



IN
PLAIN SIGHT
The Life and Lies of
Jimmy Savile
DAN DAVIES

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Dan Davies

Quercus

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Contents

PART ONE

1. Apocalypse now then
2. Frisk him
3. Not again child
4. The first brick
5. The world was completely black
6. Specialist subject: 'Jimmy Savile'
7. They felt they were in control
8. The power of oddness
9. Old and infirm
10. 'Power' is the wrong word
11. I didn't ask
12. Look up, you bastard

PART TWO

13. Oscar 'The Duke'
14. Smokescreen
15. Didn't die, very good
16. All front and no back
17. Scumbags and slags
18. Sonderkommandos
19. Someone the kids could look up to
20. Little slaves
21. A lot worse if it was true
22. Project DJ

PART THREE

23. Nostalgic memories
24. The only punter you can recognise from the back
25. Let 'em think
26. A cross between a Beatle and an Aldwych farce curate
27. A dead straight pull time
28. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings
29. An old man even then
30. TCP tonight
31. Good enough to eat
32. They know I'm honest
33. Eins, zwei, drei in the sky
34. More insidious than filth

PART FOUR

35. Young crumpet that would knock your eyes out
36. A bloody saint

37. It's obscene
38. The best five days of my life
39. Pied Piper
40. The only thing you can expect from pigs
41. We always line our artists up
42. A particularly religious moment
43. The 1976 temptation
44. Your porter hurt me
45. Am I saved?

PART FIVE

46. Rewriting history
47. Sir James
48. All sorts of trouble
49. I wouldn't let the side down
50. Like a Stradivarius
51. SOS – Same Old Shit
52. I am the boss – it's as simple as that
53. 50 million, give or take a few quid
54. Runners are junkies
55. Off the hook
56. And a bit of leg-over and chips
57. Ultimate freedom
58. A void

PART SIX

59. The wrong idea forever
60. Operation Ornament
61. The policy
62. Piss and shite
63. Mistakes were made
64. Two 16-year-old girls from the Ukraine
65. The last great gimmick
66. In the palm of his hand
67. No local connection
68. All that remains

Endnotes

Select Bibliography

Acknowledgements

PART ONE



1. APOCALYPSE NOW THEN

Shortly before midnight, on a hill overlooking the North Yorkshire seaside town of Scarborough, the wrought-iron gates of Woodlands Cemetery were locked shut. Police officers took up position outside while beyond, in the darkness and at the highest point of the burial ground, undertaker Robert Morphet and his men removed tools from their truck. Little was said as portable floodlights were assembled and attached to the generator they had brought with them from the Bradford headquarters of Joseph A. Hey & Sons, funeral directors.

The plan had been to arrive early the next morning but public and media interest was so great that Morphet had decided to discuss arrangements again with Scarborough Council. It was agreed to get the job completed as quickly as possible; in the dead of night, safe from prying eyes, telescopic lenses and those with possible vengeance on their minds.

The mood was sombre as the men set about their task with hammers, chisels, wedges, long bars and drills. Removing a six-foot wide, four-foot high triple headstone in black, polished granite was hard, physical and, in this case, demoralising work. For the headstone had taken Robert Morphet and his men eight months to complete, being inscribed both front and back with pictures of the man buried beneath, poems written by his friends, a short biography, a list of charities he'd supported and an epitaph in flowing script along the base: 'It was good while it lasted.'

Three separate slabs of granite, a base and fourteen hundred letters in total, each one finished in gold; Joseph A. Hey & Sons' bill was in excess of £4,000. The headstone had been fixed to its concrete foundation stone only three weeks before.

The placing of the headstone, which was wide enough to cover three plots, should have been the concluding act in the biggest funeral ever arranged in the 130-year history of the firm. It had been a national funeral, a celebration of a remarkable life that had drawn crowds to the streets and been reported extensively in news bulletins and papers across Britain.

Morphet had told reporters that he considered it an honour when his firm was contacted soon after Saturday, 29 October 2011, when the body of an 84-year-old man had been discovered by the caretaker of a block of flats bordering Roundhay Park in Leeds. The man had been found lying in bed. There was a smile on his face and his fingers were crossed.¹ The police confirmed there were no suspicious circumstances; he was old and had been unwell for some time. The last two months of his life had seen him cut short a round-Britain cruise through illness, and he'd been in and out of hospital. Morphet considered it an honour because he knew of the man; the whole country did.

Reaction to the news of his death had been widespread. On Twitter, comedian Ricky Gervais hailed the deceased as 'a proper British eccentric', while author and newspaper columnist Tony Parsons described him as 'a sort of Wolfman Jack for Woolworths'. BBC Radio and TV presenter Nicky Campbell went further, saying he was 'so unique, a character so extraordinary, a personality so fascinating yet impenetrable. You could not have made him up.'

The following morning, his familiar face dominated the front pages of almost every Sunday newspaper in the land, while on the inside pages the great and good lined up to pay their respects. A spokesman for Prince Charles, who he had mentored and served as a trusted confidant, said he was 'saddened by the loss'. Louis Theroux, maker of a memorable film twelve years earlier, described him as 'a hero'. BBC Director General Mark Thompson said, 'Like millions of viewers and listeners we shall miss him greatly.'

Even I was interviewed. The *Mail on Sunday* asked me to sum up his character and share a few stories from the times I had spent with him over the previous seven years.

Reporters called up former colleagues from his long career in radio to add their voices to the growing chorus. Curiously, none professed to have any great insight. David Hamilton talked of a 'very remote figure' that didn't mingle much. Tony Blackburn suggested he was lonely and didn't have many friends. Dave Lee Travis, who had known him for close on fifty years, revealed in all that time they'd never had a meaningful chat. 'He kept himself to himself and put a shield up,' said Travis. Broadcaster Stuart Hall told BBC Radio Five Live that he was 'unique' but 'a loner'.²

As a child, Robert Morphet had written to the man whose funeral he was about to arrange. It was a time when he was a huge national star, possibly Britain's biggest, famous for his charity work and for hosting a hit television show that made children's dreams come true. The young Robert Morphet had written in asking to become an undertaker for the day. Like the thousands of other British children who wrote letters in the course of the show's 19-year run, he had not received a reply. His wish had come true anyway.

Decades on, the funeral director acted on the instructions from the dead man's family and arranged for the body to be dressed in a favourite tracksuit fashioned from Lochaber tartan, a white T-shirt bearing the emblem of the Red Arrows, running shorts, socks and trainers. An honorary Marine Commando Green Beret was placed in one hand and his mother's silver rosary in the other; his Marine Commando medal was hung around his neck. Once dressed, the body was placed in an American-style coffin made of 18-gauge galvanised steel and finished in brushed gold satin, along with a single cigar and a small bottle of whisky.

For the first day of the funeral proceedings, the gold coffin was driven to a hotel in the centre of Leeds. There, in the foyer, it was placed carefully on a plinth draped in gold-tasselled blue velvet and adorned with cascades of white roses. When the doors of the hotel opened the next morning, people were already queuing outside to pay their final respects. Thousands more followed over the course of the day. I was among them.

