

Monstrous cover-up: How the Liberal party, police and MI5 concealed MP Cyril Smith's industrial-scale child abuse

- For four decades, 29st politician was free to prey on vulnerable children as young as eight
- Police received at least 144 complaints from victims yet authorities blocked any prosecution
- New book serialised in Daily Mail details how Smith - who died in 2010 aged 82 - was repeatedly protected despite being arrested for sex crimes
- MI5 and Special Branch officers put pressure on police to drop investigations
- Child porn was found in Smith's car but police were ordered to release him
- Liberal Party put his name forward for knighthood in 1988 in spite of rumours of his sordid activities swirling around Westminster

By [Michael Seamark](#) and [Guy Adams](#) and [Daniel Martin](#)

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For four decades, the depraved 29st politician was free to prey on vulnerable children as young as eight.

Police received at least 144 complaints by victims of the predatory paedophile yet the authorities blocked any prosecution – allowing Smith brazenly to continue his abuse.

The Liberal Party even put his name forward for a knighthood in 1988 in spite of the rumours of his sordid activities swirling around Westminster.

David, now Lord Steel nominated him for the honour despite knowing of the allegations about the bachelor MP for Rochdale, the ex-Liberal leader's involvement emerging only in recent weeks after a Freedom of Information battle.

At Smith's 80th birthday party, a gushing message from current Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg was read out, which said: 'You were a beacon for our party in the '70s and '80s and continue to be an inspiration to the people of Rochdale.'

Now, an explosive new book serialised in the Daily Mail details how Smith – who died in 2010 aged 82 – was repeatedly protected despite being arrested for a string of sex crimes.

Written by one of Smith's successors as MP for the Lancashire constituency, Labour's Simon Danczuk, the book reveals:

- MI5 and Special Branch officers put pressure on police to drop investigations;
- child porn was found in Smith's car but police were ordered to release him;
- he was repeatedly arrested for 'acts of gross indecency with young lads' in public toilets but no action was taken;
- Smith was a visitor to the notorious Elm Guest house in South-west London, now the focus of a Scotland Yard investigation into an alleged VIP paedophile ring;
- senior Labour figures' support of the Paedophile Information Exchange helped keep Smith 'hidden from scrutiny'.

In his book, Smile for the Camera: the Double Life of Cyril Smith, Mr Danczuk details Smith's 'rapacious sexual appetite' and highlights chilling similarities between the northern MP and fellow paedophile Jimmy Savile.



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For four decades, the depraved 29st politician (pictured above in 1972) was free to prey on vulnerable children as young as eight



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David, now Lord Steel (centre) nominated Smith for a knighthood despite knowing of the allegations about the bachelor MP for Rochdale, the ex-Liberal leader's involvement emerging only in recent weeks after a Freedom of Information battle

Like the DJ, Smith – who in 1973 appeared on Savile's Clunk Click TV show – portrayed himself as a charitable man supporting young boys to provide cover for his sordid activities.

But unlike in the Savile scandal, police forces around the country repeatedly investigated sex abuse allegations against Smith yet their efforts to prosecute the MP were constantly blocked.

The book details how police officers were threatened with dismissal and gagged by the Official Secrets Act if they attempted to expose the politician's sordid activities.

Mr Danczuk, Rochdale MP since 2010, first raised Smith's case in the House of Commons in 2012 after victims contacted him to tell of their ordeals at the hands of the '29st bully'.

One young Liberal activist was sexually assaulted in Smith's office in the House of Commons in the 1980s as other MPs, including then Labour leader Michael Foot, walked by.

Days later, the Crown Prosecution Service revealed that his victims' claims were investigated by police on three separate occasions – in 1970, 1998 and 1999 – but each time files were submitted to prosecutors, they were rejected.



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The Liberal Party, bruised by the negative publicity surrounding the 1979 conspiracy to murder trial of its leader Jeremy Thorpe (right) and aware of Smith's 'electoral Midas touch', was eager to sweep the problems under the carpet

The CPS belatedly agreed that Smith should have been prosecuted and Greater Manchester Police publicly acknowledged, amid 'overwhelming evidence', that he did sexually and physically abuse young boys.

The book, co-written by Matthew Baker, reveals that as far back as the 1950s, Rochdale police had their suspicions about the politician.

Smith, MP for Rochdale between 1972 and 1992, was governor of almost 30 schools. In the 1960s, he helped to open Cambridge House children's home, where he abused boys, often subjecting them to spurious medical examinations.

