



## The Burning Bush - Online article archive

### Attempt to blacken the witness of the gospel

An article appeared in the 'Belfast Telegraph' November 11th which contains, I believe, a wicked attempt to link the Free Presbyterian Church with the sins of a man recently convicted as a paedophile.

While giving details of the convicted man's connections to the Orange Order and the Democratic Unionist Party, and their distancing themselves from him, the writer of the article simply states that the Free Presbyterian Church in north Armagh at one time considered "the shamed 65-year-old a valued member." It is further said that the man, Ivan Russell, was "a regular attendee at Sunday services in Lurgan Free Presbyterian Church with his wife Muriel."

It is to be noted that in the article his attendance at Lurgan Free Presbyterian Church is referred to in the 'past tense'! In this at least the writer speaks the truth. In fact he ceased attendance at the church quite a few years ago, some twelve years to be exact. Mr Russell was never a member of the Free Presbyterian Church, though such a detail is of scant importance to a newspaper man!

I am reminded of Judas! He 'at one time' was considered 'a valued member' of the apostolic band but then he was expelled as a traitor. ("Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor," Luke 6:16.)

Our sympathy is with those deceived by this man, both family and friends. They must feel most dreadful indeed at this turn of events.

Such happenings as this is most distressing to the people who love the Lord and hate evil (Psalm 97:10).

I am sure that Christians may take some comfort from the Saviour's words in the parable of the wheat and tares and also Jude 1:4 and similar accounts of the attempted infiltration of the Church of Christ by the those who would corrupt the good testimony of God's work.

However, the fact that it has happened before does not take away the sense of shame and heartbreak that such a report brings.

I am anxious that Free Presbyterians be informed of the truth in this case, rather than be left to suffer unnecessarily, due to a lack of proper information regarding the incident being circulated.

### A "SELFISH and monstrous" paedophile jailed for abusing two young family members is a former DUP election candidate.



Ivan Russell

Leading Portadown Orangeman Ivan Russell was sentenced to six years for sexually assaulting his sister Margaret Brown when she was just 13 years old, and granddaughter Rebekah Russell when she was aged 17.

Both his victims, who are now adults, bravely waived their right to anonymity in order to identify their pervert relative who was caged at Craigavon Crown Court last week.

Russell's admissions have rocked the Orange Order and Free Presbyterian Church in north Armagh - with both institutions at one time considering the shamed 65-year-old a valued member.

They have also embarrassed the DUP, who he represented in the 2005 local government elections.

A former friend told Sunday Life: "Ivan Russell pulled the wool over everyone's eyes. We thought he was an upstanding member of the community, when in fact he was abusing young female relatives."



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Our source said it was well known that Russell had a dark side - pointing to a 2002 Drumcree rioting conviction - and that he had been supportive of paedophile Orangeman Mark Harbinson after he was jailed in 2011 for abusing a schoolgirl.

"People thought it strange that Ivan spoke up for Harbinson (below) after he was found guilty, but no one suspected this was because he was also a child abuser," added his ex-pal.

"It was thought that this was because he was convicted of rioting with Harbinson at Drumcree, and nothing else."

Russell was so well thought of in unionist circles in Portadown that he was selected by the DUP to run for Craigavon Borough Council in the 2005 local government elections. He polled 302 first preference votes which was not enough to win a seat in the Loughside ward.

What Russell's loyal supporters had no clue about is that he was, in fact, a long-standing paedophile who started abusing his younger sister Margaret in the mid-1970s.

He was aged 21 when he first crept into the terrified 13-year-old's room and molested her.

The abuse, which started shortly after the birth of Russell's first child, took place between 1974 and 1976 until after his second child was born and he became a Christian.

Margaret was targeted by her older brother while she babysat the youngsters in his home.

Now living in Canada, she only made a statement to police in 2016 when she learned that he had also abused his granddaughter Rebekah, who is her grand-niece.

A drunken Russell sexually assaulted the 17-year-old during a family holiday in Crete, pinning her to the hotel bar next to a pool table.

Frightened Rebekah later told a teacher at Portadown College, with her grandfather confessing to the attack during a counselling session.

Disgraced Russell no longer has any connection to the DUP and in the aftermath of his child abuse convictions, faces being kicked out of his beloved Orange Order.

He comes from a family steeped in loyalist tradition with images of his father Alex Russell and grandfather Ballantine Russell adorning two Lambeg drums carried by Tamnificarbet LOL 17, which is based in Portadown. The self-confessed paedophile was also a regular attendee at Sunday services in Lurgan Free Presbyterian Church with his wife Muriel, who is standing by him and was in court to see him jailed and placed on the sex offenders register for life.

She and a group of supporters sat on one side of the public gallery away from Russell's brave granddaughter Rebekah and her immediate family.

In a joint statement issued after he was jailed, victims Rebekah and Margaret Brown branded their relative "cruel".

They said: "After consulting with friends and family, we have made the uneasy decision to waive our anonymity so that the perpetrator can be publicly identified, the truth be heard and those most cruel to us can finally be silenced.

"The selfish and monstrous actions of one man, who was a brother and a grandfather, have left deep and lasting scars on both of us but we now at least have a measure of justice."

In a victim impact statement, Margaret added: "I feel Ivan took my innocence at 13. I will never understand why he did it."



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Their words have had a sobering effect on Ivan Russell's former friends in north Armagh, some of whom stood by him after he was charged.

Up until Rebekah and Margaret went public last week, the coward had hidden behind the cloak of anonymity, unable to be named by the media as it would identify his victims.