The following morning, the coffin was opened for close family and friends to say their goodbyes. Make-up had been applied to the man's face, something he had always refused during his lifetime. He'd always maintained that wearing make-up was like lying.

Two hearses and five black limousines pulled up outside the hotel, and as crowds gathered on the pavement, the gold coffin was loaded before members of the man's family climbed into the vehicles for a final tour of the city. The cortège slowed in front of the man's childhood home and the hospital where he had worked as a volunteer for more than half a century. Outside, hospital porters formed a guard of honour in the rain.

From there, the fleet of black limousines proceeded to St Anne's Roman Catholic Cathedral where cheering crowds lined the approach. Six Royal Marines in full ceremonial uniform waited at the front steps to carry the seven-foot long casket from the hearse. At the doors, the Bishop of Leeds, the Right Reverend Arthur Roche, sprinkled holy water on the lid before it was shouldered to the altar.

I joined the 700 people occupying every available seat inside the cathedral for the requiem mass. Loudspeakers broadcast the service to the many thousands outside, among them television news crews and reporters from across Britain.

Bishop Arthur Roche spoke and reminded those present that this cathedral was where the man had been baptised in 1926. He went on to give thanks for his 'colourful and charitable life'. It was a life that Monsignor Kieran Heskin later described as 'an epic of giving' before concluding that now he would surely be given 'the ultimate reward – a place in Heaven'.

Friends of the man gave eulogies. One talked of how he had recently told medical staff at a local hospital he had 'absolutely no fear of dying' because 'he had done it all, seen it all and got it all'. The

same friend recalled the man's 'courage, nobility and trust', but still touched on the rumours that had surrounded him: 'He many times answered the question about what he might be hiding in his private life by saying that the really great secret was ... that there was no great secret.'

The third and final day of the funeral saw the gold coffin transported to Scarborough. The cortège began on the Esplanade, outside the dead man's seafront flat, before stopping briefly in front of the Grand Hotel where another of the company's funeral directors led the procession on foot along the Foreshore.

Then it was on to Woodlands Cemetery on a hill overlooking the town. In accordance with the dead man's final wishes, Morphet had arranged for a plot at the highest point and a grave to be dug at a 45 degree angle. It had taken two days to complete and required a laser device to get it exactly right.

I was among the few hundred onlookers that joined the man's family and friends inside the cemetery. As the coffin was lowered into the grave, coming to rest on a cement ramp at the bottom of the shaft, some moved forward to take photographs down into the hole. I did not require a photograph of the gold coffin, a coffin that would be encased in reinforced concrete once we had all left.

*

In the weeks and months after the funeral, the BBC aired tribute shows to the man on national television and radio. Up and down the country, committees were formed to discuss how best to acknowledge his contribution to society, most conspicuously the £40 million he was believed to have raised for a variety of good causes.

The following summer, an all-day auction took place of the man's belongings. It was hosted in a large function hall in Leeds that had been named in his honour, and raised more than £300,000 for the two charitable trusts bearing his name.

And yet at a little after 1 a.m. on the morning of Wednesday, 10 October, 2012, less than a year on from the fanfare of the funeral, Robert Morphet and the men of Joseph A. Hey & Sons could be found packing away their tools and taking down their floodlights. Behind them they had left only a rectangular patch of bare soil. Across the turned earth were four bedraggled bunches of flowers in cellophane, two still with ink-smudged cards attached; a single white Yorkshire rose at one end and a spray of red carnations at the other.

These damp, wilting stems were all that remained from the small family ceremony less than three weeks before to mark the placement of the headstone. Afterwards, a plaque had been unveiled outside the man's house on the Esplanade at which Roger Foster, the nephew who had helped to organise the lavish funeral, talked about his hopes that the headstone might become a tourist attraction.

'He was just an ordinary bloke from the back streets of Leeds but everyone loved him and wants to pay their respects,' said Foster.³ He added that he wouldn't be surprised in the future to find an ice-cream stall selling refreshments to fans that had travelled to enjoy the headstone and to offer thanks for the life of his uncle.

Just a few short weeks later, dawn broke over a rectangular patch of bare soil to reveal an unmarked grave and a ruined reputation.

The three 18-inch thick slabs of dark granite it had taken eight months to craft and to polish and to inscribe had been taken to a yard in Leeds where the fourteen hundred letters were ground down and the black granite smashed into tiny pieces for landfill. Nothing was to be left of the headstone and nothing was to be left to mark the spot where the coffin was buried beneath the earth. It was good while it lasted.

*

The events leading up to the nocturnal dismantling had been driven by a television documentary. The announcement of the film's transmission date, its airing on national television a week earlier and the deluge of newspaper revelations that followed in its wake purported to expose what the man had been hiding all along. Like the headstone, the notion of 'the great secret' was now smashed into tiny pieces and consigned to a skip.

Just over eleven months after his death, the man had become the biggest story and the most reviled figure in the land. His fall from grace was as sudden as it was shocking.

All across Britain traces of his life were now being systematically erased. At a leisure centre in Glasgow, staff removed a likeness of the man in carved wood. 'Given the controversy and the seriousness of the allegations, we thought it appropriate to move the statue at this time,' explained a spokesman for the company that operated the centre.⁴

The gold-coloured memorial plaque unveiled outside the man's home in Scarborough was taken down after being defaced. Soon afterwards, the council removed a footpath sign commemorating his place in the town's life. It had been installed only weeks before.

In Leeds, his name was deleted from a wall commemorating celebrated citizens in the Civic Hall. The chief executive of the city council said it was the appropriate course of action in light of the 'very serious allegations'.⁵

In London, Scotland Yard's response to the aftershocks caused by the television documentary was to assemble a special team of 10 officers to review the numerous allegations, and to process the calls now flooding in from members of the public. Operation Yewtree was the codename given to their investigation. One hundred and twenty lines of inquiry were already being pursued involving as many as thirty victims. Specially trained staff had been seconded from the NSPCC, which itself had reported fielding numerous calls in the first five days after the documentary aired. Twenty-four of these calls had been referred to the police, of which seventeen were directly related to the dead man.

Eight criminal allegations had been formally and posthumously recorded against him – two of rape and six of indecent assault. Details emerged; the majority of the alleged offences had been committed on females aged between 13 and 16. From those who had come forward, there were reports of sexual abuse taking place on the premises of the BBC, at hospitals, at a children's home in Jersey and in an approved school for girls in Surrey.

Commander Peter Spindler, head of Scotland Yard's Specialist Crime investigations, described the man as a 'predatory sex offender' and said that his pattern of offending appeared to 'be on a national scale'.⁶

But the man was dead and could not defend himself. Spindler was asked whether he felt sure of his guilt. 'I think the facts speak for themselves,' he replied, 'as does the number of women who have come forward and spoken of his behaviour and his predilection for teenage girls.'

