

# Anna Raccoon and the dawn of Savilisation

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## Jimmy Savile 'moral panic' tracked on computer in Dordogne

Social scientists studying mass-media fantasies known as 'moral panics' have reported on an archive of internet traffic that reveals the social media origins of the Jimmy Savile scandal. This revelation was in the *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* and was provided by Dr Mark Smith (from Edinburgh University) and Dr Ros Burnett (senior research associate at the Oxford University Centre for Criminology). They link the Savile Scandal – 'the most prominent chapter in recent UK cultural history, in which the former BBC entertainer Jimmy Savile is alleged to have sexually abused hundreds of children over the past fifty years' – with the satanic ritual abuse scandal 'which swept the US and the UK over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. . . suggesting that a belief in demonic threats still has traction in the public imagination.' <sup>1</sup>

Thousands of emails copied to an obsolete Apple iMac personal computer in a country house in France, recorded hours of private social media discussions between the first women to come forward and claim they had been sexually abused by the dead disc jockey. Forty years ago the women had been teenagers detained at the Duncroft Approved School, an experimental secure boarding school near London Heathrow, opened by the Home Office to give a second chance of education to girls of above-average intelligence taken into care after breaking the law.

The owner of the electronic archive was a retired English lawyer living in the Dordogne, who had herself lived in care at Duncroft in 1965 and 1966.



Susanne Cameron-Blackie, blogging daily online from France as Anna Raccoon, had joined two now defunct online communities, Friendsreunited and Care Leavers Reunited. She noticed that former boarders at Duncroft Approved School were exchanging memories using code names. Cameron-Blackie collaborated online with Sally

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<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/IJSSP-03-2017-0029>>

Stevens, a former pupil living in California, and they worked out the true identities of the women behind the code names.

Cameron-Blackie described how she noticed that a woman, who had roomed with her in the Wedgewood Dormitory at Duncroft in 1965, was claiming online to have been assaulted in the dormitory by Jimmy Savile.

'How could I have been so unobservant as to *not* notice such a comment worthy event as a major celebrity galloping around the building unescorted? There had to be some mistake in the reporting. Or maybe in my maths? I rechecked all my fingers, yep I was definitely there in 1965. Except for one month at the end of the year – but I was back four months later.'

So began Cameron-Blackie's three year unofficial investigation into the Duncroft online allegations that sparked the 2012 nationwide Savile Scandal. By 2016 that had cost Savile's part-time employers at the BBC £10.7 million. The total cost of subsequent investigations by the National Health Service, by various police forces, education authorities and by the ongoing £100 million Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), announced by the British home secretary Theresa May in 2014, will never be known.

Cameron-Blackie collated extra information from research into BBC records gathered online by two other blogging investigators known as Moor Larkin<sup>2</sup> and Rabbitaway<sup>3</sup>, and by Sally Stevens herself, at The Rockphiles.<sup>4</sup>

In November 2012 some of the 'care leavers' emerged from the anonymity of social media to give television interviews and instruct lawyers to take legal proceedings against the BBC and the £4 million held in trust by Jimmy Savile's medical charities. Cameron-Blackie, a former Lord Chancellor's Visitor for Wales, was able to cross-reference their claims and recover documentary evidence from the Barnardo's charity which had inherited the Duncroft school records.

Surrey Police discovered from a visitor's book that Savile had not visited the school before 1974. They eventually wrote to a hundred surviving Duncroft pupils and staff to report that a police 'Operation Outreach' had found no corroborated evidence that any member of staff had been aware of any wrongdoing at the school.

In 2013, fearing that she might not survive a forthcoming cancer

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://jimcannotfixthis.blogspot.co.uk>>

<sup>3</sup> <<http://rabbitaway.blogspot.co.uk>>

<sup>4</sup> <[http://rockphiles.typepad.com/a\\_life\\_in\\_the\\_day/](http://rockphiles.typepad.com/a_life_in_the_day/)>

operation in France, Cameron-Blackie sent an email to Professor Vivienne Cree at the Edinburgh University School of Social and Political Science:

'I blog on the Internet as "Anna Raccoon" and as such have published several articles on the current "Savile saga".

However, having found myself at the centre of the "Duncroft" furore, I have also been given a mound of information which I have not yet published. I am looking for a good home for it!

