

Jurors Question Guilty Verdict

In November 2007 Keran Henderson, a registered child minder and scout leader was jailed for three years at Reading Crown Court for allegedly killing an 11-month-old baby. Keran had been accused of shaking the child so violently that she was left blind and brain damaged. She was convicted of manslaughter by a 10-2 verdict.

In her defence Keran Henderson claimed the baby had a seizure while she was changing her nappy. Expert witnesses for the defence said the injuries could have been days, weeks or even months old. She claimed the baby had repeatedly been ill since she was first in her care, a claim which the baby's mother denied. Keran told the Court that on the day she died, the baby's body "stiffened and jerked back" as she changed her nappy, her eyes rolled back into her head, her body went floppy and she was gurgling as if something was stuck in her throat. The jury rejected her story, agreeing with the prosecution that Keran Henderson caused the child's death. Crucially however, neuropathologist Waney Squier, an expert witness for the prosecution, said there was "nothing to indicate the baby had died from shaken-baby syndrome".

It has now emerged that two jurors have questioned the guilty verdict – a man who is believed to have been the jury's foreman, and a woman – both say they believe Keran Henderson, and that the jury has made a mistake.

Speaking on radio the female juror said "I believe a miscarriage of justice has occurred and there's nothing I can do about it. I don't think you can get a fair outcome. I will never know, as long as I live, whether the verdict was right. If medics can't decide between themselves how it happened what chance have we got?"

The jury foreman, who is reported to be writing a book on the issues raised by this case, has said that in his view, the case should never have come to Court. He has also called for jurors to be better trained so they can tackle complex trial arguments. He added that although the judge's well-rounded summary was excellent and made this case a little easier to understand they were told they could not have a transcript. "Had the jury been given a transcript they might have reached a better verdict", he added.

What was not proved, he said, was who caused the death "or indeed whether anyone did ... ultimately the case was decided by laymen and laywomen using that despicable enemy of correct and logical thinking, that wonderfully persuasive device, common sense."

The courage shown by the jurors in speaking out is unprecedented; jurors are prohibited by law from disclosing the secrets of the jury room and the discussions as to how a verdict was reached. But the readiness of the two

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House of Lords Extend Time Limits for Sex Abuse Compensation Claims

In a landmark ruling ([2008] UKHL 6) the House of Lords has decided that the limits for making a claim in the Civil Court for compensation following sexual assault will no longer be time barred. Previously, sexual abuse victims were prevented from bringing a claim more than six years after the offence or, in child abuse cases, more than six years after the victim reached 18. Beyond the age of 24, the victims were therefore no longer able to sue.

Opinions vary as to whether their Lordships are simply rebalancing the test to be applied when hearing compensation claims for sexual assault out of time, or whether a more fundamental change is being signalled. What is clear however is that the ruling has re-interpreted the law in favour of claimants. However Judges will still have to decide if there are grounds of negligence and whether the conduct of the claimant is reasonable.

Although all five law lords were unanimous in their decision Lord Brown offered cautionary note. He said (Para 86) [that as a result of the combined effects of changing

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F.A.C.T. is a voluntary organisation which supports carers and teachers who have been falsely accused and/or wrongly convicted of child abuse, and campaigns on their behalf for changes in investigative practice, and for reform of the criminal justice system.

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FACTion

FACTion is produced at approximately 6-8 week intervals at the national committee's discretion, and is provided free of charge to F.A.C.T. members.

The editorial team welcome articles for publication, of between 150 and 1,500 words, and letters of not more than 200 words

These should be sent, preferably by email, to faction@factuk.org or by post to FACTion, P.O. Box 3074, Cardiff, CF3 3WZ.

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Editorial

A very Happy New Year to you all. Every new year brings a new beginning. Quite what 2008 will bring is anyone's guess. Last year we thought we had seen an end to trawling in historic cases, but events on the South coast and in the Channel Islands have proved us wrong. What these events have done, however, is give us an opportunity to re-state, with renewed vigour, our opposition to trawling; and an opportunity to highlight the injustice which arises when attempting to defend historic allegations.

The recent judgements by the Law Lords, which many feel will result in a flood of compensation claims in the Civil Courts, has not helped. We must, however, trust the judges only to award compensation in those cases where the accused can be given a fair trial. Equally, we must demand that the judiciary, in both the Civil and the Criminal Courts, take firm action against anyone who is minded to make false allegations.

In January, the National Committee met. The main item on the agenda was the Jersey Inquiry. We also discussed ways of remembering George Williamson's contribution to F.A.C.T. What we have decided to do is dedicate annually one of our conference lectures to George's memory. We think this will be a fitting tribute to his work and hope you will approve. The Committee were also very pleased to receive a most generous donation from George's estate, which provides much needed financial stability.

We also used the time to do some stocktaking. I know many of you have been concerned to know what is happening with the Cambridge research project, and with HAAP cases generally. Following our meeting, we have made further contact with HAAP, and I am pleased to say we will be meeting them shortly. I think we both recognise that our relationship has drifted a little of late, probably because we have both been extraordinarily busy.

In this edition of FACTion the underlying theme has been Courts, the Police and Justice. One of the goals the National Committee are striving to achieve is the need for a follow up on the Home Affairs Select Committee's 2002 report on the Investigation of Past Abuse in Children's Homes. One of the problems we face however, now that the Home Office has been disaggregated, is which branch is responsible for these areas; and whom we should be lobbying. Is it the Home Office; or will it be the Ministry of Justice? Will they be as accommodating as the Home Affairs Select Committee were; or will they take up an entirely new stance, or completely ignore the issue? Whatever they decide, 2008 will be a challenging year.

Rory O'Brien
Chairman

Police Adopt New Trawling Practice

Hampshire Police have announced that ten men and two women, aged in their 50s, 60s and 70s, were arrested in connection with allegations of physical and sexual abuse of children, dating back to the 1970s and 1980s. Hampshire Constabulary said the allegations concern the abuse of children and young adults by people living in their own private homes.

In what would appear to be a departure from usual practice the police set up a mobile police station on a housing estate in the Milton area to "enable members of the public to speak to officers".

Chief Inspector Gary Cooper who is leading Operation Crossbow said, "The investigation started as a result of a number of disclosures from a number of people in relation to historical child abuse. The investigation team are appealing for anyone living in these areas around the time of the allegations who may have witnessed an incident or has information which could assist police, to contact them. We are hoping to speak to people who are victims who have not come forward"

West Australian Government Announce Compensation Programme for State care kids

The West Australian Government has announced a \$A114million compensation programme for children abused while in state care.

Premier Alan Carpenter estimates 9,000 to 10,000 people may be eligible for payments under the scheme, including members of the stolen generation, migrant children and children placed into foster care or state institutions prior to March 2006.

People have one year from May next year to apply for compensation.