By the time Prime Minister David Cameron appeared on breakfast television to make his views known, the firestorm was blazing through the Roman Catholic Church, which had announced that it was to consider stripping the man of the papal knighthood it awarded him in 1981, and through parliament. The BBC, meanwhile, appeared in danger of being totally engulfed by the flames. After bearing the brunt of the media's outrage, the national broadcaster finally declared that it would be launching an inquiry of its own.

'These stories are deeply, deeply troubling,' said Mr Cameron of the revelations and victims' testimonies that now dominated the news. 'I hope that every organisation that has responsibilities will have a proper investigation into what happened, and if these things did happen, how they were allowed to happen. And then of course everyone has to take their responsibilities.'⁷ He added that he was looking into whether the man could be posthumously stripped of the knighthood he'd received in the

Queen's Birthday Honours List in 1990.

And it was at this point that a bottle was thrown at the six-foot wide, four-foot high triple headstone in black, polished granite. Security was immediately stepped up at Woodlands Cemetery but relations of those buried in neighbouring plots expressed their concerns about possible damage to the final resting places of their loved ones.

So, shortly after contacting Morphet to ask that he return to Woodlands Cemetery, the relations of a man who had been acclaimed as a 'latter-day saint' less than 12 months earlier, released a statement of their own. '[We] are deeply aware of the impact that the stone remaining there could have on the dignity and sanctity of the cemetery. Out of respect to public opinion, to those who are buried there, and to those who tend their graves and visit there, we have decided to remove it.'⁸

Among the last people to see the headstone before it was removed was a woman who had worked at the same Leeds hospital where the man had famously volunteered as a porter. She said she had always thought he was odd. In 1969, she explained he had volunteered to drive a friend to her wedding in his Rolls-Royce. The man had turned up sitting in the back, with a chauffeur in the driver's seat. The friend had told her he had tried to grope her all the way to the registry office and that she'd been forced to fight him off.⁹

There was now only one person left who was unaffected by the tumultuous revelations; revelations that had seen a nation question itself and re-examine its past, and many of its biggest institutions turn on and against themselves. That one person was where he had always been: bricked in and beyond reach.

2. FRISK HIM

Friday, 12 March 2004. The taxi turned into West Avenue and continued a few hundred yards up a gentle incline before dropping me off outside Lake View Court, a modern block of apartments that would have been considered the height of chic in the Sixties. I pressed the intercom button marked 'Penthouse' and after a short pause, a voice: 'Morning.' The sound of the Yorkshire Dalek was unmistakable. The door buzzed, I pushed against it and took a seat in a small lobby that smelled of pot-pourri.

Two or three minutes later, I heard voices coming from the lift shaft. Then the wooden doors of the lift slid open, releasing a cloud of smoke and two large, unsmiling men in their fifties. 'Frisk him,' barked Jimmy Savile, who had stepped out of the lift behind them and was wearing a blue shell suit with chevrons of red and white on the shoulders.

I was pinned to the wall and searched before Savile finally called them off. He chuckled, extended his hand and introduced the two men as Mick Starkey, a West Yorkshire Police inspector, and Jim 'The Pill' Cardus, a retired pharmacist. 'Meet the Friday Morning Club,' he trumpeted before ushering the men out of the front door to the flats.

He showed me into the lift, which was cramped and stank of cigars. The doors shut and to my surprise, I felt quite calm about being up this close to a man I had spent so many years wondering about, looking into, talking about and hating. He looked at me and raised his eyebrows. His lips stretched into a thin, toothless grin. Silver chest hair poked through the garish French tricolour string vest, a spider's web of broken veins covered his nose.

*

I had not seen Jimmy Savile in the flesh for 24 years, not since an early evening in the autumn of 1980 when, as a treat, my mother took me, my best friend and my younger brother to watch an episode of *Jim'll Fix It* being recorded at a television theatre in Shepherd's Bush, west London. I was nine years old at the time and *Jim'll Fix It* was one of Britain's biggest family shows.

Since 1975 its winning formula had cast Jimmy Savile, madcap disc jockey, *Top of the Pops* presenter, confirmed bachelor and charity fund-raiser extraordinaire, as a real-life Santa Claus, only one with the power to make Christmas Day come round every Saturday evening. Children wrote letters in the hundreds of thousands, and for the lucky few, Jimmy Savile made their dreams come true. Those who were picked got to fly with the Red Arrows, blow up water towers or sing with The Osmonds. One boy even got to visit the place where baby Jesus was born. Millions tuned in to watch and the bizarre-looking man with the big cigars, odd catchphrases and helmet of white hair became a national institution.

I can still remember sitting in the red velvet seats of the auditorium, and the excitement when the lights finally went down and the floor manager waved his clipboard as the signal for us to clap and cheer. Savile emerged from the wings in a grey three-piece suit with flared trousers, which was relatively subdued attire for him. With Jimmy Savile, you never knew what to expect. One week he might appear in a tracksuit, the next he could be dressed as a pharaoh or in the tiniest of running shorts or as an adult cub scout. The only constant was his refusal to ever make reference to what he wore.

To children, he was a mysterious, Wizard of Oz-like figure. He possessed the power to dispense happiness and silver 'Jim Fixed It for Me' medallions from a chair with drawers and compartments

that emerged robotically from the arms. Jimmy Savile was quite simply the man who could do anything.

The *Jim'll Fix It* theme tune played out of speakers above our heads: 'Jim'll Fix It for you and you and you.'

Like every other child in the audience that evening, I had gone expecting to witness magic. What we were presented with instead was the unvarnished reality of pre-recorded television: packages played back to us on monitors, cameras blocking the view, a messy tangle of leads and numerous stressed-looking adults corralling a procession of insanely grinning 'Fix Its' to go for their chat with Jimmy Savile who finished by rewarding them with those magical red-ribboned badges.

My overriding memory of that evening, however, was not of the boy in the wheelchair doing a dance routine in the studio with Legs & Co., the troupe of saucy dancers from *Top of the Pops*. It was of leaving the theatre feeling ambivalent about Jimmy Savile. In his gruff manner there seemed to be a suggestion of menace. For someone we all felt that we knew so well, there was something remote and cold and untouchable beyond the façade. I spent the car journey home in silence.

The troubling experience of those couple of hours in the BBC Television theatre in Shepherd's Bush might have remained nothing more than a flicker in the recesses of a child's subconscious, had it not been for the accidental discovery some years later of a copy of *As It Happens*, Jimmy Savile's autobiography. The cover photograph alone was enough to reopen the box: Savile in a pinstripe suit and adorned with jewellery, his snow-coloured hair hanging like that of a medieval peasant. He was leaning forward in his chair, his right hand raised to his mouth as though about to call out. The eyes were blank and unsmiling. On the back cover was a picture of his elderly mother proudly cradling a framed portrait of her famous son.

I was in my mid-teens at the time, by then too old to be interested in writing to *Jim'll Fix It* but very possibly looking for something or someone to rail against. The book, published in 1974, was read in one sitting. But rather than guffawing at Savile's capers as a child drummer in a wartime band, Bevin Boy miner, racing cyclist, dancehall manager, pioneering deejay and pop personality, I was struck by his evangelical zeal, his fascination with death, his all-consuming obsession with money and his frequent references to teenage girls, inevitably followed by cheerful accounts of how he had made narrow escapes from suspicious parents.

