

Hoodwinked by the Department of Health? Frank Dobson and the 1997 Jimmy Savile report

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This is a continuation of 'A Jimmy Savile sex scandal concealed during the 1997 General Election' in *Lobster* 73.¹

What happened to the external management review of Broadmoor high-security hospital that Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell had commissioned, once the Conservative Party had left office? The report was sent to his office in April 1997, shortly before the Conservatives lost power at that year's General Election. The report, including the reference to the 1995 police investigation of Savile's sex offence, then landed on the figurative desk of the Rt Hon Frank Dobson, MP for the London constituency of Holborn and St Pancras South. Mr Dobson was Tony Blair's first Secretary of State for Health from May 1997 to October 1999.

Since his retirement at the General Election of 2015, Mr Dobson, now 77, has lost a significant amount of weight. This, he cheerfully volunteers, is the result of re-adjusting to regular mealtimes rather than having to grab quick snacks during a long working day. But he retains his signature 'Father Christmas' appearance. Old habits die hard, however: he takes his cappuccino with a chocolate dusting: 'It's not a real cappuccino without chocolate.'²

He is blunt about his time in Cabinet, referring to the Civil Service as 'the machine'. He found it obstructive, laborious, and occasionally malicious. On one occasion Department of Health staff presented him with a blank 'With Sympathy' card tucked inside the usual sheaf of official letters awaiting his signature. When he asked who the card was for, he was hesitantly told it was for 'someone big in the private healthcare sector.' He didn't sign it. 'It was a trick of course,' he recalls, 'a dirty trick – and if I had signed it then it would have come back to damage me somewhere along the line.' Mr Dobson was very careful about his dealings with 'the machine'.

¹ <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster73/lob73-jimmy-savile.pdf>>

² Interview conducted at the Cafe Russell, London on 30 November 2017.

He famously wrote a memo about the NHS to Tony Blair in 1998, telling the Prime Minister: 'If you want a first-class service, you have to pay a first-class fare – and we're not doing it.' What previous accounts have overlooked is that Mr Dobson had this memo typed up in his House of Commons office, away from the prying eyes of 'the machine'.

'If the Civil Service don't like what you are up to, then they will go to their colleagues in Downing Street and scupper you before you have got there. Generally speaking, if I did this then I got in first and got my own way. Because if you already have the Prime Minister's backing then it's easier to say "Such-and-such has to be done".'

Did 'the machine' ever hide anything from him? 'Not that I know of, but then of course I wouldn't know about it, would I?'

Asked about the handover from Mr Dorrell's tenure, Mr Dobson recalled that soon after taking office his predecessor paid him a visit: 'Stephen Dorrell asked could he come and see me. I always got on with Stephen Dorrell and I got him to go through who in the Department of Health were good people to get on with and who weren't.'

Shown the 1997 Broadmoor report commissioned by Mr Dorrell, which mentioned the presence of a sex offender among Broadmoor's staff, Mr Dobson said: 'I don't remember this and think I would have done, if it had come up.'

Which is odd because in 1999 a report was put to Parliament under Mr Dobson's name concerning conditions at Ashworth High Security Hospital. It cited the 1997 Broadmoor report at some length – but it didn't mention the fact that in 1995 Thames Valley Police had investigated a child sex abuse incident on Broadmoor hospital property. Shown the relevant portions of the 1999 Ashworth Report, Mr Dobson's perplexity increased:

'I do not recall anything to do with Broadmoor. I have no recall of this incident from 1995. I would have seen this report on Ashworth before it was put to Parliament in 1999. But it's an independent report and you don't start interfering with independent experts when they are writing reports.'

The paradox, then, is that a review of Broadmoor, commissioned in February 1997 and subsequently delivered to the Conservative Secretary of State for Health in April 1997, was cited in a second 1999 report to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Health – who today states that he has no recollection of the affair. What happened to the review during the two years between its delivery and its quotation in another document is unknown.

The Savile incident occurred in April 1995. The Health Secretary at that

time was Virginia Bottomley, who was succeeded by Mr Dorrell in July that year. This indicates that two separate Health Secretaries under Prime Minister John Major could have been aware of the scandal. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that the Prime Minister himself would have learned of it. Both Sir John and Baroness Bottomley were contacted in relation to this matter, but no reply was received from either.

Directed to the specifics about Broadmoor in the 1999 Ashworth Report, Mr Dobson said: 'The only bell this rings is that there were things wrong at Ashworth and we needed someone good.' The Broadmoor incident 'doesn't ring a bell. If something was reported to the police then it was reported to the police.'

Asked whether he had discussed the 1997 Broadmoor report with Mr Dorrell during their meetings in 1997, Mr Dobson suggested: 'Stephen Dorrell might not even have seen it.' Could such a report really be ignored by the man who commissioned it and then overlooked by the man in whose name it was quoted two years later? Or did 'the machine' simply not bring it to their attention?

What is clear, however, is that Savile's gradual easing out from Broadmoor began after Labour took office in May 1997. By July that year, Savile's friend and colleague Alan Franey had been nudged into taking early retirement from his post as General Manager. By 1998, the new chief executive, Dr Julie Hollyman, had concluded that Savile's involvement wasn't benefiting Broadmoor. ³She believed that 'the hospital was doing something for him and that that wasn't right' and she drastically restricted Savile's access to accommodation. After 1998 Savile 'would have needed to obtain a non-dedicated set of keys by presenting his identity card to reception staff, or else entered the hospital as a visitor without access to security keys.'⁴ By 2003 the Kirkup review established, Savile had stopped visiting Broadmoor altogether, although it wasn't until 2009 that he was de-registered as a keyholder.