Victims of abuse or neglect would receive an ex-gratia payment of up to \$10,000, or up to \$80,000 if there was evidence they suffered physical or psychological harm.

They would also receive an official apology from the State government, but would no longer be able to pursue civil litigation against the State through the courts.

Mr Carpenter today apologised to all children who had been abused while in state care.

"We unreservedly apologise to them and hope we can, through this method, seek to re-address some of the pain they have suffered," the Premier said.

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Chris Saltrese Solicitors is a law firm providing a premium service in representing clients accused of sexual offences and domestic violence, in criminal proceedings. We have unrivalled expertise in these areas, both regionally and nationally.

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- domestic or relationship disputes
- contact disputes
- mental health problems
- financial incentives

and have no prior experience of the criminal justice system. Often these allegations involve uncorroborated, historic allegations.

In this complex arena specialist legal advice and representation is vital especially as recent changes in the law, designed to convict genuine offenders, also put the innocent at greater risk of injustice.

We particularly welcome carers, teachers, and health care professionals who have been accused of abuse and are likely to be subject to a criminal investigation. Where allegations have been made we would be happy to advise, whether or not criminal investigations are underway.

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Ministry of Justice issues consultation Paper on Tribunal Reform

The Ministry of Justice has issued a consultation paper on the proposed restructuring of all Tribunals in the light of the Tribunals Courts and Enforcement Act 2007. The Act created the Tribunals Service .

The new proposals involve the creation of a two tier system that aims to give much clearer routes of appeal.

F.A.C.T. would like to contribute to this consultation as tribunals are playing an increasing role in hearing appeals in both employment and 'listing' cases, where abuse has been alleged

If you have any views which you would like us to put forward please let us know.

Victim Support Group Calls for National Debate on False Allegations of Child Abuse in Ireland

The **Alliance Victim Support Group** in Ireland is so concerned about so called 'victims' abusing the taxpayer by falsely claiming to have been abused that they have called for a national debate on the subject.

In a statement the AVSG state that they have many years experience of trying to help victims of abuse by campaigning, advocating on their behalf and introducing them to the services they need, and like so many others are absolutely horrified by some of the stories of abuse that have come out in recent years.

However they go on to say, having just read Hermann Kelly's new book, **'Kathy's Real Story'** that they are shocked by the long litany of good people who have been falsely accused before being later found innocent.

"Kelly makes an extremely well argued and factually backed-up case, that the level of claims of abuse exponentially jumped in number once the Government offered money through the Redress Board, allied with a virtually non-existent level of proof".

"The consequence of this is a culture of false allegations in which the innocent have been herded in with the guilty abusers, so that many good people have had their lives torn apart and publicly humiliated. This is a continuing and appalling injustice".

"This raises very serious questions about the Redress Board which financially incentivises people to make false allegations yet asks for no proof, save they actually attended the institutions in question. A strong case has now been made that the Irish taxpayer has also been abused, by this scheme".

The group is also critical that the issues raised by Hermann Kelly's book have not been treated equitably, by RTE, the national broadcaster on TV or radio, which, they say, has given considerable air time to those who have made serious allegations of abuse against Catholic religious.

"We believe that not to have a discussion on the findings of Kathy's Real Story is a shocking avoidance of public service responsibility "

The Alliance Victim Support Group has been at the forefront of protecting the welfare of those who suffered institutional abuse. We are now calling for RTE, the national broadcaster to initiate an 'on air' debate about the finding of false allegations. If RTE refuses to fulfil its obligation to provide balance on the issue of false allegations, it should hand back its license".

"In order to defend the cause of those who were abused in the institutions, Alliance Victim Support also wishes to repudiate false allegations when found. Kathy O'Beirne's story has been found to be untrue. She never attended a Magdalene Laundry, there is no evidence she ever had a

baby. Kathy's Real Story shows she made many allegations against people, such as Fr Fergal O'Connor OP which were investigated and found to be totally untrue. In order to differentiate between true and false claims of institutional abuse Alliance Support now calls on other support groups to totally repudiate Kathy O'Beirne's story".

F.A.C.T. would like to thank the Alliance Victim Support Group for the stand they have taken. They are unique among support groups in accepting that, inevitably, some people are falsely accused, and that when this happens action should be taken against those who abuse the system.

Footnote: You can also read a review of Herman Kelly's book on page 14.

DIARY DATE

The Spring F.A.C.T. conference
will take place on
Saturday 26th April
in Birmingham

F.A.C.T. members are
cordially invited to join
Carers4Carers
On a peaceful March in London on
Wednesday 20th February
in support of
Keran Henderson
a child minder and community worker
wrongly convicted of manslaughter.

*Meet outside the front entrance
of the Houses of Parliament.
We shall walk past the House of Parliament, 10
Downing Street and the Attorney Generals office.*

*For further information see
www.carers4carers.co.uk*

Like A Frightened Rabbit

Innocent until proven guilty is a luxury only bestowed upon those who, in their chosen profession, are considered not in a position of trust. If, for example, you are a teacher and accused of any inappropriate behaviour you can guarantee you will be bound by the allegations for life, even if acquitted.

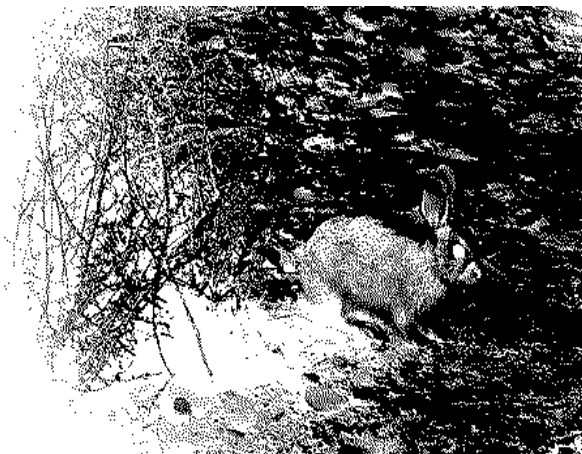
Today's legal system protects children from harms way, nobody can dispute it is a necessity, but what, when these children are given so much power as to destroy an innocent adult to the point where their freedom and family are taken from them? What when these children are paid by the media for doing so? It is a tempting offer for any fourteen year old, a few lies - they are practised at this as they sneak out the house to binge drink on a Friday night, (I was myself 14 once). If they are incredibly unlucky a court appearance beckons where they speak only to a video camera, a jury cannot therefore read their body language as their palms sweat and they fidget in their chairs, or as in many cases that the innocent darlings are pregnant, more often than not the consequence of a Friday nights binge.

The frightening fact of this is that in the current system we are powerless to stop them. Accusations of events 2, 5 or 10 years previously are expected to be remembered by the defendant as if it were yesterday. Even when the prosecution cannot provide specific dates or times the defence are required to disprove events that could have occurred anywhere in a period of years at any time and any place. In the unlikely event that an element could be disproved the prosecution can then change their mind at any point to "it's a possibility I got it wrong" or the classic "I can't remember".