Furthermore, there was his evident pride in lacking normal human emotions, the recurring subtext of violence and the highly unusual relationship with his mother, a woman he described as his 'only true love'. Looking back, *As It Happens* was my Rosetta stone, a text that reawakened and then put flesh onto the skeleton of a dormant bogeyman.

From that point on he was fixed in my mind. I began collecting Jimmy Savile's increasingly odd pronouncements on all facets of life. These were initially unearthed in newspapers, magazines and in old *Top of the Pops* and *Jim'll Fix It* annuals found in car boot sales and charity shops. From this limited source material I learned that he didn't much like children, boasted about being known as 'the Godfather' in his younger days and, inexplicably, enjoyed the ear of prime ministers, princes and popes.

God'll Fix It, a thin volume first published in 1978, was the next major milestone on my journey to the real Jimmy Savile. Intended as an accessible overview of his views on religion and presented as a series of wide-ranging discussions, to me it provided a window onto his disturbing opinions on sex and 'sins of the flesh'. He talked of trussing up troublemakers at his dancehalls and also of walking alone in the wilderness in the Holy Land before admitting that he viewed his good works as credits to offset the debit column of his many transgressions.

As a child of the Seventies and Eighties, I had heard the playground rumours about Britain's favourite uncle; we all had. Jimmy Savile was a weirdo and possibly worse; a poofter, a necrophiliac

or a child molester.

Friends thought I was kidding when I spoke of my ‘Jimmy Savile Dossier’ and how I was going to use it to one day to bring him down. My parents’ generation dismissed such talk, reminding me that Jimmy Savile was a clever, wealthy, self-made man who had done an awful lot of good in his life. He was, after all, nationally celebrated for raising many millions of pounds for charity and rebuilding an entire hospital unit.

As the years passed and the internet afforded greater access to information, my Jimmy Savile Dossier grew, and its contents became reliable dinner party fodder. It seemed I wasn’t the only one with misgivings. In 1990, the respected broadsheet interviewer Lynn Barber probed Savile about the uncommonly close relationship he had with his late mother, sex, and the rumours that he had a ‘thing for young girls.

A year later, the well-known psychiatrist Anthony Clare tried to get to the bottom of why Jimmy Savile had become so fixated with death, so fearful of attachment and so determined not to show or share his feelings. ‘There is something chilling about this twentieth-century “saint” which still intrigues me to this day,’ concluded Clare.

In 1999, five years after the final episode of *Jim’ll Fix It*, Savile appeared on *Have I Got News for You*. He insisted on smoking a cigar and cut a somewhat tragic figure, a relic of a bygone age who was unable to tap into the vibe and whose humour felt dated and out of step.

Not long afterwards, a transcript of an off-air exchange that was alleged to have taken place between Savile and Paul Merton, the opposing team captain, appeared on various internet sites. In it, Merton goaded Savile about an underage girl he’d threatened with violence when she said she’d go public about their relationship. Savile’s lawyers intervened, and websites carrying the transcript, which was later proved to have been a hoax, were forced to remove the offending material.

Jimmy Savile suddenly seemed at odds with the modern world, a decline that was most famously captured by the documentary maker Louis Theroux. *When Louis Met Jimmy* went out on national television in September 2000 and trained a beam of light on what a strange old man Jimmy Savile really was. After 40 years at the forefront of popular culture, he was seen leading a sad, lonely and peripatetic existence; a tracksuited, cigar-chomping dinosaur. And in keeping with the tenor of interviews conducted since Savile’s celebrity status had waned, Theroux quizzed him about the dark rumours. The film became an instant talking point. It was entertaining, bleak and surreal in equal measure, but I refused to accept it had got to the bottom of who Jimmy Savile was.

By 2004, the editor of *Jack*, the magazine I was working for, decided he’d heard enough of my conspiracy theories about the powerful cliques Jimmy Savile moved between and influenced. The editor was from Scarborough, the holiday town on the North Yorkshire coast that Jimmy Savile had visited all his life – more regularly after moving the Duchess into a flat on the Esplanade in the Sixties. He decided it was time that I went and put my years of Jimmy Savile study to the test.

*

The lift opened directly into a wood-panelled vestibule adorned with plaques from Royal Navy ships and army regiments. A cascade of woolly hats and thick, quilted coats of the type more commonly worn by football managers clung to a row of hooks; beneath them, a row of running shoes. This cramped entrance hall opened right into a long, rectangular living room with electric blue shagpile carpet and floor-to-ceiling windows on two sides.

The clutter of the room’s time-warp interior was in stark contrast to the panoramic views of Roundhay Park and the hills beyond. An ancient-looking exercise bike, a low sideboard with two *This is Your Life* books lying open on the top and a free-standing glass-fronted cabinet stuffed with what

looked like cups, medals, plaques and various awards from his career in entertainment dominated the first half of the room. A low wooden shelving unit against the far wall accommodated a stack of videotapes and a pair of extravagant lamps with white bases fashioned as cherubs holding the bough of a tree. At the far end was a black swivel reclining chair, an L-shaped white leatherette sofa and a coffee table cluttered with ashtrays, pens, brochures and assorted pieces of paper. Perched on the top of a modest black stack hi-fi system was a framed photograph of Jimmy Savile in a field. He was wearing a kilt and struggling under the weight of a 15-foot caber. Above it was another framed shot: Jimmy Savile standing with Prince Charles and Princess Diana. In the corner, a set of sliding doors led out onto a small outdoor terrace covered in green AstroTurf.

Savile showed me through to his kitchen, decorated in tiles of pink and brown, or 'The colour of sex' as he put it. He asked me what was missing but I already knew the answer: it didn't contain a cooker. He liked to boast that none of his many homes had one. 'It would give women the wrong idea – and that would only lead to brain damage,' he said. The 'brain damage' caused by conventional relationships was something he had discussed with Theroux. He opened the fridge to reveal a spartan range of assorted chocolate wafers, a half-finished box of After Eights and pallet of long-life milk cartons held together with gaffer tape. He filled the kettle, flicked the switch and encouraged me to snoop around.

On the walls of the long living room in his penthouse apartment there were framed gold and silver discs and a black and white photograph of Savile squashed together on a sofa with The Beatles. He told me it was taken during the five weeks he spent compèring The Beatles' Christmas Show at the Hammersmith Odeon in 1964, a time when Beatlemania was erupting across the world.

Coffee made, he shuffled into the front room and sank into his black recliner which allowed him to lean back at a 45-degree angle. Lighting one of the three giant Bolivar cigars I had bought him – one of his conditions for granting the interview – he took a couple of puffs and announced that we could now begin.

