspect has **picked up a glass and smashed it over the left side of her head.** The victim states

[2018 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 10 p 148

May 2017 Secrets Eversholt Rd

Intoxicated customer complains to police of assault. Police condemns club for not dealing with customer and not calling them to the venue

Of concern to the MPS:

Again **the venue did not call police to this incident**, even when the victim was trying to regain entry in to the venue. From the report, the venue had numerous chances to remove the victim as he was causing trouble all night and even go onto the stage. From the report the victim was heavily intoxicated and should have been removed from the venue much earlier. This does install confidence to the MPs and possible the dancers when the venue do not get rid of trouble makers at the earliest opportunity.

[2018 Licensing Report Pack](#) p 149

Nov 2017 Secrets Eversholt Rd

A waiter is left to evict a drunken punter who then assaults him. Police concerned security did not deal with this and did not act much sooner:

Of Concern to the MPS:

It seems after a fight occurred inside the venue, the door staff have simply removed the customers and shut their doors. Of concern is the levels of intoxication of the victim and **where were the door staff** to eject the trouble makers instead of a waiter having to use force. The report reads that staff have called police, but at time of writing this report, it is unclear and the informant is still to be contacted.

[2018 Licensing Report Pack](#) p 149

Police Recommendations

The police initially objected to the renewal of the club's license and then withdrew their objections dependent on a number of conditions being adapted – which we believe are [ineffective](#). These include improved CCTV, that the club must call the police over any violent incident and that staff must comply in providing police statements. It is concerning that Camden has for years relied on CCTV evidence in all of its club of proof of compliance (not deemed inadequate by the police until 2017), rather than statements from women from their clubs or other experts exposing the unreliability of such CCTV. Equally, these incidences clearly demonstrate the license holder - who has to be told to call the police over violent assaults or that staff must assist in police enquiries - as unfit

Three incidences of financial fraud were reported at one Secrets venue during 2016 and 2017. When this venue became Sophisticats (still owned by Secrets Camden Ltd), 13 incidences were reported in one year alone. Camden council has subsequently ceased to license this venue, however it continues to license both remaining Camden Secrets clubs. Secrets branches in other boroughs (Hammersmith, Westminster) also continue to be relicensed. The financial fraud demonstrated here does not just refer to the substantial over charging and manipulating payments on credit card machines. It is unlawful to extract payment from a customer who cannot reasonably consent due to intoxication. It is also a breach of the licensing act to sell alcohol to intoxicated individuals.

2016 Secrets Eversholt Rd

27 October 2016 [ref 091248]

A victim thinks he was **taken advantage whilst intoxicated** when visiting the premises by members of staff ordering things he did not ask for. He spent a total of £3,000 whilst there.

[Sophisticats 2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 10

2017 Secrets Eversholt Rd

2 March 2017 [091158]

A customer visits the Eversholt Street branch and says he was **so intoxicated**. He cannot remember any services being provided and yet he spent £2,500 over three transactions made at the premises.

[Sophisticats 2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 1

2018 Secrets Eversholt Rd

29 March 2018 [ref 094629]

A victim and a colleague ended up at the premises and ordered two bottles of champagne at £192 each. However, he was charged £3,180 and then a further £3,000. He has **no recollection** of authorising these transactions.

[Sophisticats 2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 10

2019 Sophisticats Eversholt Rd

In 2019, thirteen cases of financial fraud were reported to the authorities at Sophisticats, formerly known as Secrets, Eversholt Rd. It is argued that this venue is under new ownership. However, the license holder is Secrets Euston Ltd: [Sophisticats 2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 10.

We would also highlight the testimony of women who have worked as lap dancers who state that clubs frequently change management and even ownership in order to avoid being shut. When breaches are discovered, Councils invariably seem satisfied with the claim that this was a 'temporary lapse' due to new management/ownership.

Trading Standards Recommendations

Trading Standards suggested a series of recommendations that, even if followed, [still cannot prevent fraud](#). At their core, they state payments can only be made at a cash desk, 'cannot be coerced' and must be recorded on audio as well as CCTV: [Sophisticats 2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 10

However, a drunk or coke-fuelled customer could very well 'consent' and be recorded as consenting to exorbitant charges. Indeed, in some of the Sophisticats reports, the authorities noted that men seemed fully aware and consenting to their purchases. However, they all woke up the next day with no recollection of the sales, many believing their drinks had been spiked (a possible consequence of excessive alcohol and cocaine consumption).

As countless women from the industry have [testified](#), including to the [press](#), getting customers intoxicated with alcohol and drugs *is the business model* of the industry (many clubs have resident drug dealers). This is one of the reasons customers often pay breath taking prices. The [owner](#) of Sophisticats himself has stated that a £50,000 spend is not unusual. Clearly the industry does, and will continue to, work around any and all conditions put in place.

Sexual Contact, Soliciting, Pimps and Abuse

Sexual contact has been observed on several occasions at the Secrets chain; Residents have described pimps posing as cabbies outside; former dancers have described sexual contact, abuse and intimidation as routine and how regulation is circumvented. All of this has been ignored or dismissed by the council.