But when police launched an investigation, the chief constable of Lancashire personally intervened to stop it.

In the 1970s Smith was arrested on a number of occasions in public toilets in London's St James's Park, a regular haunt for young male prostitutes after dark, but always walked free.

The cover-ups continued in the 1980s when Smith's car was pulled over on the motorway near Northampton and traffic officers discovered child porn in the boot.



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At Cyril Smith's 80th birthday party, a gushing message from current Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg was read out, which said: 'You were a beacon for our party in the '70s and '80s and continue to be an inspiration to the people of Rochdale'

'The police were naturally disgusted and wanted to press charges,' says the book. 'But then a phone call was made from London and he was released without charge.'

When Rochdale police first started investigating him in 1972 they were threatened by the council's Liberal leader and, according to Mr Danczuk's book, rumours of his activities were well known in Westminster for many years.

But the Liberal Party, bruised by the negative publicity surrounding the 1979 conspiracy to murder trial of its leader Jeremy Thorpe and aware of Smith's 'electoral Midas touch,' was eager to sweep the problems under the carpet .

David Steel, who took over from Mr Thorpe as party leader, even recommended Smith for his knighthood despite knowing of the sordid rumours that surfaced in 1979 that the MP had abused young boys.

The Cabinet Office had previously refused to disclose who had put Smith forward – claiming it would breach data protection rules – but the Information Commissioner's Office ruled earlier this year that there was a 'legitimate public interest' in it being disclosed.



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Lord Steel was unavailable for comment. Last year, he said he had asked Cyril Smith about the allegations of child abuse and accepted his denial of wrongdoing.

A spokesman for Mr Clegg said last night: 'Clearly he would never have paid tribute to Cyril Smith if he had had any idea about these horrible allegations.'

The book also describes how Labour politicians' support for a notorious paedophile group that campaigned to legalise sex with children helped Smith evade justice for years.

Earlier this year the Mail revealed the extraordinary links between the National Council for Civil Liberties and the Paedophile Information Exchange.

Labour's deputy leader Harriet Harman, her MP husband Jack Dromey, and former Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt held key roles in the NCCL, which in 1975 granted 'affiliate' status to the group of predatory paedophiles.

Smith was friends with PIE founding member Peter Righton and Mr Danczuk said the NCCL's backing for PIE helped Smith's crimes remain secret.

'Worryingly, it seemed a fair few on the Left, including some who have subsequently become key figures in the Labour Party, were fooled into giving this hideous group shelter.

'All of which helped Cyril's cause and kept him hidden from scrutiny.'

Smith was a visitor to Elm Guest House, in Barnes, south west London, which is at the centre of the Metropolitan Police's Operation Fernbridge.

A Liberal Democrat spokesperson said: 'Cyril Smith's acts were vile and repugnant and we have nothing but sympathy for those whose lives he ruined. His actions were not known to or condoned by anyone in the Liberal Party or the Liberal Democrats.'

'I've come to examine you': From bogus medical examinations to punishment beatings, how paedophile Cyril Smith used his powerful public image to abuse boys

By SIMON DANCZUK

The huge man, all of 29st, unlocked the door with his own key and burst into the teenager's room.

'Take your clothes off,' he ordered the orphaned youngster, who was sick with the flu and had taken to his bed in the hostel instead of going to work.

'I've been told you're ill and I've come to examine you,' the man declared. Yet this was no doctor, but a councillor and businessman, a respected and well-known figure in the local community.



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Just like Jimmy Savile - whom he counted as a friend - Cyril Smith used his public image as a shield while manipulating his way into positions of influence over vulnerable young people he then ruthlessly abused. Above, Smith (bottom left) with children outside the House of Commons

'He was a colossus, more than three times my size,' the lad recalled years later, in graphic and disturbing testimony. 'I remember his eyes watching me like a beast sizing up its prey. In the folds of fat around his neck I could see rivulets of sweat.

'Shaking with fear, I did as I was told. He bent down and clasped me with huge hands like shovels.

Suddenly he grasped my private parts and began to squeeze. I screamed.

'Violence flashed in his eyes. "Now, now, lad. I'll have none of your petulance. This is for your own good. I'm checking to see if there's anything wrong with you," he said, as he forced his way between my thighs again.

'I don't know how long it lasted, but it felt like hours.

'When he rose there was a faint smile on his features, which twisted into a sneer as he said: "There's nothing wrong with you, lad. You're swinging the lead, trying to bunk off work."