Is there a possibility that we might collaborate in some way? I am not interested in money, nor credit for my contribution, but I am not in good health [I have had cancer for the past two years, and am now – thank God – several months past my "sell by" date, but I take nothing for granted!] and I am growing concerned that should I kick the proverbial bucket, then the knowledge and the contacts that I hold will be lost forever, and one day academics will want to piece together the origins of this current panic.'

Within weeks of the November 2012 screening of a sensational ITV documentary, *Exposure: The Other Side of Jimmy Savile*, Edinburgh University held the first of a number of 'moral panic' seminars, involving Professor Cree, Dr Mark Smith, head of social work, and Dr Gary Clapton, senior lecturer in social work. The Edinburgh team said they

'... shared common interests in how particular subjects, especially those involving children and sex (e.g. satanic ritual abuse, child exploitation and abuse in residential child care settings) could be moralised with disproportionate and sometimes dangerous consequences.'

Their research project, state-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, was initially described as Revisiting Moral Panics: A Critical Examination of 21st Century Social Issues and Anxieties. It aimed

'... to examine some 21st century social issues and anxieties through the concept of moral panic, first brought to public attention 40 years ago in Stanley Cohen's influential study *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.'

Until he died in 2013, Cohen was Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics. He showed in *Folk Devils* how news media had hyped a social threat from overblown police reports of 'Mods and Rockers' fighting on a beach in Brighton in 1963. In a book that has become a classic, he noted in 1972:

'... a pattern of distorted facts and misrepresentation, as well as a distinct, simplistic depiction of the respective images of both groups

involved in the disturbance.’<sup>5</sup>

He found that, like a traditional witch hunt, ‘the depiction of mods and rockers as violent, unruly troublemakers actually led in itself to a rise in “deviant behaviour” by the subcultures.’

At the seminar in Edinburgh, Dr Mark Smith (an expert in residential child care, who had already publicly questioned the reported scale of historic child abuse allegations in British care homes) noted that Cameron-Blackie had discovered that Duncroft complainants were circulating a forged letter about Savile typed on stolen Surrey Police notepaper.

Cameron-Blackie had also discovered that the anonymous Duncroft complainants were unaware that the former headmistress, Miss Margaret Jones, was alive at the age of 91 and quite able to challenge the anonymous tales about her school. Confronted without warning on her doorstep by a *Daily Mail* reporter, Miss Jones warned the newspaper, ‘A lot of these girls at the time were very mentally disturbed.’<sup>6</sup>

Cameron-Blackie described the media frenzy over Savile:

‘Stories were sold to the main stream media concerning the girl who had spent a considerable time sitting up in bed opposite me. She was now claiming that Jimmy Savile had been running round our dormitory sexually abusing us and that “we were terrified” – I had never heard so much nonsense.

Another girl was all over social media saying that “Maggie Jones”, as she had the temerity to call her, had been “pimping the girls out to celebrities”. I literally couldn’t believe my ears.

I was quickly rewarded with, as I had suspected, a raft of supportive “ex-Duncroft girls” who had been googling these mysterious stories, and who had landed on my site.

I shall always be grateful to them – they have kept my spirits high as the story grew legs by the day, and I was in danger of disappearing under a tsunami of vitriol and recrimination.’<sup>7</sup>

In the summer of 2013, when the National Health Service spent a million pounds to investigate Savile’s charity activities in 41 British hospitals, the Economic and Social Research Council activated an ‘urgency grants mechanism’ to form a team for recovery and collation of information from

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<sup>5</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: Paladin, 1973), p. 224 .

<sup>6</sup> *Daily Mail*, 2 November 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Smith and Burnett: *The origins of the Jimmy Savile scandal*. See note 1.

the iMac at Cameron-Blackie's home in the Dordogne and to interview the elderly staff and former residents of Duncroft.