In many cases there is no physical evidence. It is not required for a conviction; only one friend to be offered a cut of the expected payout to back up their fabrication. Even when the accomplice's versions do not match the "innocent victims" allowances are made for everyone witnessing events differently, no such leniency for the defendant or their supporting witnesses. School yard gossip and rumours are used as evidence in court; the "well I heard Mr. Bloggs was snogging two dinner ladies behind the vending machine" is evidence against you.

The backgrounds and criminal records of the accusers are not disclosed in Court. The accusers appear studious, well behaved individuals who, because of your behaviour have had their dreams dashed and will now work for a potato peeling factory. The Jury know nothing of their exclusions from primary school at eleven, their pregnancies at twelve and their drug addiction at thirteen, way before they met you and had the opportunity to make a quick buck.

You can be the best in your profession with no previous convictions, people queuing to defend you to



clear your name and it will all be twisted against you. You will be made to appear a master of deception, fooling everyone you know even your wife of twenty years. Your religion or moral standing matters not, you could've taken a vow of celibacy at sixteen, it only adds to the fantastic lie that is your life. To top it all you can even be given a longer sentence because your family support you so you have obviously deceived them and are more likely to re-offend.

Once you are scooped into the system you are forced to "admit your guilt", to write in detail what you have done and sympathise with your "victims"; A psychological mind game to break your spirit and make you "accept the truth". There is no justice and the truth is long buried. When you protest to this you will be denied visits from your loving family, all that is keeping you going.

A rabbit caught in the headlights of a moving car. You can see it coming; at first you are startled, confused and unprepared. You freeze and don't realise that your life and reputation you've worked so hard for are about to be questioned. You hear warnings from all sides and alarm bells ring. As the system speeds towards your life you will find it engulfs your whole being. You breathe it every second. The car is almost on top of your insignificant existence, you're a potential conviction for the police, you're road kill; a statistic. You feel the tyres begin to crush your family, your friends; your soul. Your accusers are at the wheel, they are laughing as the media offers pour in, ten, fifteen, twenty thousand pounds of your flesh. You are now caught in the system; it will roll over and over your frame and try to take your dignity, passion and belief. You hang on to your last breath of fresh air.

This isn't a particular case, this isn't uncommon; it is our British legal system and it is failing us every day.

We are grateful to Charlotte Dyer, the daughter of a falsely accused and wrongly convicted teacher, for this article .

Dangerous Convictions

Margaret Jervis and Chris Saltrese take a close look at injustice in sex trials and conclude that it has become a political problem

“It is important for a jury to be cautious about convicting a person on the basis of uncorroborated evidence. Judges will always warn of the dangers of so doing”. So spoke the then Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, in October 1987. He was speaking on the occasion of a bill to lift the bar on children giving uncorroborated evidence in court.

It was an emotive issue, with the warring claims of mass sexual abuse in Cleveland and dodgy diagnostics making headlines on a daily basis. Allowing children to give uncorroborated evidence in such circumstances was a reasonable and necessary step in the interests of justice. But contrary to what Douglas Hurd promised, the warning would not stand firm. Within a few years, Michael Howard was announcing its demise for all complainants in sexual offences, because it was ‘demeaning to victims [sic].

Nobody stopped to correct him that in many uncorroborated cases the status of ‘victim’ was precisely the matter at issue. But then the erosion of justice in contested sexual offence cases over the past two decades has been marked largely by silence or irritation that measures do not go far enough. And just when corroboration warnings were hitting the skids, a rush of cases started to flood courtrooms countrywide, based solely on a complainant’s story of what was alleged to have happened long ago.

Before the mandatory corroboration warning was scrapped in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, the House of Lords decided that multiple complainants making allegations could be regarded as corroborating each other and that where there was a danger of collusion or contamination – precisely the dangers that had historically kept such allegations apart at trial – it was for the jury to decide.

Once the mandatory corroboration warning had gone, the new rules on mutual support by allegation remained. So family members acting out an old grudge against a long divorced parent could recite their pieces before the jury who would be able to use one allegation to support another and vice versa. Yes it’s circular, but it was a powerful way of convicting people in sex offence cases, even if there was no evidence of the crime outside what was said.

Nowhere was the new similar fact rule employed to greater effect than in the trawl cases involving former approved schools and children’s homes. Massive police investigations scoured prisons and probation lists for allegations against care workers. As in all sexual offence cases, there were some guilty people (though often, contrary to popular belief, detected at the time), but the bulk of allegations were against innocent people and, as is often a trademark of fictitious allegations, the more serious the allegations and more frequent the purported

conduct, the less likely, by rational analysis, was it to be true, but the more likely it was that the jury would convict. In 2002, the Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee produced a damning report on the children’s homes trawls, detecting a ‘new genre’ of miscarriage of justice and calling for legislative reform of the similar fact rules to restore safeguards against wrongful conviction. In fact concerned defence lawyers were aware that the ‘new genre’ extended back further and more broadly than the Committee was willing or able to probe.

Being jointly hit in the massive North Wales and Merseyside trawls of the mid-nineties, care workers had begun to form their own collective lobby, which led to the Parliamentary inquiry. Domestic cases, though far more prevalent, have so far failed to attract the same kind of collective concern.

But the calls for reform fell on deaf ears in the government. And the similar fact rule, far from being abolished, has been extended through the Criminal Justice Act 2003 to include allegations of prior ‘misconduct’ such as alleged domestic violence that play no part in the criminal charges themselves.

Why has this happened? The classic excuse is that sexual crimes are so prevalent, dangerous and difficult to detect that it is necessary to have special rules of evidence to convict. Such was the legalistic rationale in the 17th century witch trials where ‘spectral evidence’ - dreams, visions and hallucinations - was admitted. Something similar exists in today’s secular world, where sex crimes, particularly against children, are seen as a kind of demonic infestation that is the reserved territory of therapists and ‘survivor’ advocates and not the proper inquiry into offences committed in space and time.

It was as the witch trials faded away, that the ‘corroboration warning’ first began to be formulated. Contrary to what has been said by opponents, there was never a time when corroboration was required to convict on sworn testimony in sexual offences in English law, the warning however acted as a brake on a rush to judgment, as well as method of gate-keeping and, importantly, a touchstone of investigation.

For while the handling of sexual complaints may have been insensitive and sceptical in times gone by, there is every reason for the police to test the evidence at the first opportunity, both to screen out unreliable claims and to find out whether there is a solid foundation for the offence. In effect it formed a spinal cord of the investigation and prosecution of sex crimes, and many sex crimes are in fact capable of being independently corroborated, if reported promptly.

