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Westminster 'paedophile ring': now where does the investigation go?

How did Dolphin Square - the Pimlico apartment complex favoured by generations of Establishment figures - become the latest focus for the ever-widening investigation into Westminster child sex abuse claims?



The Palace of Westminster Photo: Alamy



By Andrew Gilligan

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"Both MPs were brutal," says "Nick", in his account of being abused as an 11-year-old by two Conservative politicians. "I was raped over a bathtub, while my head was submerged beneath the water. One [MP] attempted to get me to beat another boy with a baton. I refused, and was physically and sexually punished for it."

Another alleged victim was 13 when an MP took him to a "dinner party" for about a dozen people in the same block of flats. "There were a mixture of boys and girls, aged between 13 and 15," he said. "They would put a porn film on when things would calm down. It took a few minutes or so, and then they would feel you." He was raped, he said, in one of the bedrooms.

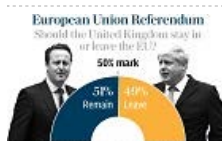
Both men, speaking to the Exaro News website, were describing what

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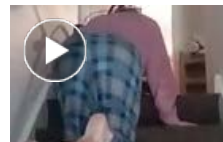
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they say happened to them about 35 years ago at Dolphin Square, a riverside apartment complex in Pimlico much favoured by MPs, civil servants and other establishment figures. Nick says another of his rapists there was Sir Peter Hayman, the former deputy director of MI6, a member of the notorious Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) convicted of gross indecency in 1984. In total, he says, he went to the riverside complex around 10 times. Nick is now a key witness in a new Dolphin Square strand of the Metropolitan Police investigation into alleged historic child sex abuse.

Dolphin Square is not the only way the story of a claimed Westminster "abuse conspiracy" has continued to broaden. Just as the dust was settling on Home Secretary Theresa May's troubled review of historic sex abuse allegations – a second chairman, lawyer Fiona Woolf, had resigned over a potential conflict of interest – it emerged last week that one crime being investigated by the police was a "possible murder". Last week, too, an official inquiry into the Home Office's handling of child sex abuse claims in the 1980s failed to uncover any of the missing documents that prompted the investigation.

The review, centring on concerns that civil servants ignored information passed on by Tory MP Geoffrey Dickens in the 1980s, dashed hopes that the so-called "Dickens dossier" might still exist in some Home Office basement.

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Can what happened to Nick and the others really be true? Was there really a Westminster cabal, a ring of abusers who looked out for each other and protected themselves from justice? The answer, perhaps, is both yes and no. Just as at the BBC and in the NHS, there can be no doubt that serious abuse occurred in public life in the Seventies and Eighties, and that powerful public figures, including at least two MPs, got away with it. As early as 1970, Cyril Smith, soon to become the Liberal MP for Rochdale, was found by the police to have "used his unique position to indulge in a sordid series of indecent episodes with young boys towards whom he had a special responsibility". No action was taken, and Smith was allowed to carry on

abusing children for most of the rest of his life.

Sir Peter Morrison, Margaret Thatcher's parliamentary private secretary, was caught more than once molesting underage boys, but managed to avoid being charged. He used Britain's sledgehammer libel laws to prevent his exposure by the press.

Morrison's paedophilia was known to at least some of his colleagues; his successor as MP for Chester, Gyles Brandreth, recalls being told in 1996 by the then Welsh Secretary and current Leader of the House, William Hague, that Morrison, who had died the year before, "might feature" in the inquiry into sex abuse in north Wales children's homes. Edwina Currie, the former Tory minister, described Morrison as a "noted pederast".

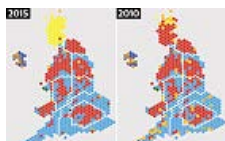
Hayman was arrested in the Seventies after leaving a packet of "obscene literature" on a bus. Officers raided his flat, finding correspondence with other PIE members in which they shared their desire for child abuse, but Hayman was not charged. He was mentioned in the trial of five fellow



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members of the PIE, but only under a pseudonym. Intense, but unsuccessful, efforts were made by ministers to stop Mr Dickens naming him in Parliament, which was how his identity eventually emerged.

There have also been persistent reports of an abuse ring centred on a guest house in Barnes, south-west London. Names on a list of visitors kept by the owners include Smith, Hayman and those of some other former politicians who are still alive.

But perhaps the most disturbing evidence concerns Peter Righton, a founder member of the PIE, and a senior figure in the world of child protection for decades. Director of education at the National Institute for Social Work and a consultant to the National Children's Bureau, Righton advised the Home Office on child care and led official inquiries into abuse at children's homes. He also had close links with Islington council, under whose care hundreds of children were abused in the 1980s. Some of them came to stay on the country estate in Suffolk where he lived.