Sir James Wilson Vincent Savile, OBE; Knight of Malta, Knight of the Vatican, 'Special' Friend of Israel; Honorary Royal Marines Green Beret, Honorary Doctor of Law and Honorary Assistant Entertainment Officer at Broadmoor maximum security psychiatric hospital; miner, scrap metal merchant, inventor of the disco; racing cyclist, wrestler and marathon runner; pop Svengali, radio DJ and *Top of the Pops* presenter; charity fund-raiser, highly paid business consultant, hospital administrator; confidant of prime ministers and princes. Most famously, though, Jimmy Savile – fixer of things.

There was so much I wanted to ask him even though I was already familiar with many of his stories thanks to the steady growth of my Savile Dossier. What I really wanted to find out, though – over and beyond whether he genuinely hated children, why he never married and if his relentless charity work was a bid for atonement for some awful sin in his past – was where the border existed between the public persona and the private man. The latter appeared to be someone few, if anyone, really knew.

In other words, what or who lay beneath the shell suit, the jewellery and the cigar smoke? And where better to start than at the beginning.

3. NOT AGAIN CHILD

Jimmy Savile was always old, it seems; even as a child. ‘I was the youngest of seven, which with hindsight was phenomenal, because you are never a kid. I didn’t have a childhood.’ This was the very first thing he told me about himself. He leant back in his chair and cackled, blowing a self-satisfied plume of cigar smoke into the cloud hovering at head height in his living room in Leeds.

‘You can’t be left at home if you are the youngest of seven,’ he continued. ‘You have to be taken everywhere. I grew up with adults, which meant I didn’t have anything to say. So I finished up with big ears, listening to everything, and big eyes, watching everything, and a brain that wondered why grown-ups did what they did.’

James Wilson Vincent Savile was born on 31 October 1926. His parents, Agnes and Vince Savile, had already produced six children in fifteen years of marriage: Mary, Marjory, Vincent, John Henry, Joan and Christina. This Halloween baby, arriving nearly five years after their last, was an unwanted early birthday present for its mother: Agnes turned forty the very next day.

Jimmy Savile was what he always called a ‘Not again child’. As he told me at that first meeting, ‘When the Duchess told the neighbours she was up the tub, the neighbours said “Not again.”’ The unplanned youngest of seven, scrapping for attention and trying to survive in a large, working-class family living on the breadline in a northern city during the Depression: this was the foundation stone for the mythology he’d constructed around himself.

Leeds celebrated its 300th anniversary in the summer of 1926. An historical pageant was staged in Roundhay Park. The realities of life, however, were less vibrant: soot-darkened skies glowering over cobbles and chimneys and endless terraces of squalid back-to-backs. By late October, when Agnes gave birth to little Jim, as she called him, the city’s miners had only just been forced back to the pits having remained defiant long after the end of the General Strike.

The city Jimmy Savile was born into was one in which daily life saw packed trams ferrying workers to and from the engineering plants at Hunslet and the mills at Armley and Wortley. At Montague Burton’s tailoring factory on Hudson Road more than fifteen hundred men, women and children toiled side by side. But Leeds had also become somewhat notorious for its thriving black market, prostitution rackets and easy access to illegal gambling. It was a reputation that prompted one newspaper to describe it as ‘the City of Sin’, a label that Jimmy Savile always relished.

Savile’s father, Vince, held down regular if poorly paid employment with Jim Windsor, a bookmaker who took a certain pride in defying the law by accepting wagers from the working men of Leeds – off-course betting was illegal up until 1960. Operating out of a ‘blower room’ above a parade of shops on Vicar Lane, Vince Savile took such bets and issued handwritten slips through a small hole in the door. Outside, a lookout kept watch for the Black Marias that would periodically cart off those caught in the act. The punters were not the only ones to fall foul of the local constabulary; in later life Jim Windsor boasted to one newspaper that he was arrested once a year for 20 years.¹

Vince met Agnes Kelly before he had turned to illegal gambling. He was working at a small railway station in rural Yorkshire that she passed every day on the way to her first job as a supply teacher and child minder. Twenty-three years old and venturing beyond the pit villages of the north-east for the first time in her life, Agnes was tiny, fair and spirited; the opposite of the tall, awkward and softly spoken young man who passed the long hours he spent alone by training birds to take breadcrumbs from his hand. Despite their manifest differences, they were married in Lanchester, County Durham.

March 1911.

The newly-weds moved in temporarily with Vince's parents in Leeds, and just over a year later Agnes gave birth to their first child, Mary. Vince dabbled briefly with the idea of following his father into the assurance business but it seems that he was not designed for hard graft. When war broke out in 1914 an army medical revealed a condition that exempted him from duty.

Money was tight, and the family had to get by on Vince's meagre earnings and the little that Agnes brought in as a supply teacher. And yet they still managed to maintain the payments on a larger than usual house situated only a short walk from the city centre. For Jimmy Savile, though, the memories of childhood that he shared with me all contained a common thread, that of being penniless in a time and place where opportunity simply didn't exist. 'I was forged in the crucible of want,' was one typically florid description of his predicament.²

Added to the family's relative poverty, Jim Savile was a small, undernourished and sickly child, the latter a legacy of the mysterious illness that struck him down as an infant. He consistently refused to elaborate on the nature of this illness, sticking instead to the well-worn line, 'When you were poor, you got ill and generally died.'

According to Savile's version of events, the situation was so dire that a doctor was called to the family home. After making his examination, the doctor shook his head gravely and wrote out a death certificate to 'save himself a return journey'. With all hope seemingly gone, the local priest was duly summoned to administer the last rites.

As a devout Catholic, Agnes Savile decided to seek refuge in St Anne's Cathedral in the city centre leaving her mother to tend to the child in what seemed certain to be his final hours. While she was there, Agnes picked up a leaflet on a little-known Scottish nun, Sister Margaret Sinclair, who had died just a few years earlier. Sinclair had been posthumously credited with a series of miraculous intercessions, so Agnes closed her eyes and prayed to Sister Margaret for help.

In the very first chapter of his autobiography, Jimmy Savile wrote that as his grandmother lowered a mirror over his mouth expecting to collect his dying breath, she received instead 'a right eyeful of involuntary, well-aimed pee'.³

Agnes Savile's account was significantly different, however. In 1970, aged 84, she recalled the 'illness' struck when Jimmy was two and a half. 'My eldest daughter had him out in the pram and stopped at a shop leaving Jimmy outside,' she said. 'He was strapped in, but jumped about so much that the pram overturned and the hood caught the back of his neck and severed one of the muscles.'⁴

The muscle refused to heal, Agnes explained. 'He could not sit up, he could not even shut his eyes to sleep, and in fact slept staring up at the ceiling. He would go into spasms in which his face would turn round over his neck till he was looking over his back.'

After six months, she took her spasmodic and perpetually staring child to the hospital. He was admitted but after 10 days the doctors were still at a loss to diagnose the infant's condition, concluding that their only option was to perform an exploratory operation. Agnes refused, saying she would rather take her youngest son home.