Nor was Savile's criminality the only Broadmoor dirt swept under the rug at the Department of Health. The 1999 report (on conditions at Ashworth)⁵ refers to the 1997 review commissioned by Mr Dorrell as follows:

³ <<https://tinyurl.com/y88hmjvu>> or <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jimmy-savile-investigation-broadmoor-hospital>> (see s.7.53)

⁴ <<https://tinyurl.com/y88hmjvu>> or <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jimmy-savile-investigation-broadmoor-hospital>> (see s.6.17)

⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/y7p6lse2>> or <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ashworth-special-hospital-report-of-the-committee-of-inquiry>> (s.1.20.0 et seq)

'There were allegations [in the media] of drugs finds and a possible child pornography ring [at Broadmoor]. Mr Dorrell ordered an External Management Review of the Hospital to investigate the truth or otherwise of the allegations [. . .] The Review team demonstrated that *most of the allegations made so vociferously in the media were unfounded.*' (emphasis added)

The allegations of a possible child pornography ring are intriguing in view of the recollections of former Broadmoor nurse Bob Allen. As reported in *Lobster* 73,⁶ in 1995 Mr Allen alerted management to the incident where Savile brought a child onto hospital premises overnight. Mr Allen has not seen the 1997 review commissioned by Mr Dorrell, so was not aware that the review team was tasked to look into claims of child pornography.

What Mr Allen recalls is that there was indeed someone at Broadmoor who was producing child pornography, although Mr Allen did not know whether that person was doing it for his own private use or for circulation among other paedophiles. According to Mr Allen, the child abuser was a member of staff who acted as a babysitter for the children of colleagues but secretly took indecent photographs of his charges. All this occurred on hospital premises, since the person in question had staff accommodation even though the staff bungalows were outside Broadmoor's perimeter fence. (The child abuser's name is withheld here for legal reasons.) Mr Allen recalled: 'I can't remember how it came to light, but it turned out that this guy had a box full of obscene photographs of his colleagues' children. It was in his attic.'⁷

Mr Allen is quite definite that the staff member was arrested, charged and convicted: 'He served time for it.' This is a second serious matter involving child abuse at Broadmoor secure hospital that has not been reported or brought to light during reviews since Savile's death. It is precisely the sort of issue that should have been covered by the external review team in 1997, then scrutinised afresh by the Kirkup review that took place after Savile's death. The apparent explanation is that the child pornography scandal was concealed from the management review team in 1997 and so the Kirkup review was unaware of it in 2014.

One incident relating to awareness of paedophile activity at Broadmoor is particularly interesting. Bob Allen recalled a visit to the hospital made by the late Diana, Princess of Wales. Mr Allen said that the Princess was introduced to one Broadmoor patient who asked for her autograph. Diana told the patient that she didn't normally give autographs during such visits but would make an

⁶ <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster73/lob73-jimmy-savile.pdf>>

⁷ Telephone interview with the author.

exception in his case. The patient got her autograph, and shortly afterwards Diana turned to Mr Allen and said: 'That guy is a paedophile, isn't he?' Mr Allen told her that, indeed, the patient had a horrendous history of abusing children for sexual purposes.⁸

The patient – whose identity Mr Allen naturally would not divulge – later stuck in Mr Allen's memory for a second reason. On his release from Broadmoor, he emigrated to the USA and according to Mr Allen 'is still there today, I believe.' Mr Allen finds it suspicious that a former high-security psychiatric patient – with a string of convictions for child sex abuse – managed to gain permission to reside in the States, whose immigration processes are famously draconian.

All of this was unknown to Frank Dobson during his time as Secretary of State for Health, and it must be stressed that there is no suggestion Mr Dobson participated in a cover up of any child sex abuse scandal.

As for Savile himself, Mr Dobson recalled: 'I have to say he always made my flesh creep. But I never met him. I don't think he was still at Broadmoor when I was Health Secretary, was he?' Informed that, yes, Savile was still part of the management team at Broadmoor during the first Blair government, Mr Dobson said: 'You have heard what I have to say, and that's that.'

⁸ Was Diana primed by Savile to sign an autograph for this patient? If so, had she correctly divined the reason for Savile's interest in him? Savile had been a factor in her life for many years. He is referred to by name as a sort of 'marriage counsellor' in Diana's illicitly-recorded 'Squidgygate' conversation of 1989 – so before the Royal divorce – and remained on the periphery of affairs thereafter. Diana's long-term aide Commander Patrick Jephson recorded in his memoirs that Savile was among independent observers whose advice the Princess sought out and that such observers did 'nothing but good as far as I could see'. (*Shadows of a Princess* [HarperCollins, 2000] p. 422)

Commander Jephson's memoir also records (p. 510) a visit to Broadmoor in December 1993, during which the Princess met with patients and sat in on a private meeting of the Patients' Council, which received her warmly. Indeed, the 2014 Kirkup review stated:

'HRH (sic) Diana, Princess of Wales visited the hospital on several occasions. Although some staff believed that Savile was in some way behind these visits, there is little evidence to suggest this, though it would be typical of Savile to claim a link. Two were official visits, and several were less-formal visits, arranged at shorter notice, when the Princess would spend time talking to patients, sometimes in private conversations, but always with appropriate security in place.' (sec 8.17)

Why would Diana would have maintained an acquaintance with someone she apparently believed to have been a paedophile? The answer may be that Savile remained on good terms with the Prince of Wales and therefore served as a conduit along which useful information might arrive. A strategic relationship, in other words, of the kind the Princess is known to have cultivated frequently during her manoeuvres against the Royal Family.

