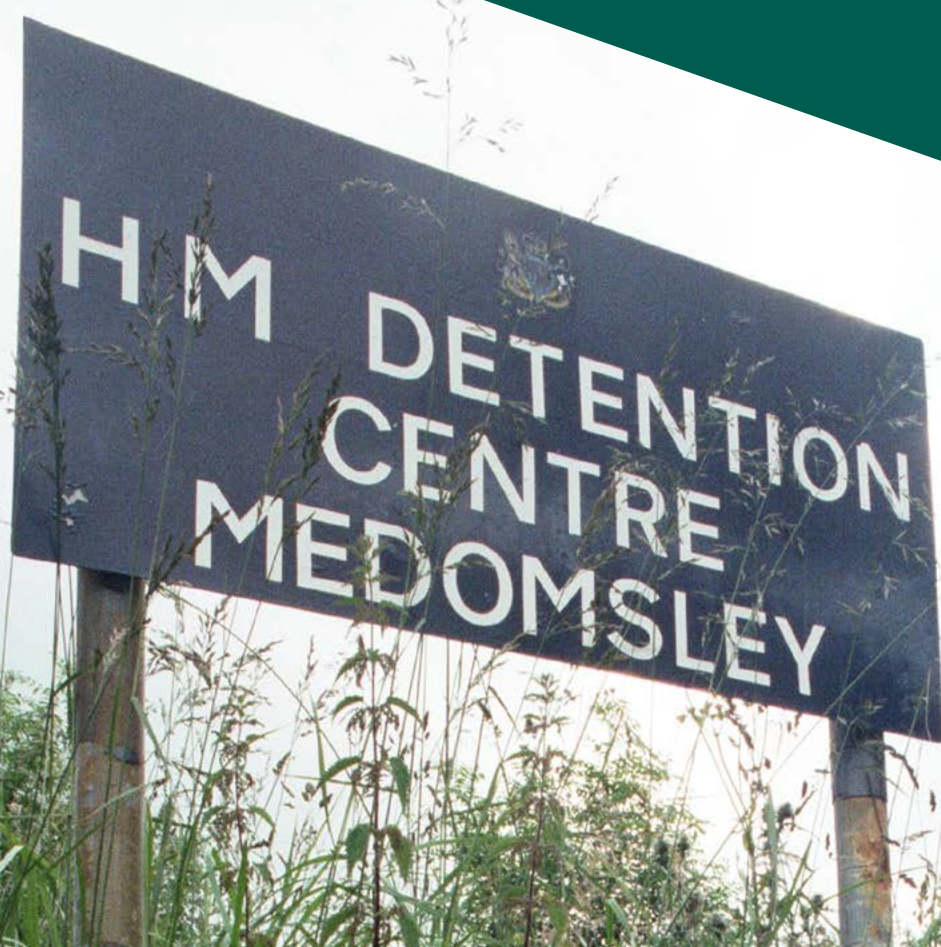


**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Investigation into the failing of Medomsley Detention Centre between 1961 and 1987





Investigation into the failing of Medomsley Detention Centre between 1961 and 1987



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Our vision

To deliver high quality and timely independent investigations and work closely with partners to achieve tangible benefits for the safety and confidence of those in custody and under community supervision.

What we do



Resolve complaints



Investigate deaths



Special investigations



Identify and disseminate learning



Ensure trust and confidence in the criminal justice system

What we value

Ambitious thinking

Professional curiosity

Diversity and inclusion

Transparency

Teamwork

About this report

Commissioning the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's special investigation

During the police investigations, victims and supporters have continued to press for a wider inquiry into how and why the abuse at Medomsley Detention Centre continued for such an extended period of time.

Many victims hoped that their abuse would be considered by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. Initially, Medomsley was included in the scope of the inquiry. However, in December 2019, Professor Alexis Jay OBE, Chair of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, made a determination that Medomsley would not form part of the scope due to the ongoing Operation Seabrook police investigation and the fact that the inquiry would not be able to consider victims who were over 18 at the time of their abuse.¹

In October 2023, the then Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice Alex Chalk commissioned the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) Adrian Usher to undertake an independent special investigation into abuse at Medomsley. Mr Chalk said he recognised that while **“an investigation cannot make up for the horrific abuse experienced at Medomsley, nor its ongoing effect on people’s lives, I hope that it will help bring an element of closure to victims and survivors and their families”**.²

The investigation was formally launched at a press conference in Newcastle in February 2024.