'The doctors have not given me long to live. Although I am both a writer and a lawyer I could not have embarked on a lengthy project at this stage in my life. I looked for someone who could research the actual truth about what really happened all those years ago and delineate the path by which we arrived at the current situation.'<sup>8</sup>

Still blogging as Anna Raccoon, Susanne Cameron-Blackie returned from France with her husband Graham Nundy to live in a riverbank house he converted for them at Reedham in Norfolk, where she died in her sleep on 18 August 2017.<sup>9</sup>

## **Anonymous social media**

In their 2018 paper, Dr Burnett and Dr Smith, now Professor of Social Work at Dundee University, have named the woman whose patently false allegation prompted Cameron-Blackie's investigation. In October 2012, Mrs Bebe Roberts, then 62 and living in Cheshire, had waived anonymity to tell the *Daily Mail* that Savile molested her outside a dormitory in 1965. Burnett and Smith report:

'Our interview with the former resident who claims to have introduced Savile to Duncroft indicates that he first visited in 1974, a fact subsequently confirmed by Surrey Police's *Operation Outreach* [2015]. Bebe Roberts's account of being assaulted by Savile in Duncroft in the mid 1960s is clearly not borne out by other sources of evidence.

We sought to reach out to as broad a range of former staff and residents, including those who had made allegations against Savile but apart from an anonymous email that seemed it might have been from one of these, we did not manage to engage any complainants.

In the event we interviewed Anna Raccoon herself, another resident from the 1960s and two former residents from the 1970s, including the girl who introduced Savile to Duncroft. We also interviewed the former deputy head of the school and a former head of education. Inevitably the numbers are small but there is some variety of viewpoints – one of

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<sup>8</sup> Telephone call the author, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Many pages of her blog, known in its early years on the web as 'the snug', have since been recovered by Richard O'Connor of Currattech in Ireland, as a tribute to Susanne's search for 'liberty, freedom and most of all, the truth' and can be read online at <<https://annaraccoon.com>>.

the residents did not enjoy her time at Duncroft and railed against much of what it stood for but, nevertheless, refuted the stories being told about Savile.'

It becomes clear from the Burnett and Smith paper that it was the dangerous anonymity of 21<sup>st</sup> century social media that triggered a nationwide moral panic after Savile's death at the age of 84, in 2011.

'When, more than forty years later, allegations against Savile began to emerge, they did so on social media message boards. The view of the former pupils we spoke to was that the whole situation had mushroomed out of control:

"This nonsense about Jimmy Savile started up as like, you know, little kids, give it a wee try to see how far that runs, and if it doesn't run far enough they ramp it up a bit. And that's been going on since 2007. . . I think they thought it would be hushed up quietly, money paid. They had no idea that this snowball was going to take off, you know." [1970s resident].

As other former Duncroft girls began to contribute to the message boards and to question the tales of abuse, the exchanges became ever-more acrimonious. "Basically the nastiness got so intense, I couldn't tell who was real and who was false, people claiming to be real weren't." [1970s resident]. This social media dimension might cast doubts on the police's assertion that those making allegations were unknown to one another and their accounts could thus be argued to provide independent corroboration of allegations.'

The Burnett and Smith paper describes the standard story of Savile at Duncroft:

'Reporting of the Savile case evokes a particularly negative image of the culture in Duncroft. One former pupil was quoted as saying that "Jimmy treated Duncroft like a paedophile sweet shop. He used to take his pick of the mix. He would wander around the school in a vest and tracksuit bottoms. . . He stayed in a flat on the top floor . . . Who knows what horrors happened up there?" <sup>10</sup>

Another told how Savile assaulted her in his Rolls-Royce after the headmistress, Miss Jones, asked if she wanted to go for a run with him. Former residents claimed that they had reported the abuse to school staff, including Miss Jones, who allegedly replied: "Don't be stupid." This dismissive attitude was represented by one of the girls through what

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 2012.

has become the standard story of institutional abuse – that of innocent victims whose pleas for help fell on deaf ears: “The girls at Duncroft had been sent there by the courts for prostitution, drugs and because they tried to kill themselves. Who would have believed us against Saint Jimmy?”<sup>11</sup>

A 1970s Duncroft resident interviewed by the Edinburgh research team agreed that Savile had taken girls for a ride in his Rolls-Royce on organised outings. But even on organised outings, the disc jockey sometimes found that the ‘sexual dynamics’ were too risky:

‘So I said, if you take me out for a car ride on my own, I said, as soon as we get down the road the first thing I’m going to do is I’m going to try and get your pants off. And, he turned round and said . . . because, I was tempting him, and that, it was sort of in the girls to be provocative like that. So, I was saying that, to see. . . and straight away he turned round and he said, nothing like that is going to happen. I mean, he wasn’t horrid about it, he just said, “I can’t take you.”’