"No," I stammered. "I've never had a day off in my life. I'm sick."

'He lunged towards me and in one brutal movement threw me over his knee. Thwack, thwack, thwack.

'His monstrous hand rained down on my bottom, smacking me until I thought I'd pass out. I cried out in pain, but that only made him hit me harder.

'When he finished I was trembling and whimpering as he held me down and told me: "It had to be done, lad."

'Above his heavy breathing I could smell his rancid body odour. With a wet sponge, he then began to stroke me, rough hands sliding over the welts he had made.

'He was humming to himself, broken every now and then by strange squeals of pleasure. "There, there," he kept whispering, his breath bearing down on my neck.

'When it was over he let me slide to the floor, cleared his throat and adjusted his braces. He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and mopped his brow.

"You'll know better now," he said, and made his way out.

'The door clicked shut. For a while the only thought I entertained was death.'

When he calmed down, the shattered youngster pulled his wits together.

'I dragged my clothes on, gathered my things into a duffle bag and ran. I spent the next night huddled in a bus shelter,' he said.

'That winter of 1963 was the coldest in 200 years. But that was nothing compared to the chill left in me for the rest of my life.'

The sadistic bully who administered this beating at Cambridge House, a boys' hostel in the Lancashire mill town of Rochdale — and in the process tainted this bright young man's life — was Cyril Smith.



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Smith posed as a tireless worker for children - at one point he was governor of 29 local schools and set up a youth charity, Rochdale Childer - using it all as a cover to prowl from classroom to classroom and youth club to youth club

In 1963, he was already an enormously powerful local figure, a political godfather with fingers in many pies.

Known as Mr Rochdale, he later became the town's mayor, then its Liberal MP, and for 20 years strutted the national stage.

At Westminster, on television and in the media, Smith was a big man in every sense.

He was one of the most popular faces in politics, using his oversized appearance, humour and in-your-face northern bluntness to stand out in a world of grey, indistinguishable politicians.

But just like Jimmy Savile — whom he counted as a friend — Smith used his public image as a shield while manipulating his way into positions of influence over vulnerable young people he then ruthlessly abused.

And, like Savile, he deployed his professional success, powerful personality and highly placed contacts to ensure he was never held to account. It was only after his death in 2010 at the age of 82 that men like that victim from Cambridge House felt safe to speak out.

Yet Cyril Smith's dark side has always been talked about in Rochdale — and the whispers echoed through British politics.

One of the most shocking elements of his story is how the truth was known to the police and in Westminster, yet concealed from the wider public, allowing a paedophile to hide in Parliament.

When I first arrived in Rochdale as its prospective Labour candidate in 2007, I, too, was taken in by him. It was 15 years since he'd stood down as MP but he continued to cast a spell over the town.

CASE STUDY 1

THE first victim police know about was groomed by Smith as long ago as 1961.

Files sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions in the late Sixties, but never acted on, reveal how Cyril found his prey on one of his frequent visits to local schools.

As a councillor, he would turn up in classrooms for whatever spurious reason he could manufacture. This time his excuse was a carol service, and his eye zeroed in on a 14-year-old singing Deck The Halls.

When the service was over, he congratulated the boy on his fine voice and offered to pay for singing lessons for him.

After the first few of these lessons, he invited the boy to call at his office one evening. There, he said he would show the boy how to get his breathing right. 'Drop your trousers,' he instructed — and proceeded to abuse him.

CASE STUDY 2



CHRIS MARSHALL (left) was abused by Cyril Smith at Knowl View residential school when he was just eight years old. Hearing his story was unbearable.

Now in his 40s, Chris is a tough man. From Knowl View, he joined the Foreign Legion. But the day he visited my office he broke down and lost his fight to hold back tears.

'I was dragged from my bed in the middle of the night and taken downstairs to a room where Cyril Smith was waiting,' he said, his voice faltering as the tears welled up in his eyes. 'I was told to

give him oral sex. I knew it was wrong. I just wanted to go home.'

CASE STUDY 3

RONALD NEAL arrived at Cambridge House hostel in 1964.

As one of ten children, Ronald's mother had been unable to cope. Her children were farmed out to different children's homes. Known as Runaway Ron because of his continual efforts to escape, the owner had contacted Cyril to ask for help.

'Bring him to me,' he said.

Neal had an allergy to meat. But one evening at Cambridge House he came down from his room to find Cyril standing at the table with a pile of ham sandwiches. 'I can't eat meat, it makes me ill,' the boy said.