Aims of this report

This report has not sought to reinvestigate any of the allegations made against staff at Medomsley. Three police investigations have already taken place and conclusively resulted in criminal convictions. It is therefore a matter of fact that physical and sexual abuse occurred at Medomsley. This report is focused on the larger question of how the abuse continued for so long without the relevant authorities taking action and bringing it to an end. Our methodology is detailed in full at Appendix A.

1 Professor Alexis Jay OBE (2019). Notice of determination in respect of Medomsley Youth Detention Centre. Available online at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20221215030627/https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/16871/view/2019-12-03-cici-notice-determination-regarding-medomsley.pdf>

2 Commissioning letter from Alex Chalk KC MP, 24 October 2023, Appendix B

What follows is a detailed and accurate picture of what happened at Medomsley based on all the available information. It sets out what was known by each authority involved with Medomsley during the relevant period and identifies examples of specific opportunities for authorities to have intervened and stopped the abuse. The report analyses the factors that allowed the abuse to continue, both external and internal.

Terms of reference

The PPO was asked to investigate and report on what ‘the authorities’ knew about abuse taking place at Medomsley between 1961 and 1987, whether there were any opportunities for them to have intervened at the time, and what action, if any, they took when faced with these opportunities.

In this report, ‘authorities’ refer to the relevant public bodies and their employees, including the Prison Service, the Home Office, police, probation, social and health care services, education bodies, faith groups, inspectorates, charities, local government and central government.

‘Abuse’ refers to specific incidents of sexual, physical and psychological abuse but is also applied more broadly to the nature of the regime that was employed at Medomsley.

The terms of reference can be read in full at Appendix C.

Availability of historical records

The availability of historical records specifically relating to Medomsley is very limited. The operational life of the centre was nearly exclusively before the digital age. Files held by the National Archives contain some material and there is also the material held by Operation Seabrook. Some additional material relating to Medomsley has been provided to us from victims. However, much of the original documentation which may have furthered our knowledge of the operational running of Medomsley is no longer available.

Terminology

Throughout this report, the boys and young men who served sentences at Medomsley will be referred to as ‘trainees’, as this was the term used at the time for those detained in detention centres and borstals. However, many victims have used the terms ‘inmate’ and ‘prisoner’ to refer to themselves. Where a direct quote has been taken from their testimony, these terms have been left in. Similarly, many official reports and documents use the terms ‘inmate’ and ‘prisoner’, as these have a wider meaning which include all those imprisoned across the Prison Service. Where direct quotes have been taken from these materials, the terms ‘inmate’ and ‘prisoner’ are left in. All three terms refer to those serving sentences at Medomsley when used in this report.

The head of the detention centre is referred to as the ‘warden’, as this was the formal name until 1983 when it was changed to ‘governor’ in the revised Detention Centre Rules. These terms are interchangeable, and at times the word ‘governor’ will be used when directly quoting victim testimonies and other materials.

We have thought carefully about how to refer to those who suffered abuse at Medomsley and have decided to use the term ‘victim’ throughout this report. We acknowledge that many people prefer the term ‘survivor’ and the empowerment it represents. However, the sad fact is that not all those who suffered abuse at Medomsley have survived. We hope that all victims and survivors of Medomsley feel represented in the pages of this report.

Today, the Prison Service falls within the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service, however at the time Medomsley was open, it sat within the Home Office. References to the Prison Service include all staff, ranging from the operational staff working inside prisons to the administrators working in head office.