Smith and Burnett judge that ‘. . . wider contextual detail might suggest that he did not have the run of the school in the way that newspaper reports suggest and certainly not access to the dormitories.’

‘A picture emerges of Miss Jones as a callous individual who presided over Savile’s alleged abuse. She is said to have described those making complaints as delinquents who were looking for money. For her part, Miss Jones denied any knowledge of abuse insisting that if any of her girls had told her what Savile was doing to them, she would have thrown him “out on his ear” and reported him to police.

“Nobody ever complained to me. Not one girl complained to me or my staff”. She goes on, in the same interview, to express her personal view of Savile: “I didn’t like him. . . I thought he was an odd bod.”<sup>12</sup>

The level of public outrage following the initial allegations against Savile led to a number of official reports, perhaps the most influential of which was *Giving Victims a Voice*,<sup>13</sup> which states:

“On the whole victims are not known to each-other and taken together their accounts paint a compelling picture of widespread

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<sup>11</sup> *The Sun*, 4 October 2012.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Mail*, 2 November 2012.

<sup>13</sup> David Gray and Peter Watt, 2013, a joint publication by NSPCC and Metropolitan Police, page 4. At <<https://tinyurl.com/y7pce6mh>> or <<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/yewtree-report-giving-victims-voice-jimmy-savile.pdf>>.

sexual abuse by a predatory sex offender. We are therefore referring to them as 'victims' rather than 'complainants' and are not presenting the evidence they have provided as unproven allegations."'

Smith and Burnett admit:

'This paper is based on only a very small sample of interviews. The material is ethically sensitive in that it may be claimed or used to cast doubt on accounts of abuse. The implications of the wider project from which it draws are potentially profound, casting doubt on the origins and detail of the Savile scandal . . . .

This article cannot discount the possibility that Savile sexually abused girls at Duncroft but it paints a very different picture of the culture in the school which, it is claimed, allowed such abuse to happen unchecked. It was not a lax or uncaring institution but a pioneering and highly regarded one. The reality of Savile's time there is far less sinister and more quotidian than reported. In the regime described, he may have been able to take his chance to exploit girls opportunistically [although there is no convincing evidence that he did] but it seems unlikely that he could have behaved in the uncontained manner that press and official reports claim and upon which the wider narrative rests. The version of events set out in our interviews might be thought to convince in its consonance with narrative conventions of plot, setting and characterization . . . . Miss Jones becomes a real person, an image given some substance by the description of the tensions between her and her deputy. Jimmy Savile, too, emerges as a far more nuanced character than police or media accounts allow. One of the former pupils presciently identified some of the flaws in the narrative construction of the dominant Duncroft story:

"Well, even back then, I noticed if you were talking about real abuse it was boring, like any real story, it doesn't have the right beginning, middle and end, it doesn't have the high points." [1970s resident]

Nevertheless, the Savile story has had massive political and cultural reverberations, provoking a crisis in the British state. As one of our interviewees stated:

"But, what bothers me, it did all start at Duncroft and, I mean, the basics of that, what do you call it, emotional contagion and football crowds, the ripples go out, somebody starts it and they send out ... It started with Duncroft and a story, and then that programme [the Exposure documentary], and before you know it the ripples were going out so much that it went out of control. . . .' [1960s resident]



## Bryn Estyn

In their conclusions, Smith and Burnett refer to a famous investigation into the origins of the 1991 North Wales care homes scandal conducted by the late Richard Webster and reported in his book *The Secret of Bryn Estyn: The Making of a Modern Witch Hunt*.<sup>14</sup> Smith and Burnett follow Webster's argument that people mounting a moral crusade against child abuse can be blinded by:

'... the cognitive dissonance, which takes over in cases where emotions run high. Moreover, they see themselves as responding to something where the weight of evidence is assumed to be overwhelming and where any rational person would reach the same conclusion and operate to the same moral economy. But, as Webster observes, it is this very assumption of rationality that is at the heart of what goes wrong in major historical instances of panic over child abuse.'

