

# Revealed: Documents destroyed at Scottish sex abuse care home where teen girls were abused

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Photograph posed by model... Photograph by Colin Mearns, February 2017.

RECORDS from a children's residential home in **Edinburgh** where children were sexually abused were destroyed by the city council despite strict regulations which stipulate that files must be retained for 100 years.

St Katharine's was supposed to be a refuge for traumatised young girls but council carer Gordon Collins took advantage of his position of trust to groom, molest and rape teenagers between 1995 and 2006.

Another member of staff who worked there was jailed in 2008 for possessing 239 pictures and 70 video clips of children being abused. Around 30 of the images owned by Kevin Glancy showed the most extreme level of abuse, level five.

One former resident who was at St Katharine's secure unit for a year in the late 1990s – when Glancy worked there – has revealed that on her first night “aggressive” male members of staff tried to strip-search her and she heard screams for help from other residents in nearby rooms. Last month she submitted a Freedom of Information request to obtain copies of records relating to her time in care but was told the files were “destroyed” due to an “administrative error”. The woman who is now in her 30s fears a “cover up” and called on the City of Edinburgh Council to reveal how many records were shredded. Her call for transparency has been backed by organisations that support survivors of child abuse.

St Katharine's is one of eight local authority establishments under investigation by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. The inquiry is also looking into eight institutions run by religious orders, six boarding schools and four charities including Barnardo's and Quarriers.

In response to the former St Katharine's resident's Freedom of Information (FOI) request an Information Rights Officer said: “I am afraid that upon searching for your information it became apparent that historic information relating to your time at St Katharine's Unit has been destroyed”.

The Information Rights Officer noted in the letter that it is “normal practice to keep information relating to children in care for a period of 100 years” and blamed an “administrative error” for the failure to retain files. The council worker “profusely apologised” and pledged that the local authority's Records Management team would carry out a review.

The woman who submitted the FoI has asked not to be identified, but she told the Sunday Herald: “I was shocked. My worry is it's a cover up and I want to know how widespread it is. I really want to know exactly when my files were destroyed and who worked in the office at the time.”

She is not ready to speak about what happened to her while at St Katharine's but said on her first night “two aggressive male staff members who towered over my 15-year-old frame told me they needed to perform a strip-search”. She resisted and was locked in a room overnight where she heard “banging and horrific screams for help coming from the room next door.”

St Katharine's became notorious after it came to light that former employee Gordon Collins abused children between 1995 and 2006. He carried out the attacks at two

council-run residential units – St Katharine’s Secure Unit and Northfield Young Persons Unit. Four girls were assaulted, aged between 13 and 15. One girl was told she was beautiful, and given cigarettes and sweets. Another was molested over the course of a year.

One of the victims was raped after Collins went into her room at night. The teenager – who had been placed in the home after a series of violent attacks by her stepfather – was repeatedly raped by Collins over the course of a year.

Collins was jailed for six years in June last year, then the sentence was increased to 10 years by Lord Brodie following an unsuccessful appeal in November. Brodie said Collins “committed an appalling series of offences involving the predatory sexual abuse of four vulnerable teenaged girls” when he was “in a position of trust” and noted that Collins has “shown no remorse and continues to deny responsibility for the offences”.

Another former St Katharine’s employee, Kevin Glancy, was jailed for 15 months and placed on the sex offenders register for 10 years in 2008 for possessing child pornography. Sheriff Elizabeth Jarvie said at the time: “It’s quite clear that the children involved here had been the subject of serious abuse. You are part of the audience that perpetrates that such abuse is sustained.”

The Sunday Herald contacted the Information Rights Manager at the City of Edinburgh Council, Douglas Stephen, who confirmed that the local authority had launched an investigation into why files were destroyed. He also warned that the destruction of records may be more widespread. Stephen said: “Unfortunately we don’t know if it’s an isolated incident. There is a team investigating. It’s particularly unfortunate that this has happened and we are offering support. I don’t think it’s a systematic error, it appears to be an administrative error. Something has gone wrong and we need to find out what has happened and make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

Alan Draper of the organisation In Care Abuse Survivors (INCAS) said the destruction of children’s records is “potentially criminal”. He said: “To claim that it was an administrative error is an unacceptable excuse. I suspect it is probably widespread. It seems rather convenient to destroy records from a time period when abuse was taking place. The abuse inquiry must hold people to account for these organisational failures. The destruction of records also raises questions about whether it was deliberate and whether **police** should be investigating.”

David Whelan of FBGA (Former Boys and Girls Abused of Quarriers Homes) said destruction of records will be a “major issue” for the abuse inquiry. Whelan was abused in care and spent two years battling for his records before **Glasgow** Social Care Services admitted there were none. He said: “There are huge concerns about organisations getting rid of records which could be used in the inquiry as evidence. In some cases these records

could have helped with the investigations. This new evidence that records were destroyed by this local authority raises further concerns about how widespread the problem is. The fact that it's relatively recent makes it all the more serious. You would not expect records to disappear after the 1980s. The destruction of records also raises questions about why they were destroyed, particularly in relation to this case."

Dave Sharp, who is a spokesman for SAFE (Seek And Find Everyone abused in childhood), which is working to encourage abuse survivors to contact the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, said: "There are many people including myself who have spent years trying to get hold of records of our time in institutions in **Scotland**. The effect this has on your life is devastating. There are many examples of adults who have come forward years after being abused looking for their records to try and get some kind of understanding of what happened to them.

