

Jimmy Savile Interview October 2009 - Operation Ornament

On 13th May 2007 Surrey Public Protection Investigation Unit was contacted by an ex-resident of Duncroft School, Staines following her report to Dorset Police that she was witness to Jimmy Savile indecently assaulting a fellow resident in the late 1970s. Duncroft was a residential school run by children's charity Barnardo's for 'maladjusted girls' aged 14 – 19 years.

Through liaison with Barnardo's and other enquiries a total of twenty-three girls were identified who might have been victims or witnesses to the activity of Savile during his visits to Duncroft. Twenty-one of these women were contacted by letter in May, June and July 2008 which resulted in fourteen being spoken to by police.

As a result of these enquiries a small number of allegations were made against Savile and in October 2009 he was interviewed by two officers from Surrey Police Child Protection Team.

Following an appeal against the refusal of a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to release the interview transcript, a copy of the transcript was released with a number of redactions on 15th October 2013¹. Part of the interview was previously quoted in the Levitt report (also summarised in this series).

The following is a commentary, and inevitably therefore a subjective view, on some key aspects of the interview that may offer some insights into how Savile consistently evaded prosecution. Interested readers are encouraged to refer to the original – some of the illumination about Savile and his method are only fully apparent when reading the verbatim transcript.

Background

As detailed in earlier report summaries, the lead up to this interview was extremely unusual, in marked contrast to what could be expected by most members of the public. Following an allegation about a sexual assault, albeit historical, usual procedure would at best be an interview by appointment shortly after the allegation was made to the police, in a police station accompanied, if at all, by a solicitor. In this instance the investigating team was contacted by a Detective Inspector from Savile's home force, West Yorkshire, on Savile's behalf, to clarify the arrangements for the interview. Savile had managed to delay the interview by some months, and was eventually interviewed by appointment in his office at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, accompanied by a Trustee of Stoke Mandeville. As he was not a vulnerable adult the status of this person is both unclear and irregular. Aspects of these irregularities are now the subject of IPCC investigation.

The Interview

¹ *Freedom of Information request reference no: 165-13-198*

From the outset Savile takes control of the interview, though it could be argued that the officers ceded that by immediately suggesting they call him "Jimmy".

From his first response he asserts his innocence of any wrongdoing - ever "That makes me 83 and proud that in 83 years I've never, ever, done anything wrong." He then reputedly interrupts the introductory process of reading his rights to assert that his status often makes him the target of false allegations for bogus reasons.

When cautioned for the second time he adopts what might be described as a 'faux naïve' persona, indicating that he doesn't understand the caution but that's not important as he is entirely innocent.

As soon as the allegations are put to him he wastes no time in denying every aspect of them "Out of the question!" and casting aspersions on the complainants. In particular he repeatedly that Duncroft wasn't a children's home but a "posh borstal", apparently with the intention of further reducing any credibility of his accusers.

The interview then continues with a combination of recall about key issues interspersed with what might be termed 'strategic vagueness' and lengthy discourses about his extensive charitable work.

When the interview is more focused on detail he is categorical in his denial, particularly of sexual attraction to girls of 16 and 17 years and that "I've never sexually assaulted anybody" and "I can specifically say that's not in my nature, and it never happened and it is a fabrication, why on earth anybody would want a fabrication I don't know, probably 'cos it's coming up for Christmas, and they're looking for a few quid off a newspaper."

Having denied all the allegations he then makes a lengthy speech describing the stream of 'weirdo letters' he gets, how a group of police officers in West Yorkshire take care of these for him and then describes a particularly disturbed young woman whom it transpires was under psychiatric care. The purpose of all this apparently being two fold: to negate the possibility of any truth in the allegations as they are frequent but entirely baseless and to portray himself as a victim of his celebrity, with allegations being part of the burden he bears for his success.

Interestingly when asked about the identity of the West Yorkshire officers (presumably the Friday Morning Club referred to in the Knopwood Report for West Yorkshire Police, published 10th May 2013 and also summarised in this series) he says he cannot recall their names because they have nicknames, and when prompted recalls two of these.

At this point some of his grandiosity becomes more apparent, with a claim that should he need to follow up on a threat he considers possibly serious then "... the forensics are just round the corner from me in Wembley and so I can get them looked at as a favour cos I know the people in there...".

