

Bosses at sex scandal home were ‘hell-bent on keeping it quiet’

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Abuse: A staff member at Aberlour Orphanage was jailed

A WOMAN who blew the whistle on a sex offender working at an orphanage yesterday said its bosses were ‘hell-bent’ on keeping the scandal quiet.

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) heard that managers at Aberlour Orphanage in Moray were determined to prevent governors finding out about Eric Lee’s prolific abuse.

The ‘sadistic’ housefather was jailed in the early 1960s for sexually abusing ten children – and was only brought to justice after a staff member overheard one of the victims talking about their ordeal.

A 77-year-old witness, using the name Catherine, said the eight-year-old boy told her ‘I’m not alone’ when he disclosed the abuse. Lee later admitted a string of sex offences against children aged eight to 12.

The SCAI hearing in Edinburgh heard there had been ‘sadistic elements’ to Lee’s abuse.

Catherine, who was around 14 when she began working at Aberlour in 1956, told the inquiry she overheard a boy talking about having been sexually abused by Lee, who was a housefather and scoutmaster. She reported it to her boss who was 'completely distraught'.

But she was subsequently 'kept very much in the dark about what happened' and was 'told not to talk about it'. Catherine said: 'They [bosses] were hell-bent on keeping everything quiet so it did not get out to the Press and the board of governors.' Life at the home, she added 'went on as before'.

Lee was arrested in August 1963 and convicted at the High Court in Aberdeen on September 13, 1963.

But the inquiry heard a letter was not sent from the home to local authority children's officers until early October 1963 – stating that a housefather had been jailed for 'indecent interference' with boys.

The witness said Press coverage at the time had been relatively limited.

James Peoples, QC, senior counsel to the inquiry, said the sexual abuse had been 'on a pretty grand scale'.

Later Romy Langeland, chief executive of Aberlour between 2001 and 2006, told the inquiry that during her time in charge there had been 'absolute dedication' to 'child welfare'.

Yesterday, the Mail revealed that three of Britain's biggest childcare charities, including Aberlour Child Care Trust, are at the centre of police investigations into allegations of child abuse.

The other two are Barnardo's and Quarriers. Police Scotland has confirmed it is investigating claims of historic abuse relating to the three organisations.

The charities have come under scrutiny at the SCAI, which has heard a catalogue of claims from survivors formerly in their care.

A spokesman for Aberlour said: 'We are cooperating with the SCAI.' Barnardo's Scotland said: 'Barnardo's is aware of one on-going investigation. As with all inquiries we are assisting the police in an open and transparent way.'

A Quarriers spokesman said: 'We at Quarriers reiterate our full and unequivocal apology to anyone who suffered abuse while in our care.'

The inquiry, before Lady Smith, continues.