They quote Webster:

'The widespread belief that, belonging as we do to a rational scientific age we are no longer vulnerable to such fantasies, is itself one of the most dangerous of all our delusions. For it is precisely because of our rationalism, and the difficulty we have in acknowledging our own violence and the full depth and complexity of our sexual imagination, that we are probably more susceptible to dangerous projections than we ever have been.'<sup>15</sup>

Burnett and Smith say:

'This makes it all the more important that in major cultural episodes such as the Savile case a single story does not dominate and it is opened up to alternative viewpoints. Specifically, it needs to be recognized that the stories told about Savile are likely to be complex and multilayered and may or may not bear much resemblance to actual events. In the current climate it is too easy to accept them uncritically and indeed to canvas more of the same, which has been the *modus operandi* of the Police and the NSPCC. While it might be argued that the sheer weight of accounts offers compelling evidence of the scale of abuse, it may, equally plausibly, point to the propensity of people, for a

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Webster, *The Secret of Bryn Estyn: The Making of a Modern Witch Hunt* (Halesworth: Orwell Press, 2005) ISBN: 9780951592243

<sup>15</sup> <<http://www.richardwebster.net/brynestynintro.htm>>

host of reasons, to write themselves into a particularly powerful cultural narrative when encouraged to do so.

The implications of questioning the Savile narrative on the basis of going back to where it all began are profound – they unsettle the direction of recent criminal justice policy in respect of its privileging of victim accounts. This point was not lost on the former residents of Duncroft: “But, yes, I think there’s a lot, because if all this Duncroft stuff could be debunked then the rest of it is going to fall apart.” [1970s resident]’

The *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* published the Smith and Burnett paper on 22 April 2018, three weeks after *The Times* reported that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick, has abandoned a police policy of describing all complainants of sex abuse as ‘victims’ before any investigation has started. Cressida Dick’s decision complied with the 2016 recommendations of Sir Richard Henriques, a retired high court judge, who conducted an independent review of the Met’s handling of ‘non-recent sexual offence investigations’, particularly a two year child sex abuse and murder inquiry, *Operation Midland*, that closed down in 2016 without any charges or convictions.

Alison Levitt, former principal legal advisor to the Director of Public Prosecutions, said in 2017:

‘Sir Richard made it clear in his report that the police must stop using the word victim and start using the word complainant because the police must approach these cases with an open mind. It is their duty to investigate whether or not it leads towards the suspect or indeed away from the suspect.’<sup>16</sup>

The abandoned guidelines referred to the perceived failure by Surrey police to investigate Jimmy Savile’s activities at Duncroft Approved School.<sup>17</sup>

Burnet and Smith refer to an international study of false and distorted memories edited by Robert Nash and James Ost:<sup>18</sup>

‘The realist position adopted by the police and activists on the status of

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Evans and Robert Mendick, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 December 2017.

<<https://tinyurl.com/ycoypmc3>> or <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/12/20/police-should-refer-complainants-not-victims-investigating-rape/>>

<sup>17</sup> Cressida Dick’s decision was challenged by the journalist Joan Smith, co-chair of the Mayor of London’s Violence Against Women and Girls Panel. <<https://tinyurl.com/yct2mwr7>> or <<http://politicalblonde.com/index.php/2018/04/the-police-have-a-duty-to-believe-rape-victims-have-we-learned-nothing/>>

<sup>18</sup> Robert A. Nash and James Ost (eds) *False and Distorted Memories*, (London: Routledge 2017)

people's stories extends to their understanding of memory, which is assumed to correspond to actual events (or which, reprising the memory wars of the 1990s. . . might be thought to be repressed and subsequently recovered). This is essentially a videotape understanding of how memory operates, which assumes that it can be accurately played back and that similar accounts might be thought to corroborate one another. Memory, however, does not work like this. Nash and Ost capture the consensus in the field that memory is shaped by social, political and political forces and is thus amenable to manipulation, either active or passive, through therapeutic engagement or through the assimilation of cultural stories. In this sense, it links with the way that people use stories to make sense of their lives. Haaken [1998]<sup>19</sup> suggests that when women struggle to speak openly about their experiences they may do so through storytelling, in ways that introduce layers of meaning but which blur the boundaries between 'true' and 'false'. Tavis and Aronson [2007]<sup>20</sup> describe how the lives of unhappy and vulnerable individuals become open to exploitation, by therapists, prosecutors, police officers and personal injury lawyers who profess to offer a solution, often labelled "closure" to vague feelings that something is not right in life. The authors go on to identify how lives can be destroyed by these intractable and sincerely-held, yet false, beliefs.'