'It's your tea, get it eaten,' snapped Cyril.

Neal stood there trembling, shaking his head. 'I can't,' he said. He was 11 and weighed just five-and-a-half stone.

Cyril grabbed him and started to force the sandwich down his throat. When, within seconds, Neal was sick, Cyril erupted. He backhanded Neal across the face, smashing his head back against the wall. Two teeth fell to the floor.

He had to go to hospital to have stitches in the back of his head. Neal told them what had happened.

'I was told that I should say I'd fallen,' he explains. 'They knew who ran Cambridge House and nobody wanted any trouble.'

It was years later before Neal first realised who had attacked him. 'I had no idea who he was. We just called him "the fat man".'

'I'd moved on and was put with foster parents when I first saw Cyril Smith on the front page of the local newspaper. I told my foster parents all about it and they said they believed me, but Cyril was an important person so it was best to drop it. People said that all my life.'

'I'd be woken at 2am by people asking for urgent help on a problem. When I pointed out it was the middle of the night, I'd be told: 'Cyril would always help us whatever time it was.'

A working-class boy made good, he oozed supreme confidence and had a common touch that broke down barriers, shuffling around Rochdale market in carpet slippers to buy a bag of tripe.

Although he was officially 'retired' from politics, he still sat in an armchair on street corners, smiling like some saintly monk while people queued to hear his homilies. Councillors couldn't get elected without his backing.

At first, I respected him for his homespun politics, his spit-and-sawdust grit and his passion. But in time, the scales fell from my eyes and I was confronted with absolute horror. Once you looked beyond the jolly clown playing for the camera, there was a sickening, dark heart.

'He'd grope all the boys as he gave out awards'

I saw it in police files that had been hidden for years and I heard it in the desperate voices of grown men Cyril had abused as boys.

As soon as the first victim approached me, there was no turning back. Every email, every phone call, every meeting uncovered more about his double life.

And the more I found out, the more I came to realise that this wasn't just about abuse, it was about power — and a cover-up that reached from Rochdale all the way to the very top of the Establishment.

Smith posed as a tireless worker for children — at one point he was governor of 29 local schools and set up a youth charity, Rochdale Childer — using it all as a cover to prowl from classroom to classroom and youth club to youth club.

His happiest hunting grounds were Cambridge House, a hostel for 'working boys' he helped set up with other politicians, and Knowl View, a residential school for children with learning difficulties, where he was a governor and had his own set of keys, coming and going at will.

To sit before the men he abused there and listen to them recount their ordeals is an experience no one can prepare for. There is anger, confusion and a deep sense of shame as they recall violence, spanking and groping that will never be erased from their memories.



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His happiest hunting grounds were Cambridge House, a hostel for 'working boys' he helped set up with other politicians, and Knowl View (above), a residential school for children with learning difficulties, where he was a governor and had his own set of keys, coming and going at will

Smith would carry out bogus medical examinations as an excuse to fondle them, or beat them as supposed punishment for breaking the rules — then 'comfort' them afterwards.

Those who defied him were hit and smashed against walls. Boys' teeth were knocked out and their bodies treated like playthings.

Other details of Cyril's abuse filtered through to me almost casually. The cleaner in my office mentioned in passing how he once played for a football team as a teenager and Smith presented the awards every year.

'He'd grope all the boys as he was presenting their medals,' I was told. 'We complained to the coach, but he said we'd have to put up with it because Cyril was the sponsor and paid for the do.'

I listened, horrified. It was presented as just another everyday story of Cyril abusing boys — as if everyone knew.

I began to wonder how many other public figures over the years had received calls and letters about Cyril and not acted on them. I imagine there were a few.

'I cried out but it only made him hit me harder'

Certainly, when I started to ask questions after getting elected, a fellow Labour MP approached me and told me to leave Cyril alone. 'Don't attack him, steer clear of him,' he said. 'It's not worth it.'

It wasn't just the words that irritated me, it was the look that followed. It more or less said: 'Play the game, this is how it works, and if you want to join our club then obey our rules.'

One of the most troubling whispers that repeatedly reached me was that Cyril had been protected by MI5. But, initially at least, no one was prepared to go on the record about it.

A former Labour MP I approached started to talk but went silent after a few sentences. 'No good will come of this,' he said nervously. 'It's best left.' And then he shut the door on me.