The child's prospects looked bleak. 'My mother was with me at the time,' Agnes recalled. 'She persuaded me to go to my husband's office and bring him back. The office was near the cathedral. Seeing the door open, I went in – more because I didn't want to get to the office before three than any particular wish to pray. I had been praying for so long, it was as though I had spiritual indigestion and could not pray any more.'

When Vince and Agnes got home later that day, they were expecting the worst. When Agnes's mother announced the child had gone to sleep, they thought he was dead because his eyes were closed for the first time in months. It was then that they noticed his regular breathing.

Agnes Savile claimed that when Jim woke up that evening he was 'perfectly cured'. The doctor was called back, but she made no mention of a death certificate. When the reporter asked Agnes what had happened, she replied: 'We prayed for him to be cured, and our prayers were answered.'

Following her son's startling and inexplicable recovery, Agnes wrote letters to her local priest and joined the campaign for the beatification of Margaret Sinclair. From 1965, when the Margaret Sinclair Centre opened in Rosewell, Scotland, Agnes embarked on the annual pilgrimage to give thanks.

This seemingly miraculous intercession was hugely significant to Jimmy Savile. 'I was dying,' he wrote in the very first page of his autobiography. 'The Master, or one of his minders, hearing of this imminent addition to his heavenly host, sent in the nick of time a miracle cure.'⁵ It was not just how he saw himself, it was something the whole family believed, as his sister Joan Johnson confirmed many years later: 'Someone up there listened and realized that the world needed [him], which of course it did.'⁶

So, rather than the downtrodden image of the 'Not again child' that he peddled in so many interviews over the course of his life, a different picture emerges of how Jimmy Savile regarded himself from the very beginning; a miracle child, the chosen one.

*

The one surviving photograph of all nine members of the Savile family was taken in a photographer's studio on Burley Road at the outbreak of World War II. It was displayed in Jimmy Savile's flats in Leeds and Scarborough. Flanking the group are Jimmy's two older brothers, Vince and John Henry, both in their Royal Navy uniforms. Mary and Marjory, the eldest girls, stand at the back, while Christina and Joan, who smiles shyly from behind her father's elbow, are to one side. Jimmy, who was twelve at the time but looked considerably younger, beams from the front.

Agnes is in the centre of the group, with Vince, a balding, slightly stooped figure at her side. It was a position she was accustomed to for she was the hub of the household, as well as for Jimmy being the sun that he orbited.

Diminutive and determined, Agnes managed the family's finances skilfully, ensuring there was food on the table and just about enough money left over for her and Vince to attend the weekly dance and make a small contribution to the collection plate after church on Sunday. Her seven children were all made to attend church with her. 'She was an old-fashioned *religioso*,' Savile said. 'She went to mass because she had a guilty conscience.'

Jimmy Savile described his mother as 'ferocious', albeit affectionately. He said it was her decision that the family moved into the three-storey, five-bedroomed terraced house on Consort Terrace, a house that was technically beyond their means. They had plenty of room, he recalled, but little in the way of furniture. With only enough for coal for the fireplace in the parlour, it was Agnes who kept the family entertained by playing a cheap upright piano.

'The house had lots of steps and corridors,' he remembered. 'We had a bathroom with an old Victorian bath and an inside toilet. There was a cellar where the fuses were fitted ... [and] an apostle clock on the wall. When it used to strike every hour, figures of the twelve apostles appeared above the face. I don't know how my mother got that. She was very good at organizing and, suddenly, things would appear.'⁷

Joan maintained that it was from their mother that her younger brother inherited his drive. It was not the only personality trait they shared: 'He's very like her,' she once said, 'dominant, likes to get his own way.'⁸

If Agnes wanted the best for her family, she was generally frustrated by her husband's lackadaisical approach to money. 'She was never happy because she couldn't provide what she really wanted,'

Savile maintained. 'She was ground down by the wheel of life. It knocked bits off her.'

While his mother looms large in his story, there is not much more than the family portrait and one faded black and white snap of his father taken during his time as the stationmaster from which to gain a sense of Vince Savile. Jimmy Savile remained reluctant to talk about his father, to the extent that he even refused to tell me when he died.

Records show that Vincent Joseph Marie Savile was born in Salford in 1886, and by the age of 15 was working as a butcher's assistant. His father, John Henry Savile, had been an estate agent in Leeds before becoming a superintendent in an assurance agent's office.

According to Savile, Vince's chief gift in life was a flair for arithmetic. He rose at 11 each day because the horse racing didn't start until 12, meaning the children had to tiptoe around the house before school. He also introduced his youngest son to cigars when he was seven, offering him a drag on one Christmas thinking it would make him violently ill and put him off forever.

'He was a lovely, line of least resistance, *mañana*, never got excited fella,' Savile told me. 'That's what he was.' It was about all that he did confess of his father. But was theirs a close relationship? On one rare occasion, Jimmy Savile did reveal a bit more: 'As close as you could be. At that age you don't understand closeness ... you only understand closeness when you haven't got it ... He demanded nothing from me. I demanded nothing from him.'⁹

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Whether Jimmy Savile actually cheated death as a child or not, whether the family was as impoverished as he maintained, and whatever the truth about his relationship with his father, he was unquestionably the runt of the litter. He was so 'skint', as he put it, that he qualified for subsidised canvas sandshoes, and was given free milk and spoonfuls of malt each day at school to stave off rickets.

A photograph of his class at St Anne's Elementary School on the day of their first Holy Communion shows the pencil-thin Jim Savile sitting at the front. He is not wearing socks. Joan admitted that her brother had fewer opportunities than the other children in the family: 'We all went to college but when it came to [his] turn the money had run out.'

And yet the few people who did remember Jimmy Savile as a child recalled him as bright and his mother as a warm, welcoming figure who was well known in the Woodhouse area of Leeds.¹⁰

At Christmas, Savile maintained his big treat was being taken to Lewis's department store in the centre of Leeds to look at the toys. He also reminisced with me about days out to Scarborough organised for the children of the poor and of a holiday camp in the Yorkshire Dales where he was made to bed down on a wooden floor. He recalled standing outside and looking at the stars: 'I'd come from a back street in Leeds in the days before clear air, when everywhere was smoky and dirty. It was so magical I stood there for ages.'¹¹

One of his favourite stories was about coming home from school to find the house empty. A tin of baked beans and an egg would be waiting for him in the kitchen, which he'd heat up on the stove and eat out of the tin. He said it was like his mother had gone on strike but insisted this was an arrangement which suited him down to the ground.

Here was a solitary child who did not spend much time playing with kids his own age. Sometimes he would head into town to the cinema but more often than not he whiled away the hours outside school in the corridors and wards of the St Joseph's Home for the Aged across the road from the house. Vince Savile was a trustee of the home which was run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, an order of nuns that Jimmy Savile continued fund-raising for long after they had been forced from their premises on Consort Terrace.

St Joseph's, I suspect, was where the seeds of his fixation with death were sown. 'They were always dying,' he said of the elderly residents in our first interview. 'I'd ask, "Where's Mrs so and so?" and one of the nuns would tell me that she'd died. Then they'd say, "Why don't you go downstairs and say goodbye to her?"' He claimed to have enjoyed getting to ride in the hearse for the funerals.