For what the direction said was that experience showed

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Complaints Against the Police Continue to Rise

According to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) annual report 2006/7 almost 29,000 complaints (up 10 per cent on the year before) were recorded across the 43 police forces in England and Wales covering 45,853 allegations. The most common complaints were neglect or failure in duty (24%), incivility, impoliteness and intolerance (21%), and assault (15%). Some 32,574 officers were complained about.

Where possible complaints are resolved locally. About half of these (47%) are dealt with in this way, with no permanent record against the officer complained about.

Of the complaints dealt with formally, almost all are still investigated by the police force of the officer complained about.

The IPCC hear appeals against local decisions of which almost a quarter were successful.

In total the IPCC dealt with 3,532 appeals from complainants of which of 536 (15%) were found to be invalid. Of the 2,996 valid appeals completed over 60% were about the outcome of the investigation.

Overall, 24% of appeals were upheld. The highest proportion of upheld appeals concerned the non-recording of a complainant (39%), followed by appeals against the local resolution process (31%), and those regarding the outcome of an investigation (17%).

What do these figures reveal?

Firstly, that investigative practice throughout the UK varies widely and, secondly, it shows that whilst it is becoming easier to complain it is becoming harder to secure a finding against the police.

Figures extracted from "Police Complaints: Statistics from England and Wales 2006/7" published by the IPCC

Police Pay out £44 Million in Compensation

An investigation by Heather Brooke, an expert in *The Freedom of Information Act* and author of *Your Right to Know*, has shown that police forces have paid out more than £44 million in compensation and damages in the past five years, mostly to victims of alleged police misconduct.

The bulk was paid out for wrongful arrests, assaults, malicious prosecutions and abuses of human rights. The figures show that between 2002 and 2007 the 55 police forces received more than 31,000 claims.

Her survey also exposed defects in the way in which forces keep their records. More than half did not keep accessible records of claims, complaints or court cases. Others kept no separate record of damages awarded to victims of police misconduct, recording only total damages – including sums paid to settle employment tribunal claims and vehicle damage. In all, 31,829 claims were lodged over five years, resulting in 1,825 court actions. But only 467, or 24 per cent, of those claims reached court. Most were settled or paid off.

Heather Brooke asked police forces how many claims had been threatened or brought, defining "claim" as any written demand for financial compensation or other relief arising from alleged unlawful acts or omissions in the course of police operations. They included alleged misconduct, assault, false imprisonment, malicious prosecution, and misfeasance or private law claims under the Human Rights Act.

Police forces say that part of the problem is the "compensation culture" and that most payments are made after discussion with their police authorities and often on the basis of legal advice.

Information extracted from an article written by Frances Gibb, Sean O'Neill and James Ball, which appeared in the Times on 3rd December 2007

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In My Opinion - *A light hearted look at some serious issues*

Myths and Aberrations by George Jensen

Someone once said that there was a law for the rich and another for the poor. There is another category, whether rich or poor, is immaterial; it is the law or lack of it for those boys in blue, the Police Service (It used to be a Police Force when they did a decent job) but now it is more interested in promoting political correctness than in detecting crime through the proper investigative procedures. By proper I mean with total objectivity and a disregard for any attempt by outside influence such as Government targets, and an absence of bias. (If any Chief Constable would wish to be reminded of this rather quaint approach to policing I shall be more than willing to offer my services).

I digress, I intended to write to tell you of a matter of some considerable interest to your scribe, otherwise known as G.A.J. those who know me will readily associate those initials with the rather large body to which they are appended. Dash it all here I go digressing again. As promised in my last musings I can update you on the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire's recent problems. He did eventually appear before the magistrates in North Wales and I am somewhat mollified to report that he was fined £300 and banned from the road for six weeks which seems to me to be a less than adequate sentence for one who was the national police spokesperson for road safety with special emphasis on speed enforcement!

Whilst on the subject of law enforcement, that is what Chief Constables are supposedly paid to do. It came to my notice that magistrates who similarly enforce the law, are sometimes hoist by their own petard. A magistrate was accused by his daughter in law of assault and sued her for libel. The saga began when the magistrate from Wyre Piddle (I kid you not) fell out over some new door locks. He claimed that his daughter in law's account of the happenings to the police damaged his reputation. However the High Court ruled that allegations made to the police are exempt from the law of libel. So no matter what you allege, and no matter against whom the allegations are made, you are safe from litigation for libel. So you can say what you like to the police about anyone you care to name with a clear understanding that they can do little or nothing about it!

I am very pleased to announce that the law does sometimes apply to those afore mentioned boys in blue, provided that you are not part of the top brass. Two detective constables (you may be familiar with this particular species, they are the ones who purport to investigate in an objective manner) have been sacked by the Merseyside Force. They had allowed a car thief out of prison to visit his girlfriend in order to encourage him to confess to crimes he had not committed. On another occasion the prisoner, who was a heroin

addict, was allowed to drink alcohol with them whilst they were on duty. The two, who had 45 years of service between them, were instructed to resign and were allowed to retain their pensions. (Had they been sacked they would have lost their pensions.) The matter came to light when prison officials monitoring telephone calls told the police about it. The two were then subject to surveillance by their colleagues. You will not be surprised to know that both deny any wrongdoing and intend to appeal. When the police interviewed many men who were the subject of abuse allegations, they were not believed, I would be surprised therefore if you believed

these fine upstanding officers of our malfunctioning and dishonourable law.

You will also be captivated to learn that a Professor at Portsmouth University has made some startling findings about the police interviewing of suspects. They do not believe it when suspects who are innocent tell them that they are telling the truth, they rely on body language to identify the guilty parties. So now you know, if you had not wriggled your bottom on the seat when being interviewed you would have been believed!

I am dismayed to read that there are to be trials of the infamous Sarah's Law in several regions of the country. This is in total contradiction of stated Home Office policy and against the advice of the majority of the members of the Association of Chief Police Officers. Have those responsible for this outrageous decision forgotten what happened when the News of The World printed photographs and names of alleged paedophiles. Just in case they have forgotten, or are too young to know what happened I will recount the result. A paediatrician's home was daubed with paint,



"You have been found guilty. Have you anything to say before I let you off?"

windows smashed and she was threatened with violence by the local illiterate hotheads who did not know the difference between the two words, neither of which I suspect they could spell. If as a result of the police trials there are similar happenings it is to be anticipated that those who are harmed as a result will sue the police for maximum compensation.

Another category of offender who is, or appears to be above the law is certain High Court Judges. The police, upon being told that a certain judge had been accused of various sexual offences decided that there was insufficient evidence against him and therefore did not consider it necessary to investigate. I would remind that police force that according to our friend from Dyfed Powis who was the national spokesman on these matters for the ACPO, they have a duty to investigate ALL allegations of sexual misconduct. It may be of course that that erstwhile Ex-Chief Constable of Dyfed Powis was suffering from that terrible illness called 'selective amnesia'.