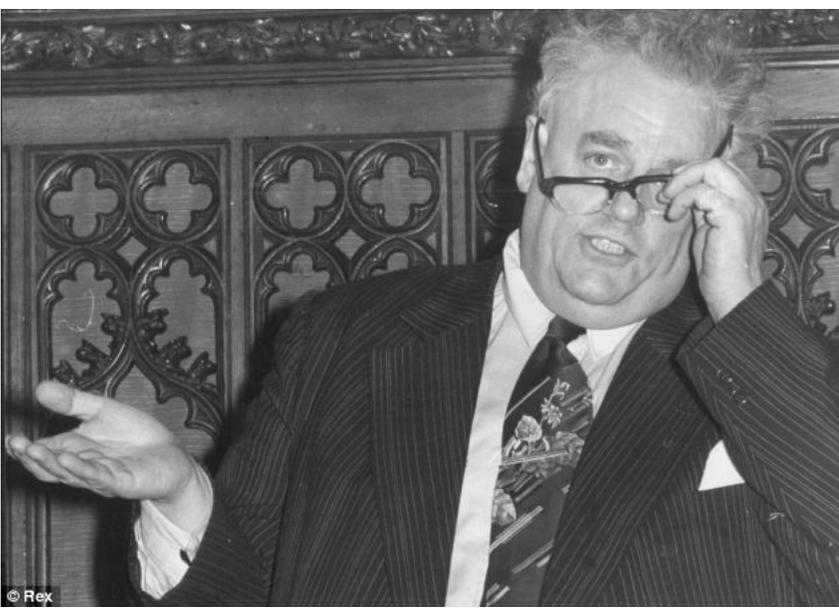
A former police officer I tracked down to his pub in Cheshire went white when I mentioned Cyril's name. 'I can't talk about that time,' he said, and again the door was closed.

It was hard not to conclude that powerful forces were still at work to protect Smith's name. But the voices of the victims could not be silenced, and in the autumn of 2012, in Parliament, I named Cyril as an abuser.

After I spoke publicly, more stories flooded in, and not just from victims.

Many — as I will describe in detail in the coming days of this series — were from police officers saying Smith's crimes were widely known to them but their superiors refused to act.

I was told of officers who found child pornography in the boot of Smith's car, only for a mysterious call from London to tell them not to charge him.



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It's now known that on three separate occasions files were passed by Lancashire Police to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Crown Prosecution Service containing details of Smith's abuse. Yet on each occasion no prosecution was pursued. It is as though Cyril was untouchable

I was told how Smith's case was used during police training on child abuse, with one instructor admitting there had been 144 complaints against him. Mysteriously, when this became known to her superiors, the instructor was silenced and moved to another job.

I was told how Smith was repeatedly detained for acts of gross indecency in toilets in St James's Park, London, only for orders to discontinue inquiries in each case.

And I was told how, when other inquiries were completed and revealed compelling and disturbing evidence that Smith was a serial paedophile, they were ignored.

It's now known that on three separate occasions files were passed by Lancashire Police to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Crown Prosecution Service containing details of Smith's abuse. Yet on each occasion no prosecution was pursued. It is as though Cyril was untouchable.

On one now notorious occasion, files of evidence on Smith held by Special Branch were removed by M5 officers from the safe at police headquarters in Preston and taken to London. They were never seen again. This was just one of several cover-ups which I will reveal in detail later in this series.

Some will no doubt argue that things have changed. The cover-up of Cyril's abuse was a long time ago. The values of the Seventies are a lot different to the standards expected in public life today. People wouldn't stand for that now. Awareness of child abuse has improved tenfold. No one would tolerate this kind of behaviour among colleagues, surely?

I would like to believe this view, but all the signs I've seen suggest it's not the case.

Cyril wasn't the only abuser in Rochdale, and he was influential enough to ensure that other abusers were allowed to hang on to his coat-tails and carry on, undetected by the authorities.

The problem that the town has to face up to, I believe, is that paedophile gangs have been operating there for years.

A leaked report to the local health authority, by a council HIV prevention officer named Phil Shepherd, warned that men from as far away as Sheffield travelled to Rochdale to abuse boys at Know View School.

I will tell the full, horrifying story behind this report, and how it became public, later in this series.

But it instantly invites the questions: Who was organising this? Who knew what was happening? Who chose to remain silent?

A number of police officers have told me that Cyril was just the tip of the iceberg and, unfortunately, I expect more stories of his abuse to emerge.

I think in time we'll hear that there were more abusers in Parliament, more terrible cover-ups.

And it won't be just one political party that's guilty of harbouring abusers.

Additional reporting: Matthew Baker.