Sexual Contact: 2018 Secrets Eversholt Rd

Police observed extensive sexual contact on club CCTV that was 'constant and far too many incidents to list'. There was also 'no intervention by management'. So this clearly wasn't a 'one off', it is the norm, the club just happened to be caught out on CCTV.

Is the council even aware of this at the time? If so, what 'measures' were put in place to prevent this? Or why did it relicense the club?:

The **Dancers Code of Conduct** is also brought into question, with **constant touching by the customer / victim, breaching Condition 53 – If a customer continually breaches the rules – They shall eject that customer from the premises.**

These breaches are apparent on CCTV footage from the 27/02/19 and 20/09/18 with there being no intervention from the management. These **breaches are constant and far too many to list.**

[Sophisticats 2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 9

Sexual Contact: 2019 Secrets Parker St

For apparently the first time on record, Camden council officers witnessed contact between dancer and punter at one of its 7 strip clubs. This occurred at one of only two annual inspections at one branch of the Secrets chain:

[2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) p 251

This was seen on a visit with a licensing officer and an entourage of 3 police and an immigration officer. At the subsequent licensing hearing it was stated that the contact was 'non sexual' even though it involved hips and thighs. [It should be noted that when inspectors at Sheffield City Council licensing observed (possibly naked) 'hugging' after naked sexual performances on CCTV, this too was not described as sexual].

And the Council is content that the issue has been addressed by the club through 'more training' and 'disciplining' staff (meaningless measures as discussed [here](#)). The licensing team state the club is 'under observation' but it is unclear what this means as it has not meant any further checks. Later in the year the Council visited again and deemed the club fully compliant. It has since emerged that the club had been informed in advance of this visit. The Council has now given the club 'a yellow card' on the basis of this incident.

Soliciting: 2017 Secrets Parker St

Anti-social behaviour, Soliciting, Unsafe for women – Resident:

The disruption caused by this establishment is already very significant. This includes noisy and anti-social behaviour by the establishments clientele. The club attracts both unlicensed taxi drivers and rickshaw drivers, who park up on the street causing a disruption to pedestrians. I have on many occasions **been solicited** by drivers and other people to enter the club, and when I have replied that it is not legal to solicit business from passers-by I have been submitted to both **aggressive and anti-social** response. For local residents such as myself and my partner the establishment greatly increases the general feeling of the area being **unsafe and uncomfortable, particularly for women**, in the evening. Extending the opening hours of this establishment would be a complete disregard for the general well-being of the local community.

[2017 Licensing Report Pack](#) Appendix 10 includes this and similar objections

Flyering 2017: Secrets Grays Inn Rd

The club was criticised at its [2020 licensing hearing](#) for flyering. Touting for business in any form is a breach of licensing conditions - however the club excused this as 'handing out business cards'. It should be noted that Spearmint Rhino in Sheffield ([3.3](#)) similarly appeared to conduct flyering (which was excused as 'not flyering at all but stamping perspective punters' hands for discounted entry').

Pimps 2018: Secrets Parker St

A local resident describes numerous pimps. They pose as cabbies but are discussing prices for 'orals'. They often lead men to nearby houses. Club Security and Council Safe Street staff 'seem friendly with them'. This information was given to Not Buying It and passed on to the Council, twice. We would like to know if the police were informed and why this does not appear to have been investigated:

[2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) p 405

Hi,

Just thought I'd let you know that outside **Red Rooms**, there are a **number pimps/ touts** almost always present near the entrances and security never ask them to move when some are stood less than a metre from the entrance. I have heard them dicussing 'oral', prices, & times & have video evidence of one walking a punter to a flat a few minutes walk away.

When security turn a blind-eye to what they are doing, seem friendly towards the pimps, one pimp even calling security by his name. It makes me wonder if the pimps could be tipping the club?

They also are friendly with Westminster quiet streets staff. The pimps mostly walk along **Kingsway** where a minute walk away **Secrets** the other strip club is. Their pretty good front is that they are minicab drivers and 'minicab' seems to be code for inticing men who want to buy sex. A pimp then leads the man to follow him to a flat, not a minicab. When men actually want a minicab they point then to a black cab in the road. It is quite a good front and I didn't see it for a few years.

There is a big sign warning punters not to use unlicensed minicabs outside secrets. However, the men posing as unlicensed minicab drivers are never told to move & consistantly there all the time the club is open.

On Kingsway at the entrance of **Secrets** in a dead end road, there can be up to **12 touts at a time just standing there and talking to punters as they exit and Secrets** security do nothing about it either.

My concern is if the clubs are getting money from these pimps or the clubs themselves are linked to these brothels a few minutes walk away.

Thanks.

2020: Chain seeks Government compensation for its touts

In 2020, the chain sought access to the £90,000 Late Night Levy to 'help prevent' the taxi touts (many of whom appear to be pimps) that are there because of its clubs.

[2020 Licensing Report Pack](#) Suppl Agenda p 9

The request for funds to 'clear up the taxi touts' seems even more ironic when Comedian, Dave Gorman, has exposed that it is routine for London strip clubs to [pay cabbies up to £100](#) every time they drop off punters.