In contrast the police, who go where others fear to tread and will boldly arrest any lawbreaker, did decide in another region that it was necessary to investigate the heinous crime committed by a thirteen year old lad. His 'crime' - he had handled a stolen ice cream cone. You see the law does apply to everyone; that is everyone except Chief Constables, Detective Officers and High Court Judges. If you know of any other exemptions I shall be pleased to hear from you.

But what about politicians? Several might qualify to be the *Minister of Hypocrisy*, or work in the *Department of Do What I Say Not What I Do*. Perhaps the best qualified is Liam Byrne M.P. Byrne was a minister in this government who helped to create much tougher law by banning drivers who transgressed by using a mobile phone whilst driving. He made a name for himself by declaring in a Commons debate that such drivers were dangerous and potential killers and campaigned for longer sentences. That was until November 2nd of last year, when he was convicted of using his mobile phone whilst driving. This minor aberration has left him with a fine, a criminal record, his licence endorsed and his reputations in tatters. Various ministers have spent years lecturing the motorists in Britain on just about every aspect of driving; speed limits, on how one should use public transport and leave the car at home, etc, but as is not infrequently the case it is a matter of do as I say not as I do.

In February 1998 John Prescott when he was Minister

of Transport boasted that he used the train when travelling from Scarborough to Hull. In reality he boarded the train and got out just three miles down the line and had his Jaguar car waiting for him to continue the journey!

In June 1999, just days after the introduction of the Bus Lane on the M4 at Heathrow Tony Blair was held up in a traffic jam, he instructed his driver to take to the bus lane! His excuse? "Security reasons!"

Just a few months later in October Prescott, who else, used his Jaguar whilst at the Labour Party Conference at Brighton to travel from his hotel to the conference venue, this journey was all of 200 yards.

In July 2000 Jack Straw was Home Secretary and a great supporter of Zero Tolerance for drivers who broke the speed limit. His car was stopped on the M5 in Somerset at a mere 103 mph; his excuse was that he was on his way to meet Mr Blair. No action as he was being driven by a police driver!



Your Worship, can we just ignore the facts - I'm a politician?

I came across an item which will be of interest to our members who have been the victims of false allegations, whether convicted in a court or not, it comes from the Journal of Psychiatry Research, published in November 2007.

Paedophilia it said could be caused by a malfunction in the brain according to the research team who found that brain scans of child molesters and criminals convicted of non-sexual offending have found key differences in the

way that their brain wiring systems are connected. Such findings are a serious challenge to the popular thinking that paedophilia is as a result of childhood trauma or abuse. Dr James Cantor, from the Toronto Centre for Addiction and Mental Health states that there is nothing in the research that should assume that paedophiles are not criminally responsible for their actions. Equally, there was found to be no link between having been abused and later criminality in the abused individual's life, thus one must challenge claims that are frequently made regarding criminality being caused by having been abused as a child. Incidentally the research team found that child abusers tend to have low IQs, are three times more likely to be left handed and tend to be shorter than the average population. So there you have it. If you are right handed with an I Q of above 100 and are six foot tall you are unlikely to be a child abuser.

Best wishes to you all for the New Year,

George

Jersey Police Launch Trawl



A police investigation is underway in Jersey into allegations of abuse at Haut de La Garenne which served as a school and as an orphanage, before becoming part of Jersey's childcare provision. It is understood that the allegations span three decades and go back as far as forty years.

Jersey Police have confirmed that while following up a series of convictions for sexual offences involving officers from the island's Sea Cadet Corps, there appeared to be links between victims in those cases, and a number of island institutions, including Haut de la Garenne, which closed in the 1980's.

Deputy Chief Police Officer Lennie Harper is quoted as saying that since announcing the operation, his officers have received over 100 calls and e-mails, and that more than 70 alleged victims, and at least 20 suspects have been identified. The allegations range "from pretty severe physical and mental abuse right through to the most serious sexual crimes that you can imagine", he said. Faced with such a major inquiry, Jersey has requested specialist help from the UK. These include one analyst, from Merseyside Police whose role will be to examine all information coming into the enquiry and establish links and connections between the various strands. He will ensure that no intelligence is missed or lost in the system. Also joining the enquiry will be two civilian investigators with extensive experience in this field and who worked at the Metropolitan Police and Nottinghamshire Police respectively. The Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police has made available a specialist detective from his force. Officers from the States of Jersey Police will continue to work on the inquiry.

Commenting on the enlargement of the team, senior investigating officer Lenny Harper said: "The team has been working flat out and we are mindful of the fact that we cannot 'strip bare' our operational response needs in

Jersey. The people we are bringing over are very experienced in this type of work".

"We have had an unprecedented response to the phone lines, and in particular, the NSPCC tell us that we have had more than three times the number of calls that they would normally expect to a helpline of this type. We know that some victims have given significant information about criminal offences and are waiting to speak to us".

F.A.C.T. understands that the inquiry has also spread to Guernsey. It is not known however whether a separate investigation in Hampshire is connected to either of these inquiries. A F.A.C.T. spokesman said that so far no one in the Channel Islands had contacted them maintaining their innocence.

"This may be because those accused may be guilty or because F.A.C.T. is not known to them, or because they might think that as F.A.C.T. only covers the UK they may not be eligible for support. If F.A.C.T. is contacted by anyone who has worked in the Channel Island and is under investigation but innocent of the allegations alleged we will offer them support."

"F.A.C.T. is however very concerned that the Jersey State police are relying on police from the Merseyside Police to establish links and connections between the various strands especially as police investigative practice in care home cases on Merseyside has been severely criticised by judges and by the Home Affairs Select Committee. Experience tells us that when the police trawl for allegations in cases of alleged historic abuse, especially when they relate to events twenty or more years ago, innocent people will be caught up in the investigation. We urge the State of Jersey police to ensure that they do not make the same mistakes as happened in the UK and in other jurisdictions worldwide".

Jurors Speak Out: Continued from page 1

to do so in this case is clearly an indication of how strongly they felt.

A campaign to secure Keran's release has already begun by friends and relatives. The group named *carers for carers* have set up a website, www.carers4carers.co.uk lobbied the press and politicians, and have planned a march around Westminster in support of Keran. This will take place on Wednesday 20th March.

Bill Bache, the solicitor who represented Salisbury mum Angela Cannings who was freed from prison in 2003 after her conviction for murdering her two sons was overturned, is also working on Keran's appeal.