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After prompting he goes on to explain his 'policy' of taking allegations seriously, giving further context to the excerpt of this interview which was reproduced in the Levitt Report. He says that on 5 occasions allegations have been made about him and on each he has sued the newspapers that printed them and each has settled out of Court.

He then continues with a thinly veiled threat²:

"Now this to me, what's going on today (the interview) is exactly one of those things so I've already told my legal people that somebody were going to come and talk to me, they've got a copy of your letter, and the process or the policy start because if this disappears, so if it disappears it disappears, if it doesn't disappear for any reason then my policy will swing into action at the same time, but the difference with my policy is that my people who are one of the initials after my name is LOD, that's a Doctor of Law, right, not an honorary one, a real one³, that gives me how shall we say friends and if I was going to sue anybody which I never got round to actually suing because they all run away and say "shussh pay him up", we would not go to the local court we go to the Old Bailey cos my people can book time in the Old Bailey, so my legal people are ready and waiting, all they need would be a name and an address and then the due process from my angle would start. Because obviously if I'm prepared to take somebody to court and put it in front of a judge there can't be very much wrong with my policy of behaviour because I've never done anybody any harm in my entire life, cos there's not need to, no need to. No need to chase girls, I've thousands of them on Top of the Pops, thousands on Radio One. I have no need to take liberties with them, out of the question and anyway its not in my nature...the newspapers consider me to be very boring, I have no kinky carryings on. But because I take everything seriously I've alerted my legal team they maybe doing business and if we do then you ladies [the two female police officers] will finish up at the Old Bailey as well as everyone else because we want you there as witnesses. Yeah, only a bit of fun. But nobody ever seems to want to go that far..."

Next comes a further lengthy speech about his good character and accusations made and how he deals with them at one point saying he is known as "Litigiousness" (sic). At one point he uses as an example a case he took against the Sun newspaper that appears to refer to Haute la Garrene, the children's home in Jersey where he is now also believed to have abused. The interview concludes with further assertion of his innocence and that the whole thing is entirely fantasy.

² This is a direct quote from the interview with the spelling and punctuation as in the transcript. It varies at points from the excerpt reproduced in the Levitt Report, which appears to have been edited in some respects.

³ Added note – in fact Savile was awarded an honorary Doctorate Of Law (LLD) by Leeds University in 1986.

Comments

At the time of this interview Savile was a major celebrity with a considerable track record of charitable work and status. The allegations were historical, the complainants unaware that they were not the only person alleging abuse and there was no evidence other than their testimony. Other than by an admission from Savile, the prospect of the matter proceeding further must have seemed remote to the interviewing officers.

However, the process surrounding the interview and Savile's behaviour during the interview is instructive as to some of the strategies he used to protect himself and escape prosecution, despite what is believed to be an unparalleled lifetime of abuse.

The delays in having the interview, the intervention by a senior officer from another force and the venue for the interview itself all set the scene for Savile to have established his authority before the interview itself ever began. His behaviour during the interview is commented on above, with the combination of portraying himself as a victim of disturbed or self seeking women and the implied threats about his litigious nature will all have served to make it clear that any attempt bring a prosecution would lead to an aggressive defence.

Progress has undoubtedly been made since 2009 in relation to the handling of such cases with one consequence of the Duncroft case being changes in the process for investigating and prosecuting such cases announced by the Director of Public Prosecutions in 2013.

However, it is noteworthy that at the time of writing (May 2014) the Independent Police Complaints Commission has three independent ongoing investigations into the response of South Wales Police, Bedfordshire Police and South Yorkshire Police to allegations that musician Ian Watkins was abusing children.

Watkins, lead singer of the band Lostprophets was convicted in December 2013 of a range of extremely serious offences against children that the Judge described as "breaking new ground" in the range of horrific cases he had heard and "plumbed new depths of depravity" before sentencing him to 35 years imprisonment. The basis of the IPCC investigation appears to be that his celebrity might have had an effect on the handling of allegations against him some time before he was finally prosecuted.

Whilst Operation Yewtree and conviction of Max Clifford and Stuart Hall indicate that some progress has indeed been made, the result of the IPCC inquiries will indicate whether further progress is needed to ensure that celebrity does not deflect justice.

Marcus Erooga
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