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Notorious orphanage 'covered up' the deaths of children in its care including a boy who was savagely beaten by a nun, inquiry is told

Child abuse inquiry heard harrowing testimony from Smyllum Park survivors

The orphanage in Lanark, Scotland, was run by 'psychopathic nuns', inquiry told

Some 400 children from the Smyllum believed to be buried in unmarked grave

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Smyllum Park

A notorious orphanage 'covered up' the deaths of children in its care including a boy who was savagely beaten by a nun, an inquiry heard yesterday.

One former resident of Smyllum Park in Lanark said six-year-old Sammy Carr died days after a nun launched a frenzied attack on him, repeatedly kicking him in the head.

In posthumous evidence, another ex-resident said 13-year-old Francis McColl died after a member of staff hit him on the head with a golf club.

Deaths were 'covered up' at the institution, run by 'psychopathic' nuns who meted out physical and sexual abuse – and even used crucifixes as 'weapons'.

It emerged earlier this year that at least 400 children from Smyllum are thought to be buried in an unmarked grave at the town's St Mary's Cemetery.

Beatings: The inquiry heard Smyllum Park, pictured, was run by 'psychopathic' nuns who meted out physical and sexual abuse

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) heard harrowing testimony from Smyllum survivors yesterday.

One witness, named only as David, told the inquiry, before Lady Smith, that Sammy was kicked on the body and head by a Catholic sister.

David entered the orphanage in 1959 when he was aged around two, along with three brothers and a sister.

In tearful testimony at the Edinburgh hearing, he said beatings at the institution were routine, and that on one occasion when he was aged around six, Sammy was beaten after playing with a match and accidentally burning his hand.

He said: 'It was unfortunate but at that time the sister came around the corner and said, "What's wrong?", and I said, "He burned my hand", and she just grabbed him and started hitting him and punching him.

'He was on the floor and she was kicking him on his body and his head.

'I said, "Please sister, please don't hurt him". She stopped when I lay on top of him.'

He said he next saw Sammy in the sick room and the inquiry heard the boy was in hospital for around 10 days before he died.



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David said he remembered walking past Sammy's open coffin and assumed that the little boy had been 'joking' and pretending to be dead - only realising later that he had been present at Sammy's funeral.

The boy died after a member of staff hit him on the head with a golf club

The nun who administered the beating later took David to Sammy's grave.

David said: 'She just stood here, there was this new plot, she must have said, "Sammy's there".'

He told the inquiry that he was filled with 'rage' for the rest of his life over his treatment at Smyllum.

This included being sexually abused by a nun - as she told him he was 'going to hell'.

He told how children who wet the bed were made to stand with the wet sheets around their necks in the morning.

David said Smyllum had been filled with the screams of children, and he suffers recurring nightmares about his time at the orphanage.

But despite his ordeal he later went to college, telling the inquiry: 'I do not want my life to be worth nothing.'

David was later abused at a home called St Vincent's, Newcastle, run by the same order.

He said a 'psychopathic' nun held a bread knife to his throat - and he 'genuinely thought he was going to die'.

Smyllum Park was run by the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul from 1860 to 1981, looking after an estimated 4,400 children since 1930.

One of the campaigners who fought for the launch of the SCAI was a resident at Smyllum Park, and gave evidence before his death in April.

Frank Docherty, who was 74, was a founder of the charity In Care Abuse Survivors (INCAS).

In 1954, aged nine, he and his siblings were sent to the home, where he said he suffered abuse including beatings.

His posthumous testimony, read to the inquiry on yesterday, claimed that Francis had died after being hit with a golf club by a 'psychotic' staff member - not a nun - who cannot be named for legal reasons.

It has been reported previously that Francis passed away at Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary in August in 1961 after battling a 'left extra plural haemorrhage' for seven days. He was 13.

Mr Docherty said there were no records of his burial and he had reported it to police before his death, but had heard nothing from them.

It is understood that there are no live investigations into the deaths of Sammy or Francis.

The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul ran the Smyllum Park orphanage, pictured, in Lanark from 1864 until it closed in 1981. But Police Scotland said a probe had been carried out which found that Sammy's death had not involved trauma or criminality.

The Crown Office is now reinvestigating historical child abuse cases.



Francis McColl, playing with cars on the floor, at the nursery of Smyllum Park.



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A Crown Office spokesman said it had instructed Police Scotland to carry out investigations into allegations of abuse at care institutions in Scotland, adding: 'It would not be appropriate to comment further at this time.'

Mr Docherty, who became an alcoholic because of his experience at Smyllum, said he and other Smyllum children were subjected to freezing cold baths, ridiculed for wetting their beds and beaten with a hair-brush.

There were 'mass punishments' twice a week when children were beaten with sticks by nuns who 'controlled by fear'.

Commenting on the staff member who stuck Francis, Mr Docherty said: 'There were cover-ups for deaths he caused. Children were dying of brain haemorrhages.'

Describing a beating from one sister, Mr Docherty said: 'I got the biggest doing of my life from a holy nun... I couldn't believe it was happening to me.'

Prosecutors have said there is no evidence that a crime has been committed at the orphanage in relation to reports of the mass grave.

More than 60 residential institutions, including several top private schools, are being investigated by the inquiry.

Another former resident, named only as Fergie, said she had been admitted to Smyllum in 1959.

The death rate among residents at the home, pictured, was at least 30 deaths per 1,000

She recounted sharing dirty bathwater, being force-fed porridge - and nuns using crucifixes as 'weapons'.

Fergie said: 'They would call you "devil's spawn", "immoral,"; they would say, "you'll be nothing in life"...'

In June, Sister Ellen Flynn, leader of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Britain, was asked at the SCAI about alleged abuse at Smyllum.

She said: 'We accept accusations have been made and we are appalled something like that may have been acceptable, and very sorry, but we cannot confirm there was abuse.'

In opening statements to the inquiry on yesterday, John Scott QC, senior counsel for INCAS, said the name Smyllum will be 'forever associated with suffering'.

He said: 'Just how could abuse of such extent and duration occur without knowledge, especially given how closely knit a community the place was?

'Either people knew because they were involved or they knew and did nothing to stop it or nobody took time to find out what life was like in this showpiece home.

'The Smyllum way became shorthand for wicked abuse.

'The Smyllum way did not involve only one or two abusers, it involved many abusers and took place over decades.

'It seems to have been part of the institutional memory of the place.'