## **Coda: The best evidence**

**As** former Lord Chancellor's Visitor for Wales, retired lawyer Susanne Cameron-Blackie, knew where to look for the best evidence – the 'best evidence' as described in 1745 by Lord Hardwicke in *Omychund v Barker*, where the judge ruled that no evidence was admissible unless it was 'the best that the nature of the case will allow'.

The best evidence about Duncroft Approved School was uncovered by Cameron-Blackie in documents and hand-written letters found by tracing the surviving Duncroft school records to the archives of Barnardo's, the nationwide children's charity that took over the school from the Home Office. The evidence led her to a truly vital witness, a 57 year-old woman living in the Thames Valley who eventually became known to Dame Janet Smith as witness A22.

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<sup>19</sup> Janice Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998)

<sup>20</sup> Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions and Hurtful Acts*, (Orland, FL: Harcourt, 2007)

A22 had been a teenager in 1973, sent to Duncroft for drug possession at the age of 14. In November of that year, on a rare visit home, she helped her mother with the catering at a Saturday night police function attended by Jimmy Savile. A22's mother suggested 'fixing it' with Miss Jones for Savile to pay a visit to the girls at the approved school.

It was thanks to Cameron-Blackie, that A22 took part in a three-day videoed police interview, during which Surrey Police were able to fix the date of Jimmy Savile's first visit to the school. That date, 21 January 1974, corresponded with an entry in the school visitors' book and immediately branded a number of complainants and informants as liars and fantasists.

For months the Metropolitan Police Operation Yewtree investigation team objected to A22 being interviewed by the Smith Review on the grounds that it could prejudice their police work. But despite police objections, the interview did take place and Dame Janet Smith reported:

'A22 told me that Savile was introduced to Duncroft through her after she met him at a social event. Her evidence is that he always behaved impeccably and her account contradicts much of what the other Duncroft witnesses say about Savile. A22 was clearly very close to Savile and thought very highly of him. She had a relationship with him after she left Duncroft. I have no reason to doubt her evidence that, while she was at Duncroft, Savile behaved impeccably in her presence.'

The BBC published Dame Janet's review in full in February 2016, thereby immediately revealing the lies of at least five women who had claimed to have been assaulted by the disc jockey at Duncroft. The most notable of these was Mrs Bebe Roberts who had told the *Daily Mail* she had been assaulted by Savile near her dormitory at Duncroft in 1965.

A few days after the publication of the Smith Review, A22 told Cameron-Blackie that a bundle of her 1974 letters to her mother and father had been found at her childhood home in Barkham, Berkshire. Each undated letter was tucked in a franked and dated envelope. The letters were discovered in the loft of the family home after A22's father had died.

Cameron-Blackie realised that the discovery of the letters and the survival of a number of A22's keepsakes, revealed details of life at the special school for 'troubled intelligent girls' that had been unknown to Dame Janet Smith, the specialist BBC and ITV reporters working on the Savile story and various Savile police investigations.

By 2016 Cameron-Blackie was dying of cancer in Norfolk. Nothing had yet been revealed from forensic examination of the social media exchanges on her old iMac at Edinburgh University.

Disappointed by the aftermath of the Smith Review, the frequently exhausted Cameron-Blackie managed to persuade A22 to reveal her identity as Miss Susan Bunce of Pangbourne in Berkshire. Susan was asked to show her teenage letters to a reporter. She was also persuaded to make herself available as a witness in the forthcoming trial of a slander and libel claim brought by the comedian Freddie Starr. Karin Ward had accused Freddie Starr of groping and insulting her 41 years earlier in Jimmy Savile's dressing room during a Clunk Click TV show. Starr lost the case.<sup>21</sup>

I was the reporter despatched by the dying Cameron-Blackie to Pangbourne to examine and photograph the letters in their envelopes. I reported back to Cameron-Blackie as she lay in a bed constructed by her husband Graham to give her a rich view of boats passing by her window on the River Yare at Reedham.