He talked of smuggling in bottles of stout for the elderly residents and stated that his desire to help others stemmed from the example set by his parents, both of whom were active members of the community. 'My earliest recollections are of having strange people in my house playing cards, and going to whist drives, beetle drives, socials and dances,' he said.¹² 'I made the realisation even in the early days, and bearing in mind I was only six or seven years old, that doing things for people isn't a bad idea. People smile at you and they patted you on the head and they were pleased to see you. And at that age it was quite easy to be a pain in the arse.'

When she accompanied her son to Buckingham Palace to collect his OBE in 1972, Agnes Savile remembered how as a little boy 'her Jimmy' made a habit of helping old ladies with their parcels when they stepped off the trams. When I asked him about where the desire to do philanthropic works had come from, he replied, 'When you're born in the circus, you stay in the circus.'

Her little brother might have been a frail and oddly self-contained boy but Joan also recalled that he possessed a markedly different outlook on life to the other Savile kids. 'Maybe it was because he was a delicate child,' she offered. 'Maybe it's because children who have been snatched from the jaws of death lead a charmed life.'¹³

She also said that by the age of 14, they were expected to fend for themselves. 'We were out there on our own. It were up to us,' she claimed. 'We used to get smacked many a time, but it never did us any harm. Mum were a great believer in self-help, but if we were ever in dire straits we knew she was there.'

In later life, Jimmy Savile steadfastly refused to elaborate on his relationships with his brothers and sisters. During that first meeting in Leeds he did reveal, though, that the trials and tribulations of his siblings' various relationships had stoked his own fear of emotional attachment. He spoke of the excitement on the street when one of them announced they were getting married, the trestle tables and tablecloths and women making sandwiches. 'And then,' he said with a well-practised look of incredulity on his face, 'the women cried in the ceremony.'

He maintained that he could never work out why they cried: 'I thought it was very strange. And anything from six months to two years later the participants wanted to kill each other. I thought this was amazing ... It gave me a lop-sided view of partnerships because they started off as idyllic but invariably for some reason went wrong.'

Beyond the lessons he learned from them about the pitfalls of romance, Savile's two brothers and four sisters appeared only in brief cameos in his anecdotes. It seems that most came to enjoy his family and occasional largesse, although the few newspaper clippings on John Henry, or Johnnie as he was known, suggest that he for one was jealous not only of his younger brother's success but his status as their mother's favourite.

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In interviews, Jimmy Savile would get prickly when pressed about his childhood. 'I don't believe all this psychological stuff that says you're a bastard because you got frightened by a snake as a child,' he told one reporter. 'That's a cop out.'¹⁴

In 1990, Lynn Barber reported that Savile became 'seriously annoyed' when she probed him about his formative years. 'We had no time for psychological hang-ups,' he'd snapped at her. 'We were just survivors, all of us. None of that, "Oh, I was ignored as a child" – what a load of cobblers. All I know

is that nothing particular wrong happened and I had a good time.’¹⁵

After the memorable 1991 interview for his *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* series on Radio 4, Anthony Clare remembered Jimmy Savile being ‘exceedingly wary, edgy, like a prize-fighter on his toes, anticipating a flurry of hooks to the head.’¹⁶ Clare later wrote that he was particularly struck by his interviewee’s recurring ‘emphasis on money and a denial of feelings’.

Despite Savile’s reluctance, or inability, to open up, Clare picked up hints that being the ‘not again pregnancy, the seventh of seven in a household that was ‘skint’, ‘may have left the young Jimmy not merely materially deprived but emotionally deprived too’.

In conclusion, Clare pondered what made him ‘project into [Savile] a foreboding that his solitary, shifting life is but a manifestation of a profound psychological malaise with its roots in that material deprived, emotionally somewhat indifferent childhood which he so flatly describes’.

In the light of what we now know both of Jimmy Savile and how common it is for those who abuse to have been abused themselves, it is a question mark that coils, unfurls and hangs in the air like cigarette smoke.

4. THE FIRST BRICK

Meirion Jones told me that he has vivid recollections of the summer garden parties at Duncroft Approved School for Girls. As both a child and a teenager, he had attended the events with his parents. His aunt Margaret Jones was the headmistress of the school and, since 1970, she had shared a house in the expansive grounds with her mother, Meirion Jones's grandmother. 'Imagine a stately home with a huge gravel drive littered with posh cars,' Jones replied when asked to describe the spectacle. He spoke of the lines of trestle tables with 'amazing food laid out on them by the girls', and guests that included minor royals – Princess Marina (the Duchess of Kent) and Princess Alexandra; fading film stars such as James Robertson Justice, who starred in the *Doctor in the House* films, John Gregson, who was in a number of big British war movies, and Ian Carmichael, who played Bertie Wooster in a big BBC TV series in the Sixties. Another visitor was Dick Haymes, an actor and crooner who was famous in the Forties and Fifties and who was married six times, once briefly to Rita Hayworth. Jones described his aunt 'swanning around as the grand dame of the event, with a celeb on each arm'.

'It was a really strange scene,' he said of the half Jacobean, half Georgian hall that had been transformed into a secure facility for troubled and criminally minded girls of above average intelligence. All of which meant that when, in the early 1970s, Jimmy Savile drove through the gates in his convertible Rolls-Royce, and started making regular visits to the school thereafter, 'it didn't seem all that weird'.

Duncroft occupied an unusual space on the outer edges of the care system. As well as its celebrity guest list, it had a high-profile patron in Lady Norman, widow of Lord Montagu Norman, the celebrated wartime governor of the Bank of England. Lady Norman was an enthusiastic advocate for mental health issues and had two buildings named after her at Duncroft, one a hostel for girls over the age of 16 and the other the house that Margaret Jones and her mother lived in.

The school was regarded as something of an experiment, one that was using psychotherapy to correct the behavioural defects of the girls placed in its care. In an era that witnessed the rise of social services and a school of thought that argued vulnerable, damaged youngsters were better off being looked after by the state, Duncroft was considered to be at the cutting edge.

Evidence of Duncroft's place within the care system can be found in a Royal Society of Medicine article from 1953,¹ in which Dr Christofer Lack, consultant psychiatrist at King Edward Memorial Hospital in Ealing, wrote about the role of psychotherapy in approved schools. He stated, 'certain types of girl are found unsuitable for psychotherapy at Duncroft. The mentally dull girl ... does not respond.' Lack concluded that throughout the approved school system, girls of poor intelligence should be kept together 'so that their sense of inadequacy is minimised'.

Dr Lack also revealed that each year, of the 300 or so girls sent by the courts to approved schools in the southern half of England, 'only about 12' went to Duncroft. The school was, therefore, a small community with a deliberately selective intake. Among the girls at Duncroft were daughters of ambassadors, surgeons and well-known producers at the BBC, as well as others from less white-collar backgrounds. The common factors were they had transgressed and all possessed high IQs. Margaret Jones viewed them as 'her chosen ones'.²

Girls were sent to Duncroft for a variety of misdemeanours. One girl, who arrived at the school as a 14-year-old in 1972, insisted years later that 'half the girls were there as punishment for being the victims of sexual abuse – the "crime" of having sex under age, as we thought it'.³ Others were put in

Margaret Jones's care for dabbling with drugs, anorexia, attempting suicide or for running away from children's homes or abusive parents.