Speaking recently Keran's husband Iain, a former policeman, said "Keran is really buoyed up by the news about the jurors and I keep her updated about the work

on her appeal. We are now just waiting for the date. This has been a very difficult time for Keran, our two boys and myself. As a family we feel very humbled by the support shown to Keran, and to myself. We are determined to overturn the conviction and to restore her good name. I would like to thank all those who believe in Keran's innocence and, in particular, the campaign team and every one who has supported us. It is a privilege to work with them. I would also like to thank F.A.C.T. for their support, especially during the pre-trial period, and for their continuing interest and advice. It's groups like F.A.C.T. who not only remind us of the importance of truth and justice but also hold the criminal justice system to account. Thankyou".

Man Wins Right To Challenge CRB Disclosures

It was recently reported (see Independent 30th January 2008) that an Oxfordshire man has won the right to challenge the decision of the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police to disclose damaging and unfounded allegations on his enhanced certificate of disclosure by the Criminal Records Bureau. His solicitor, Chris Saltrese, an expert in contested sex offence cases, described the challenge, which will be heard in the High Court, as potentially very important in what he described as a "very draconian" area of law.

"The legislation allows the police almost unfettered discretion on what information may be included in an Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate," says Mr Saltrese. "Unsubstantiated material can be included, even if there is no criminal conviction or charges, and even if there is no evidence that the allegations are true." He adds:

This approach was intended to ring-fence the vulnerable. But its effect could be devastating for the wrongly accused. Is it right that an innocent person's life can be ruined without just cause or right of reply?

The case highlights the disproportionate retention and use of information held by the police across Britain.

In November last year the Information Commissioner ordered four police forces in England and Wales to destroy criminal records of minor offences committed by teenagers who had gone on to lead unblemished adult lives but claimed they were still being punished for their past misdemeanours. In one case on the Police National Computer, Humberside Police had kept details of the theft of a 99p packet of meat in 1984 by a teenager who was fined £15.

Such cases also illustrate a wider concern about the onerous bureaucracy facing many people who wish to give up their free time to the community. On Monday, a report published by the Commission on the Future of Volunteering said that the need for Criminal Record Bureau checks, references and other assurances could be disproportionate in relation to the actual risk and work being carried out and may already have discouraged thousands of community-minded individuals from making a greater contribution to society.

"Checks are right where people are working with children and vulnerable people," Baroness Neuberger, the Prime Minister's adviser on volunteering, said in the report. "It is the way it's being interpreted that is causing a problem. Organisations don't want to get into

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Dangerous Convictions: continued from page 6

that people do, for whatever reason, make false allegations of sexual crimes, and that it was dangerous to convict on uncorroborated evidence, but, despite this caution, if the jury were sure then they could convict.

When public anxiety and prejudice is excited, as in terrorism cases, an army of civil rights advocates will usually rush to the defence, though of course there are some people who pose a threat and do commit heinous crimes. Yet for over two decades now in Britain there has been a deafening silence on the issue of escalating injustice in sex trials. There is little, if any, attempt to conduct proper research and evidential reviews. This position must change. The current extent of injustice is an enormous waste on the public and private purse, in addition to being an affront to civilised values. While good defence and appeals may make a small indent, the problem, as the Criminal Cases Review Commission is occasionally moved to suggest, is endemic within the system of justice itself. In short, it is a political problem - and that is where the change must begin.

*We are grateful to **Inside Time** for allowing us to re-print this article. If you have any views on this subject, for or against, we would be pleased to publish them.*

House of Lords Consider the Impact False Allegations have on Foster Carers

Extract from a debate in the House of Lords on the 17th January on the Children and Young Persons Bill - Committee Stage

Baroness Walmsley speaking.

“**Amendment No. 98** is about making sure that if a foster parent is accused of an allegation they can continue to receive the fee, because in those circumstances the child will have been taken away from them so they are no longer entitled to the allowance. That is natural justice. It is about being innocent until proven guilty.

The possibility of an allegation being made against them is a constant fear for foster carers. Due to the nature of the children and young people placed with them, and the often fraught relationships between foster carers and birth parents, unfounded allegations are, sadly, a regular occurrence. An allegation is often used as a way of trying to break a placement, or is due to a misunderstanding of everyday behaviour which, before the child entered care, had been a prelude to abuse. Surveys have shown that around a third of all foster carers will face an allegation during their fostering career, and the vast majority turn out to be unfounded.

Government timescales for the resolution of allegations, set out in the Working Together guidance, desirable though they are, are routinely being missed in allegation cases against foster carers. Working Together states that 80 per cent of allegations should be resolved in one month, 90 per cent should be resolved in three months and all cases should be resolved in a year. Research by Swain in 2006 has shown that 50 per cent of allegation cases last longer than three months and one in 10 last longer than a year—in some cases several years. To compound matters, in a third of all allegation cases where some or all children have been removed—which is really the de facto suspension of that foster carer from their job—almost all foster carers have their fostering income cut, and 46 per cent have their income stopped completely.

Research has also shown that 60 per cent of foster carers facing allegations are not receiving the access to independent support during an allegation that they desperately need and which they are required to receive under the current national minimum

standards for fostering services. The amendment would protect foster carers from the immense financial hardship that can accompany an allegation investigation, and it would give local authorities greater incentive to resolve investigations within an acceptable timescale.

If they are continuing to have to pay the very small fees that some foster carers get, it certainly makes it a very good thing that they speed up their investigations. We really need to keep these foster carers, and if there is an ongoing case against an innocent person, for all the reasons that I have outlined, they will obviously have lost the allowance because they have lost the child. If they lose the fee as well, they will have to get another job.

We are desperately short of foster parents, and we are paying them only a very small amount. It is against natural justice that they should be seen as guilty because their retention fee—as I would call it—has been taken away from them while the allegation is heard. If we can reach the target of 80 per cent resolved within a month, the payments that we are talking about will be very small. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure me that we will not lose a lot of foster carers because of financial expediency—they have no income and have to get another job. We will lose them, and that would be extremely sad. Amendment No. 98 would be possible if the split sought by the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, were put into place. I beg to move.”

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House of Lords Ruling: Continued from page 1

the existing law] a **substantially greater number of allegations (not all of which will be true) are now likely to be made many years after the abuse complained of.** Whether or not it will be possible for defendants to investigate these sufficiently for there to be a reasonable prospect of a fair trial will depend upon a number of factors, not least when the complaint was first made and with what effect. If a complaint has been made and recorded, and more obviously still if the accused has been convicted of the abuse complained of, that will be one thing; if, however, a complaint comes out of the blue with no apparent support for it (other perhaps than that the alleged abuser has been accused or even convicted of similar abuse in the past), that would be quite another thing.

He then went on to say by no means everyone who brings a late claim for damages for sexual abuse, however genuine their complaint may in fact be, can reasonably expect the court to exercise discretion in his favour. On the contrary, a fair trial (which must surely include a fair opportunity for the defendant to investigate the allegations) is in many cases likely to be found quite simply impossible after a long delay.