In a letter dated 6 February 1974, Susan, 15, wrote home from Duncroft to her mother and father:

'I've been trying to think more what J.S. said, I know one thing, he said he was starving so he pigged [sic] most of my chocolate biscuits, then later he plowed through beans on toast.

One thing I noticed about him. He was wearing black suede shoes [flat heels]. He says he's got to dress smartly for the next three weeks or months. I asked him why he never comes to pick me up himself and send Fred in with the taxi. It's because he can't exactly [be] sure where I live and after things happening in the past he doesn't want to. Suppose he has to stop and ask the way, he could never stop the person talking.

I don't think I'll write to Jimmy, just wait a while and see if I can get that big Valentine card for him, I'll put it on the shopping list and hope for the best, love Susan.'

On 17 February 1974, writing from a special isolation room at the school:

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<sup>21</sup> Despite Starr losing the case, Susan Bunce was seen by Mr Justice Nicol as a reliable witness. Indeed her evidence that Starr picked her up in the air that night at the studio at the age of 15 as an indication of Starr's true attitude to girls under-age appears in his judgment: 'Susan Bunce was a small 15 year old. He picked her up, held her in the air and gave her a long passionate kiss.'

Although the Starr v Ward case did not involve events at Duncroft, the judge referred to Karin Ward's memory: 'The Defendant was being given Lithium at Duncroft at this time. She has accepted that this affected her memory. On peripheral matters her account has varied. Thus she said at some points that the Claimant's smell included a component of alcohol. She has accepted that she may have been wrong about that. In her BBC interview she said she was 14 at the time. We know that she was in fact 15. But in its core elements, her account has been consistent.'

'Naturally, Granny Bunce mentioned David [a schoolfriend]. She also mentioned Jimmy and how he may like a swim in our pool during summer.'

4 March 1974: 'Apparently we were supposed to go to Clunk Click last Thursday. Miss Jones said Jimmy was expecting us. We are definitely going this Thursday. Whether or not it will be the bean bag thing, I don't know, I am allowed to go to that one Miss Jones said. I have been told I am going to this one, so I am in a muddle.'

1 April 1974: 'I keep forgetting to tell you that Princess Alexandra is coming on May Day, she has been here before. Jimmy rang up again to say that he had to go to Leeds this weekend so he will be down at the beginning of the week.'

'Remember for the first time home I've got enough money not to care about what I buy or spend because I won't be buying any drugs. Instead of buying 16 pills for £2 I can buy myself a load of nail varnish or a jumper . . . agreed . . . or even Daddy some pipe tobacco.'

28 April 1974: 'Did you see me on television again last night, I got the biggest shock of my life. They were showing excerpts of old shows, the one with F. Starr. Jimmy hasn't been here yet but I get the feeling it won't be long, and he will be on Top of the Pops soon so we probably will be.'

I remember what I was going to say. They brought Jean Rook's page [article praising Jimmy Savile] to me during Clunk Click. Saint near to heaven my foot! Satan near to prison more like it! But I know this and that which he has told me -- not bad though.'

Page 5: 'Four girls ran off the other morning all at once, they came back next day.'

6 May 1974: 'Have I told you about Princess Alexandra coming on Wednesday? Her mother was here in the war, something like that. I have got to present her with a bouquet, or one for her lady in waiting. All the managers will be there, lots of big wigs and even Jimmy Savile is coming. On the subject of Jimmy, what exactly do you think of him? You had quite a long chat with him on Easter Sunday. He is taking us to the theatre at the end of next week. I don't know what we are going to see, but I am looking forward to it. Guess what? The needlecraft teacher has to make a doll of Jimmy, it's got to look as near to him as possible, and we think he will appreciate it.'

June or July 1974 [by Susan Bunce's estimation] 'Miss Jones said yesterday that Jimmy rang up and perhaps would come down this week. I am looking forward to seeing him. By the way as I am in 2nd grade now, I

have decided to be as good as possible, because I don't want to be down-graded again. We are trying to be very quiet after lights out and I haven't had a cigarette up the chimney since the time I was caught.'