According to another girl who was sent to the school in 1965, Margaret Jones was passionate about proving to the Home Office, under whose jurisdiction Duncroft fell, that the girls' lives could be turned around given the chance to continue their education and live in a decent environment. The headmistress was, as this woman remembers her, 'a messiah on the subject'.⁴

Meirion Jones describes his aunt as a complex woman. He believes she had been 'shaped by the fact she was running this very strange institution'. He has clear memories of the photographs of Margaret Jones posing with the celebrities who visited Duncroft. Jimmy Savile was among them.

'She had a strange view of what the world was like,' explains Jones. 'She was very bright, very focused and interested in celebrity, which is why you ended up with all these film stars and, eventually, Savile. I think she thought she was doing right by the kids, by opening things up to them and letting them see another life.'

In November 2012, Margaret Jones, then 91, told a newspaper that she had been 'hoodwinked by Jimmy Savile'⁵, who she allowed to occasionally sleep overnight at Duncroft. She explained he had been introduced by the mother of one of her pupils, and that no complaints were made about him.

Duncroft was nothing if not a curious set of contradictions: on the one hand was its bucolic Surrey setting and garden party guest list; on the other was its barred windows and staff carrying large bunches of keys. It was 'a stately home crossed with a prison,' said Meirion Jones, and as such, it doesn't hold happy memories for many of those who were sent there.

The school was run primarily by single women, most of whom, like Margaret Jones, were in their forties and fifties. Discipline was enforced through chores – endless cleaning of corridor floors, tidying staff quarters or working in the kitchens – and a rewards system of cigarettes (40 a week if a girl behaved, down to 10 a week if she didn't). Days were filled with lessons in typing, shorthand and home economics, or sessions with the psychiatrist who, according to Margaret Jones, had the authority to put girls in the padded isolation unit. During their time off, girls lounged in a common room where they smoked incessantly, gossiped about the staff and listened to records.

Life behind the eight-foot high walls surrounding the estate was also subject to the scrutiny and curiosity of regular visiting parties of trainee psychiatrists, social workers and Home Office officials.

But by the early Seventies, fears were expressed that the experiment was beginning to founder. Duncroft was placed in the hands of social services, and as such became known as a community home school. This reclassification makes it sound cosier but the reality experienced by some of those inside does not tally. The recollections of some former Duncroft girls, published online, speak of emotional abuse and staff cruelty. Other girls, however, have warmer memories of their time there, and its staff. From 1970 to 1974, Meirion Jones says he visited Duncroft School 'very regularly' with his parents, chiefly to visit his grandmother. 'The normal thing we'd do is drive over to the school where my aunt would be finishing up stuff. We'd go and have a chat with her, leave the car there and then and wander through the grounds to my aunt's house.'

From 1971 onwards, Jones recounts that he saw Jimmy Savile at Duncroft 'on at least half a dozen occasions', and spotted his Rolls-Royce parked on the gravel drive on numerous others. Jones was in his teens by this point and his memories of Savile are clear: 'He was full of banter, though had no real conversation as such. I had a feeling that he was somebody with whom you didn't really know what was going on. There was somebody hidden behind who you couldn't see.'

On one occasion, Jones saw Jimmy Savile drive off the premises with three Duncroft girls in his dark convertible. He says his parents, who both had backgrounds in teaching, confronted Margaret Jones about it. 'They would say to my aunt, "He's a 50-year-old guy and these are underage girls. What are you doing?" And she would say, "He's a friend of the school."'

‘[Savile] said, “I’ll take them for a run,”’ admitted Margaret Jones. ‘I had no reason to doubt him. Please remember, my staff were always on watch. Except when they were off in his car, which I allowed stupidly.’⁶

Margaret Jones claims she considered Savile to be an ‘oddball’. Her nephew insists she thought Savile ‘was fantastic’, and his invitation to her to take a holiday in one his homes on the south coast provided further conversation on the drive home.

Meirion Jones was suspicious of Jimmy Savile from that day on, as were his parents. His grandmother had altogether more serious misgivings about the famous visitor in their midst. ‘She hated him,’ Jones says. ‘She thought he was creepy.’

In October 1978, Meirion Jones’s mother had dropped in to Duncroft to visit her mother-in-law when Savile arrived at the house unannounced and demanded to be cooked a meal. ‘It was all very awkward and ended up in a row,’ he recalls his mother telling him. She also said that she had found him to be ‘quite intimidating’. Meirion Jones is sure of the dates, as is his mother, because his sister had just gone to university and his grandmother died the following month.

By this stage, Meirion had left London to attend university in Cardiff, where he went on to edit the student newspaper. After graduating, he worked as a print journalist before landing a job at BBC Radio in 1988. Seven years later, he moved into television and a job with BBC2’s *Newsnight* where he would establish a reputation as one of Britain’s leading investigative journalists.

‘I always had my ears open,’ Jones says of the suspicions aroused by what he’d witnessed of Jimmy Savile at Duncroft. ‘I didn’t hear anything at first but when I moved into telly at the BBC, I started to hear the odd story. I’d try to track down where the story had come from but it always ended up as a conversation in a green room, or something like that. There was never anyone who was a witness or who knew a victim or anything like that. Cameramen would say he had underage girls in his caravan but I could never get to the bottom of any of that.’

Jones also heard Jimmy Savile’s name mentioned in the course of his investigations into paedophile priests within the Catholic Church. Having looked on websites such as Friends Reunited for references to Duncroft, he had found hints but nothing concrete. Something did grab his attention, though: mentions of a police investigation having taken place at some stage.⁷

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In late 2008, a 50-year-old woman named Keri began writing her biography.⁸ The project was suggested by her counsellor as part of her therapy following a mental breakdown. Keri had suffered with chronic anxiety and depression since spending an abusive childhood in and out of care homes and approved schools.

She had gone on to marry three times, and had seven children by five different fathers. ‘Due to my background of abuse, I was entirely unaware of how to have, or hold onto, any kind of intimate relationship with a man,’ Keri explained. Three of her children had been taken into care as babies, and another as a 10-year-old. In 1982, while she was pregnant with her fourth child, she spent a year in prison for deception.

Keri had never known her natural father and claimed to have been abused by her stepfather. At the age of 12 she was sent to Garfield House in Norfolk where, she alleged to the local police in 1999, a care worker had sexually molested her. Two years later, in late 1972, she was transferred to Duncroft. She was 14 at the time.

In late 2009 and throughout 2010, Keri began publishing online chapters from the second instalment of her biography, *Keri-Karin Part 1*. They covered her time at Duncroft. In one chapter, she wrote about typing classes, being taught dressmaking and the screams she heard coming from the padded

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