F.A.C.T. Comment: *It remains to be seen what the effects of this judgement will be in practice. On the one hand the Courts have to consider compensation claims for alleged assaults long after they were said to have to have occurred, and on the other hand they have to balance out the need to ensure the accused is not disadvantaged by having to defend allegations relating to events which are said to have occurred many years before.*

Happy Birthday

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News from Scotland

£38,000 paid to falsely accused teacher

It has been revealed that teachers in Scottish schools received compensation totalling more than £180,000 during 2007. The highest single payment of the £180,300 paid out in compensation was £38,000 for psychiatric injury caused by the false allegation of a pupil and lack of support from the employers.

Interim payments have also been made to a teacher who suffered psychiatric injury after an assault, and another who suffered internal injury and post-traumatic shock after being kicked by a pupil. A further £70,000 was paid in legal costs to employees.

Ronnie Smith, the general secretary of the EIS, Scotland's largest teaching union, described the amount paid out as "extremely worrying".

He added: "The number of incidents remains far too high and the amount of compensation paid out is actually up slightly on last year.

"Teachers, in common with many other public-service workers, are far too often on the receiving end of assaults in the course of their work.

"Employers have a duty to assess and minimise the risk facing teachers, and also to send a clear message that violent conduct, physical or verbal, will not be tolerated."



Kathy's Real Story

Reviewed by Jim Hepburn

Kathy's Real Story by Herman Kelly
Prefect Press, Dunleer, Co Louth. Ireland
www.prefectpress.com

Price €14.99 / £9.99

This is the story of a woman who has a deeply flawed personality. With the help of a professional ghost-writer, she has produced a best selling book called "Kathy's Story" in Ireland, and "Don't Ever Tell" in the UK. It tells how she was born and raised in the outskirts of Dublin, was abused by her father, used as slave labour in Magdalen laundries, was beaten by nuns, and raped by two priests. She states she had a baby born in a laundry when she was thirteen years of age. She also claims to have been in psychiatric hospital where she was drugged for the purpose of experiments and, whilst in another home, in Dublin, was beaten and raped by a priest.

In her book, she is always somewhat vague about locations. When questioned about these accusations, she would say she had proof, but never actually showed any of the documentation she said she had. Her book was very successful, and she was feted on Irish television on chat shows. This is when she overstepped the mark and got over-confident and began to mention locations. This is when the cracks in her story began to appear. It was at this time that her eight brothers and sisters came forward to protect their father's good name. She had stated that she was not a blood relation to them and that she was adopted, but they

produced her birth certificate which proved that this was a lie. Next thing was that the nuns checked their records and stated that she had never been in a Magdalene laundry, and that no babies had ever been born there. Also the priest who was alleged to have beaten and raped her suffered severe arthritis from an early age, and couldn't even shake hands as it was so painful.

Although some newspapers were still serialising her story, other journalists were starting to ask questions. Kathy was told repeatedly if she produced any documents to prove her story, the journalists would back off. Her response to this was she threatened to have them "dealt with".

Some former residents of Magdalen laundries questioned Kathy's description of locations, saying her descriptions are as these buildings are now and not thirty years ago.

Others would not comment as many of them are claiming compensation, saying "let the women get their money".

One of Kathy's most outspoken critics, Florence Horsman-Hogan, the founder of the Irish organisation LOVE (Let our Voices Emerge) who is well known to F.A.C.T. members, has been threatened by Kathy. Florence was in care herself and says she was well cared for by the nuns, and set up her group to support these nuns and clergy.

It has emerged that Kathy was a troublesome child. She was manipulative and would tell lies about people, then stand back to watch the reaction. She was a petty thief who would steal from her own family, and local shops. She spent some time in prison as a petty thief.

As for all the many places she says she has been, her school records prove that till the age of 12, apart for a period of six weeks, she attended her local primary school.

Hermann Kelly has spent a year investigating both sides of this story. He has provided a gripping and in many ways shocking account of how Kathy not only duped politicians, the press and the media; but fed a national panic which led to the Irish Government

setting up €1bn Government compensation scheme which many people feel paid out huge sums of money on the basis of untested allegations.

Hermann Kelly's conclusion is that Kathy's Story is a largely fictitious and has been gleaned from other people and put forward as her own experience, and has damaged many innocent people's lives including her own immediate family. This is compelling book about a serious subject and concludes with a chapter on the spread of false allegations in the United Kingdom. Despite its forensic quality it is easy to read. Every aspiring politician, civil servant, lawyer, journalist, social worker, or prison officer should be required to read it as part of their training. Who was it that said people don't make false allegations?

**Urgently Needed
Two Volunteers**

Following the death of George Williamson F.A.C.T. is looking for two volunteers to carry on his work.

We envisage one volunteer being responsible for lobbying (by mail or email) politicians, government officials, and other bodies. We hope the other volunteer will take responsibility for developing lobbying initiatives at a national and local level.

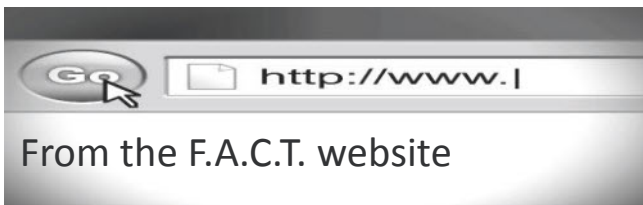
Both volunteers will also be invited to attend meetings of the national committee which are held about every two months.

Alternatively both of these tasks can be merged or undertaken as a job share.

If you have a few hours spare each week and would like to undertake any of these tasks please let the national secretary know.

F.A.C.T.

Fighting false allegations of abuse



Our web crawl in January begins with the news that Kris Hanns, an independent member of the South Australian Parliament, who is also a lawyer specialising in criminal defence will call for a Parliamentary inquiry into how the Special Investigations Unit of the Department of Families and Communities handled child sex abuse allegations against public servant Tom Easling.

Here in the UK it was reported that a massive police presence descended on a St Albans school one Monday morning following reports that a student had been assaulted by an intruder. More than 20 officers, dog units and a helicopter were mobilised to attend Marlborough School in Watling Street at about 11.30am. A receptionist at the school called the police after it was reported to her that two students spotted an intruder in the school and one of them had been "grabbed" by him. Head teacher Annie Thomson said: "The two girls subsequently retracted their allegations so it would seem that it was a false alarm."

A Bolton man who falsely claimed he had been raped as a schoolboy sparked a four month police investigation before admitting he had made up allegations. Sajid Bharucha, aged 21, told officers that when he was 13 a man had offered him a lift home from school but then had taken him home, tied him to a bed and raped him before dropping him back off at school. He claimed the rape had been repeated when he was 16-years-old. He pleaded guilty to perverting the course of justice and was sentenced to a 12 month community order with supervision.