"If you search online for facts and figures about historical child abuse in any country and in any language you will be bombarded with information about the wheres and whys – but when you start asking questions in Scotland you are met with this great big brick wall of silence. Everyone has to wake up and see what has gone on. There are far more organisations, including local authorities, that were involved in the destroying of records than people really think. This is yet another reason why there has to be a national public awareness campaign about the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry."

Janine Rennie, Chief Executive of Wellbeing Scotland, a charity which supports survivors of abuse, said: "Records are evidence which can help survivors in achieving justice, either criminal or civil. The destruction of records is not an administrative failing, it is destruction of evidence, intentionally or in error. It is happening too often and to ensure justice and redress for survivors for the harm caused, those responsible for destroying records must be held to account."

A spokeswoman for the Scottish **Government** said: "The statutory requirement on local authorities is to retain records for 100 years relating to a child who is looked after...the Scottish Government would expect all local authorities to comply with this statutory duty."

A spokeswoman for City of Edinburgh Council apologised for the "administrative error" and said they are "investigating the circumstances which led to the error", as well as providing support to the woman affected.

A spokesman for COSLA, the association of local authorities, said: "We are fully committed to working with both survivors and agencies to ensure the removal of barriers to justice for survivors of historical child abuse. We fundamentally support the coming Limitation Act and recognise that a key aspect of implementing this legislation is access

to files and records. We know this requires transparency and sensitivity and councils will do everything in their power to make records available.”

A spokesman for the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry said it has “invested in a wide-ranging public information campaign” and is encouraging survivors to call 0800 0929300 or emailing [talktous@childabuseinquiry.scot](mailto:talktous@childabuseinquiry.scot)

Councils in Scotland systematically destroyed care home records

A report into abuse in Scottish children's homes found that senior council staff in Scotland ordered the destruction of records.

The dossier – Historical Abuse Systemic Review Residential Schools and Children’s Homes in Scotland 1950 to 1995 – by Tom Shaw, former chief inspector of education in Northern Ireland, said: “Some people in key positions, such as senior managers, seemed to lack understanding about the significance of records, what records existed and where. Some senior people in local authorities, voluntary and religious organisations were guarded and even unwilling to help. The review also learned that senior people had ordered records to be destroyed.”

The Public Records (Scotland) Act 1937 was the main law in place to ensure preservation of public records during the period of the review.

The report, published in 2007, said: “The absence of adequate public records legislation means that local authorities aren’t consistent in how they deal with archives or manage records. Many have archives, but archivists complain of lack of funding and of little value being placed on their work. There is no guidance on how to identify and keep records and when it’s acceptable to destroy records.”

The review’s survey of local authority archivists revealed a litany of problems with retaining records. All records after 1996 are on recycled paper, which is “unlikely to survive in the long term”, the report said. One archive holds no records specific to children’s residential establishments, and attempts to find the information from council departments failed. Another archivist said they were instructed to destroy records in 2004.

The report also noted that: “Senior people working in social work departments had ordered records associated with children’s residential services to be destroyed. These included children’s files and management records.”

"I sat on my bed, terrified, not sure what was happening to the girl next door, wondering if I would be next."

The words below are extracts from writing by the former St Katharine's resident who submitted the FOI but discovered her records had been destroyed. She has asked not to be named.

"Yesterday, I sat in therapy, discussing this feeling I have that I am invisible, insignificant, that I could disappear and nobody would notice. That I am inferior to everybody else, that there's something different about me that makes me less than human.

"These beliefs don't come from nowhere. A lot of them can be traced back to the time I spent in a secure unit when I was a teenager. I had been placed there after spending several years being moved around different hospitals struggling with an eating disorder and several suicide attempts.

"I had been told I was going to a secure unit for my own safety, but I wasn't told what this really meant, or what it would be like when I got there. Nothing could have prepared me for what happened on my arrival.

"I was taken to an 'interview room' that was more like a cupboard where I sat across from two aggressive male staff members who towered over my 15-year-old frame. They told me they needed to perform a strip-search before I could enter the unit. I refused, and insisted on a female member of staff being present. Nobody had requested this before and I was locked in this suffocating room for hours before a female staff member was found in a nearby children's home. 'Welcome to secure,' I was told.

"I was then taken to my room and told that because of the trouble I'd caused, there would be a delay before someone could come search my belongings and they would come back later. I was locked in my room, sitting on my mattress, waiting. Nobody came back that night. I listened as everyone got ready for bed, shouting threats at each other and the 'new bitch' who'd delayed their cigarette break. I listened to banging and horrific screams for help coming from the room next door. I sat on my bed, terrified, not sure what was happening to the girl next door, wondering if I would be next.

"I have never been as scared in my life as I was that night. Nor have I ever felt so vulnerable, so powerless, so alone. It hit me like a thousand bricks that I was trapped, and although people knew where I was, I had no way of getting out or calling for help. I felt like a ghost. I had vanished from my own life.

"My memories of the months that followed are patchy. My fear levels shot through the roof that night and did not come down.

Part of processing this experience involved putting in a request recently to see my files from that time in my life. I wanted to know what was documented, what gaps in my own memories could be filled in.

"I received a letter yesterday from my local authority telling me that due to an admin error, all my records have been destroyed. Deleted. As if they didn't matter. As if they were irrelevant. As if they were too much bother to deal with so why not just get rid of them. As if they were young people who were just 'too difficult to cope with'.

"Files and records can be destroyed but experiences have a lasting impact. If I don't share my story I might not realise that it's like your story. Or his story. Or part of her story. If I don't share my story, it stays my secret and my shame. And I stay invisible. Instead of coming into the light, and hoping that others will join me."