In 1992, Righton was arrested. Thousands of documents were seized from his home, some, according to the local chief constable, implicating "establishment figures, including senior members of the clergy", in abuse. But Righton was convicted only on the relatively minor charge of importing child abuse images, receiving a £900 fine. No one else was charged.

Of the solid evidence produced so far, it is perhaps Righton's case that offers the best potential for proving some kind of establishment "network". But for those alleging an overarching political cover-up, a secret conspiracy, the difficult truth is that Righton and his like were actually quite open about what they were doing.

In 1977, in an article in *Social Work Today*, he was quoted as saying sex between workers and residents in care homes was perfectly acceptable. "Provided there is no question of exploitation, sexual relationships freely entered into by residents – including adolescents – should not be a matter for automatic inquiry," he wrote.

Righton was also one of several apparently respectable figures to contribute to a book called *Perspectives on Paedophilia*, published as late as 1981 by a serious academic imprint, Batsford, which made a strong defence of sex with minors. Edited by a Sussex University academic, Brian Taylor, it aimed to challenge what Dr Taylor's introduction called the "prejudice" against child sex. Disturbingly, the book was aimed at "social workers, community workers, probation officers and child care workers".

The public, wrote Dr Taylor, "generally thinks of paedophiles as sick or evil men who lurk around school playgrounds in the hope of attempting unspecified beastliness with unsuspecting innocent children". That, he reassured readers, was merely a "stereotype", both "inaccurate and unhelpful", which flew in the face of the "empirical realities of paedophile behaviour". Why, most adult-child sexual relationships occurred in the family!

"The isolation, secrecy, guilt and anguish of many paedophiles," wrote another contributor, Professor Ken Plummer, "are not intrinsic to the phenomenon but are derived from the extreme social repression placed on minorities... Paedophiles are told they are the seducers and rapists of children; they know their experiences are often loving and tender ones. They are told that children are pure and innocent, devoid of sexuality; they know both from their own experiences of childhood and from the children they meet that this is not the case." Professor Plummer, who was a member of the PIE, remains an active member of Essex University's sociology department, where he continues to teach.

Graham Powell, another contributor to the book, is now one of the

country's most distinguished psychologists, a past president of the British Psychological Society and a current provider of psychology support services to the Serious Organised Crime Agency, the National Crime Squad, the Metropolitan Police, Kent Police, Essex Police and the Internet Watch Foundation. In *Perspectives on Paedophilia*, however, he co-authored a chapter that stated: "In the public mind, paedophile attention is generally assumed to be traumatic and to have lasting and wholly deleterious consequences for the victim. The evidence that we have considered here does not support this view... We need to ask not why are the effects of paedophile action so large, but why so small."

On the Left, the National Council for Civil Liberties granted the PIE official "affiliate" status in 1975. It put a PIE leader, Tom O'Carroll, on one of its working groups, made him a platform speaker at a conference in spring 1977, and strongly defended paedophiles against "hysterical and inaccurate" newspaper attacks.

With the Pill, the legalisation of homosexuality and shrinking taboos against premarital sex, the Seventies was an era of sudden sexual emancipation. To some, sex by or with children was just another repressive boundary that had to be swept away. Britain's half-hearted liberalisation of homosexuality – until recently, the gay age of consent was 21, five years above heterosexuals – also allowed the likes of O'Carroll and the PIE to cleverly conflate their perverted agenda with the legitimate demands of young gay adults.

As recently as 1995, Tim Fortescue, a Tory whip in the early Seventies, was prepared to tell a TV interviewer how the whips at the time would help "get a chap out of trouble" with difficulties such as a "scandal involving small boys". To some, that may seem decisive evidence for the existence of cover-ups. But not much was made of it in 1995.

None of this is to excuse the harm done to the victims, or to deny how utterly wrong the paedophile apologists were – as Dr Powell, among them, now admits. But it does help show another reason why the abusers so often got away with it – not necessarily because of any active conspiracy, but because the climate of the Seventies and Eighties was simply more confused and child abuse was taken less seriously.

Most people, on the Left and Right, never fell for the PIE's cynical rhetoric about "child lib". Indeed, the group's activities caused a significant public backlash. But for sophisticated opinion, the likes of Mr Dickens, with his dossiers and his calls for birching child abusers, were seen as faintly comical, clodhopping figures. A little like immigration today, child sex abuse was seen as something that only tabloid newspapers got worked up about, not something for civilised liberals to concern themselves with.

But the conspiracy element cannot be wholly dismissed. After abuse was revealed at the BBC, the police and courts made brisk progress, charging and, in many cases, convicting a string of showbiz figures under Operation Yewtree. Operation Fairbank, the investigation into abuse in public life, is only a few months younger than Yewtree. But despite rather similar evidence – the testimony of victims – absolutely no one active, or formerly active, in politics has yet even been charged. It would be wrong if former MPs and ministers were more protected from prosecution than Rolf Harris, Max Clifford or Dave Lee Travis.





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