A Hull teenager who falsely accused a taxi driver of rape has been jailed after the man proved his innocence by producing a recorded conversation of her repeatedly asking him for sex. The driver was able to establish his innocence when it emerged that he had used his mobile phone to make a video recording of her during their journey. The footage showed the teenager repeatedly asking the driver to have sex with her. In court she pleaded guilty to perverting the course of justice and was jailed for eight months.

There is also a distressing report that a frail grandfather from Blackpool killed himself after a woman he refused to lend money to accused him of rape in revenge, an inquest heard. James Bamber, who was 82 and had prostate cancer, was "highly unlikely" to have been physically capable of having sex or attacking the woman. In despair, and with no news on whether he would face charges, the retired businessman walked into the sea near his home and drowned. The coroner attacked the anonymous woman who made the rape claim, while Mr Bamber's family demanded to know why he hadn't been cleared

sooner.

In Hampshire two men suspected over allegations of child abuse were also found dead. One is believed to have shot himself in the head in a remote part of the New Forest after being told that the police wanted to question him, and the other found dead at his home in Southampton. He was one of ten people due to stand trial after allegations of abuse in the 1970's and 1980's. F.A.C.T. has written to the Coroner pointing out similar deaths.

In South Wales a fireman was cleared of rape after claims a woman had "made up" the sex attack because he refused to be her sperm donor. In North Wales a mother of four pretended to be a 14-year-old rape victim as she made "thousands" of hoax calls to hospitals and police. The court was told she rang most of the police forces in the country and numerous hospitals with a false story which caused great distress to health workers and police officers. She was given a three year supervision order, a curfew for three months between 9pm to 7am, and ordered to pay £300 costs.

Perhaps it's no wonder the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) recently stated (Times 1st January 2008) that it would not normally be sufficient for the police merely to caution the maker of a false allegation of serious sexual crime. These remarks followed an appeal by David Carrington-Jones, on a reference by the Criminal Cases Review Commission, against his conviction in December 2000 at Lewes Crown Court of four counts of rape and four counts of indecent assault for which he was imprisoned for a total of ten years. The President, giving the judgment of the court, said that, after the appellant's trial, events in 2001, 2002 and 2004 demonstrated that the complainant had a proven tendency to make false allegations that she had been a victim of sexual crime. Later in 2006 she admitted that she had fabricated allegations of rape against a man because she did not like him and, as a result, she received a police caution for wasting police time. Their Lordships said that although no one doubted that victims of rape had to be treated with every possible consideration by the criminal justice system, a false allegation could have dreadful consequences for an innocent man who had not perpetrated the crime. Also, every occasion of a proved false allegation had an insidious effect on public confidence in the truth of genuine complaints, sometimes allowing doubt to creep in where none should exist. There would not be many cases where the offence of attempting to pervert the course of justice, on the basis of a false allegation of rape, should not be prosecuted for what it was.

On same day however it was also reported Warren Blackwell, a man wrongly jailed when a woman cried rape, has failed to prevent being charged £12,500 for his "board and lodging" while in prison. He spent three years in jail as a convicted sex attacker until his 'victim' was unmasked as a fantasist. It was revealed he has been awarded £252,500 compensation for his lost years - but minus the estimated cost of his food. Something wrong somewhere. Happy New Year!

Personalalia

A new year and a new beginning. I don't know about you but I often find January a rather depressing month. As soon as we have taken down the Christmas cards the weather gets gloomy and the mood changes. We must be positive though. Spring will soon be here. Talking of Christmas cards we have received several letters (too many to list) from F.A.C.T. members in prison and their families, asking us to thank everyone one who took the trouble to send their loved ones Christmas cards.

Typical of these those we received was the comment from Sandra Edwards who wrote to say will you please thank everyone concerned for the wonderful support shown to my husband who received over 60 Christmas cards from F.A.C.T. supporters. It made a big impact on those around them. Another F.A.C.T. member in prison who has not given permission for his name to be published wrote to say that he found his third Christmas in prison very difficult but he had managed to get through it knowing he had the full support of his family and friends and the "wonderful people in F.A.C.T."

The national committee would also like to add their thanks to all those who send out Christmas and birthday cards to those inside. As someone said at the Christmas gathering a small gesture with a big meaning.

We would also like to pass on our best wishes to several F.A.C.T. members who are due for release on parole this year. We hope very much the recent report stating that there is too much government interference in the workings of the Parole Board will see more of you being released, and sooner.

So its back to business for F.A.C.T. We have already held our first meeting of the year and set our goals for the immediate future. Chief amongst these is the need to fill the gap left by George Williamson's passing. We think we probably need at least two people to help with this, so if you are interested please let us know.

It has also been back to business in the regions. Both the North Wales and the North West groups have met.

In North Wales the meeting put on a surprise treat for Wally who celebrated his eightieth birthday recently. Happy Birthday Wally. The group, who have been very busy on fund raising, lobbying, casework support, have

also been invited to address local students attending social work courses. Speaking of North Wales we were sorry to hear that Brenda has injured her elbow rather badly. We hope that the pain has now subsided and that you are feeling much better. Painful arms seem to be the order of the day. Ellen in Hertfordshire recently injured her arm and had some nasty bruises to show for it. We are pleased to hear you are on the mend.

The North West have also already held a meeting this year when some time was spent discussing how the group can better help those in prison. One of the difficulties they face is that, comparatively speaking, there are now less North West members in prison - and long may that continue! Where the North West goes others follow so perhaps we may see reductions in other areas. The group also paid tribute to Sister Barbara of the Catholic Blind Institute Christopher Grange, who has recently retired. Sister Barbara has always been very accommodating in allowing F.A.C.T. North West to meet on their premises. We wish Sister Barbara good health and a happy retirement. Talking of good health, the North West group pass on their very best wishes to Monica who is recovering from a hip operation. The group meet every third Thursday in the month at Christopher Grange in Knotty Ash from 7:30 to 9:30pm. New members always welcome.

In South Wales it was noted that the Chief Constable did not send out Christmas Cards to those on the sex offenders register this year. Strange really given South Wales Police's justification for sending them out last year. Perhaps, on reflection, they agreed with us that their decision to do so last year was in reality a PR stunt, unnecessary and unjustified.

Some of you will have heard that Joy and Ian Gower's daughter has recently had surgery on her back. We wish her well and hope her good recovery continues. We were also sorry to hear that Norma in Northern Ireland has not been well recently. We are thinking of you Norma and hope things are not too difficult. Finally you might also like to know George and Iris Jensen celebrate their golden wedding on the 22nd March. Congratulations.

Well I think that's about all the gossip we have for this edition. We will be in touch again in April. Meanwhile, enjoy Easter. Yes it's early this year!

F.A.C.T. Helpline 02920 777 499

The F.A.C.T. helpline is normally open from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 7:30pm to 9:30pm Mondays to Fridays, and on occasional Saturday mornings. It is not open Bank Holidays.