As soon as Cameron-Blackie read the letters, she told me: 'You see. No sign of [school head] Miss Margaret Jones pimping out her clever girls to celebrities or of Savile groping girls outside the dorms at bedtime.'

In an email to friends and collaborators she wrote:

'The tedium, the boiled cabbage, the floors to be polished; interspersed with the kindness, the occasional walk in the sunshine, the cup of coffee in Debenham's, the extra cigarette handed out when tears threatened to flow – all from a group of unmarried women who did their level best to understand we complicated teenagers. It is their very mundanity that got to me – nothing exciting ever happened – showing a group of magistrates round was a highlight.

Only Susan would have cut out the picture of her and Savile – but still kept the disfigured original including Ms Jones. Did that family throw nothing away? You can literally watch her growing up through the course of those letters – even the handwriting changes, becomes more confident – and she kept all the envelopes! Incredible.

How Susan meeting Savile on home leave would have roared through that place like a tornado and created unbridled jealousy – and how she has been vindicated by the little asides "Ms Jones said that Savile had phoned and was coming to see me", the dress maker asking Susan to make a doll of Savile for Princess Alexandra's visit....

And especially the letter mid February. . . "he hasn't phoned yet" . . .and yet the media would have us believe that three weeks after that letter, he had not only phoned, but arrived. That the girls she speaks of "running off" at every opportunity were now so trusted that Ms Jones sends them off (er, not including the girl he had actually come to see!) in Savile's Rolls Royce so that he could force one of them to give him a blow job so that she could go to TV centre on March 9th . . .

Yeah, 'course she did Karin. . . .' <sup>22</sup>

Dr Ros Burnett, a former reader in criminology at Oxford University and editor of the 2016 Oxford University Press book *Wrongful Allegations of Sexual and Child Abuse*,<sup>23</sup> read the letters and emailed:

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<sup>22</sup> Email to author.

<sup>23</sup> Ros Burnett (ed.) *Wrongful Allegations of Sexual and Child Abuse*, (Oxford: OUP, 2016)

'They provide a real insight into the regime at Duncroft from the perspective of residents in the seventies at the time of its transition from "approved school" to "community home", and into the education and extra-curricular programme for the residents (Hamlet and watching polo at Windsor Park, as well as Clunk-Click and ice-cream picnics on the lawn).

I find it touching that Susan borrowed someone's Queen Velvet stationery in order to write to Jimmy Savile, how she tolerated him eating all her chocolates and biscuits, and how she sought her grandmother's approval of Jimmy Savile. It is a shame the letters are undated and some of the postmark dates not clear but those which are should help in corroborating timelines or resolving disputed dates.

The picture that the letters provide of Duncroft staff and regime, as well as Susanne's account of the good work done by Duncroft, is important for presenting a more accurate view of residential care homes and their staff. Possibly the greatest value of Susan's archive is that her experience of Jimmy Savile, from the time of meeting him at an event outside Duncroft to the letter of congratulations he sent on her upcoming wedding, shows a more human, restrained and somewhat kinder side to his personality in contrast to the archetypal sex fiend he has come to represent.'



One of the Bunce family keepsakes I examined at Susan's home was this picture, taken after Susan had served her time at Duncroft, when Savile was still dropping by to see the family at Iona, their house in Barkham, to swim in their pool, to lounge on the lawn and to talk to his old pal Albert Bunce, the local church organist.



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Thirty-seven years later, in the ten weeks between October and December 2012, 450 people contacted the police to complain they had been sexually abused by Jimmy Savile.

By January 2013, a joint police and NSPCC review, 'Giving Victims a Voice', suggested that in 54 years Savile had attacked 28 children under ten years old and 63 girls between 13 and 16. The dead disc jockey was being accused of 214 offences, including 34 rapes in 28 different police areas.

*Andrew Rosthorn is a veteran news reporter based in Lancashire. After reporting The Irish troubles in the early seventies for the Daily Mail, he worked on hard news for the Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror, The Independent and The Independent on Sunday. He has conducted radio and television investigations into the fate of Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess, CIA sabotage of Leyland exports to Cuba, corruption in ammunition supply at the Ministry of Defence, breaking UN sanctions in Serbia for Marks and Spencer, the Owen Oyston Affair and pre-war Royal Navy espionage in Japan.*