2008 – Present: Testimonies from Lap Dancers

A woman who worked at Secrets Eversholt 2008-2009 has testified to the financial fraud, sexual contact, assaults and pimps that have now been verified numerous times since. She also describes aspects of the industry that no amount of police raids or trading standards reports will show - the harassment, threats and intimidation to which lap dancers are routinely subjected.

A woman who worked at the Parker St branch in 2019/20 has testified to appalling and unsanitary working conditions and the fact that lap dancers working there were not even breaking even. She also states that financial fraud is rampant in the strip trade.

These testimonies have been given to Camden council. We question why information from whistle blowers is steadfastly ignored by this Councils, like others across the country. Women who whistle blow on the industry whilst in it (which puts them at considerable risk) or after they have left are the only ones who expose the truth of the industry. Yet theirs are the voices that are steadfastly ignored.

[2020 Licensing Report Pack](#)

Ongoing: No Monitoring or Meaningful Regulation

In all this time, Camden Council has never seen any serious breach on any inspection of its Secrets clubs, nor indeed any of its strip clubs. This is despite a [catalogue of abuse at its clubs](#) over 2 decades.

Camden Council only inspects each of its strip clubs twice (sometimes just once) a year. One of these visits is always pre-announced - clearly of no meaningful value. But even un-announced 'spot checks' are meaningless. Countless women from the industry state that clubs go into immediate lock down the minute licensing officers and police (who are all known to the clubs) appear in, or outside, the premises. Police have also confirmed this to Not Buying It in personal communication.

This is true for all Councils, who rarely find anything amiss on inspections of strip clubs, despite a staggering level of criminality, with recorded incidences in at least [half of the entire UK strip trade](#).

As women from the industry repeatedly state, the only chance to obtain a meaningful inspections of a strip club is through trained undercover surveillance operators. But this is something the authorities steadfastly refuse to do. This means that the entire strip trade has, in effect, been unregulated and unmonitored since its inception. And still is.

Accounting Concerns

The financial status of the company also needs to be addressed. The 2018 accounts of the entire Secrets chain appears to show staggering levels of debt:

Net Worth	Club Name	License Holder
£ 2.5 million debt	Secrets Parker St	Secrets Western Ltd
£ 1 balance sheet	Secrets Grays Inn Rd	Secrets Grays Inn Ltd
£ 1.6 million debt	Secrets Hammersmith	Wilton Park Ltd
£ 2 million debt	Secrets Eversholt Rd	Secrets Euston Ltd
£ 1 balance sheet	Sophisticats *	Secrets Camden Ltd
£1.6 million debt	Gas Light St Jame's **	The Gas Light St Jame's Ltd

[£3.3 mill profit recorded in 2018 for SLLH Holdings - Parent company?]

Net worth: £4.4 million debt?

Why is a company with so much debt still operating? *How* is it able to? This has to raise serious issues about the manner of operating or the appropriateness of allowing a business to continue to do so, particularly when financial fraud has already been demonstrated.

*The license for Secrets Eversholt Rd was transferred to Sophisticats in 2019. Sophisticats was shut after 13 incidences of financial fraud were reported in 2019. This club is not deemed part of the chain, even though trading under the Secrets name.

**Gas Light St James' is deemed part of the Secrets chain, even though not trading under the Secrets name.

2020: Section 21 Offence ('Lying to the Council')

On 12 Feb 2020 at the licensing hearing for Secrets Parker St, the owner of the Secrets chain categorically stated that there had never been any serious incidences or breaches at *any* of his clubs. He further stated that his legal team had looked through minutes of licensing meetings over several years and found nothing.

However, several police crime reports of GBH are thoroughly referenced in these minutes. The club's legal representative, Mr Clifton, also discusses them at length in these minutes:

Mr Clifton addressed the Sub-Committee on behalf of his client and assured Members that they took the Police concerns seriously. They had agreed conditions with the Metropolitan Police to allay these concerns. He also informed Members that staff had undergone crime scene management training.

[Minutes of 2018 Licensing Hearing for Secrets Eversholt Rd](#) p 2

It isn't merely implausible that the club did not know of four Police Crime reports of violent incidences over 2016 and 2017. The fact is, the club was fully informed of these incidences and was clearly actively engaging with the police and Council, particularly as the police initially planned to make representations against the club's license. The club's legal representative, Mr Clifton, confirmed this engagement with his letter to the police regarding withdrawal of their objections, subject to new conditions:

[2018 Licensing Report Pack for all Secrets branches](#) Appendix 10 p 151

Given extra conditions were imposed on the club because of serious police concerns around violent crime, it seems even more concerning that the club now claims 'there have never been any incidences' and that it couldn't even find reference to them by looking through past licensing hearing minutes.

The club and council surely also knew of the numerous Trading Standards reports over 2016-17

We believe that the only reasonable explanation for this is that false information was knowingly given to the Council. Under [section 21 of schedule 3](#) of the LG(MP)A this is an offence:

Any person who, in connection with an application for the grant, renewal or transfer of a licence under this Schedule, makes a false statement which he knows to be false in any material respect or which he does not believe to be true, shall be guilty of an offence.