Investigation statistics

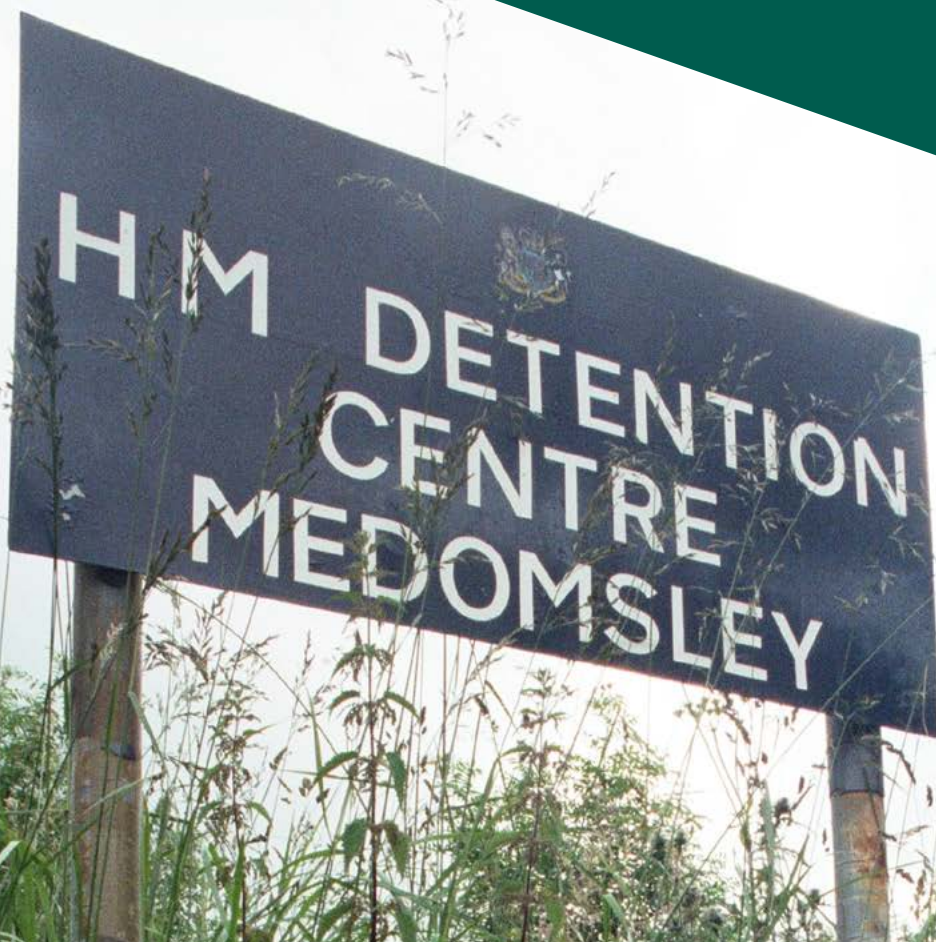
74 witnesses were interviewed during the investigation. This includes former trainees, police and prison officers, and former education, probation and administrative staff who worked at Medomsley.

We reviewed over 7,900 pieces of relevant documentary evidence from a wide range of sources, including Durham Constabulary, the Ministry of Justice, the Home Office, the National Archives, open-source material and academic publications.

We identified and contacted 51 relevant authorities with links to Medomsley and launched a call for evidence which lasted from July to October 2024.

The conclusions and recommendations in this report are based on the available documentary information, analysis of victim accounts and evidence received during the call for evidence.

Foreword



Foreword

It was supposed to take young men, perceived to lack discipline and structure, and instil within them the benefits of more ordered, law-abiding lives. A positive experience for the trainees and for society.

For many of the young men, sentenced to three-month or six-month training orders, their time at Medomsley Detention Centre saw them subjected to violent physical and sexual abuse.

In some cases, the effects of the trauma they suffered effectively became a life sentence. Living with that trauma has been made all the more difficult for some victims as they gradually learned over time that their experience was far from isolated and that the abuse had been taking place for decades. This left them to endlessly ask the question as to why it had not been detected, and prevented, long before they had ever arrived at the gates, therefore sparing them from the devastating consequences of their own time there.

Trying to answer that question is at the heart of my investigation into events that took place at Medomsley during the time it operated as a detention centre between 1961 and 1987. The pages that follow are a very difficult read. I have chosen to omit many of the most heinous details of sexual abuse, but I believe it is necessary to include enough to make clear the extent of the horrors that some of those young men endured and the memories of which have ruined whole lives. That so few members of staff spoke out, or when victims did, they were not believed, has many causes. Some stretch across the whole of society at the time and some are rooted in the particular circumstances found at Medomsley. I have brought those factors together under overarching themes in the final part of this report.

It was, of course, a different time. Societal attitudes to violence, and to homosexuality, were different to present day. During the period of Medomsley's operation, corporal punishment was a feature of school life. Many of the staff had undergone National Service where low-level violence often featured in training alongside pushing personal limits of endurance. During some of the period, homosexuality was still, for many, an underground sub-culture in which fear and shame generated secrecy and silence. Not all of the staff at the centre would have been responsible for physically assaulting trainees. Indeed, some victims spoke of the small kindnesses they witnessed from a number of the staff. However, the evidence demonstrates that most, if not all, staff were aware that violence, at some level, was part of the regime. Individuals speak out when their own value system becomes so challenged by what they are seeing that it is more stressful than not doing so. The fact I found that only a few members of staff raised concerns in 28 years of operation is, partly, explained by the different societal attitudes to discipline, punishment and young offenders than those existing today.



Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

“

the evidence demonstrates that most, if not all, staff were aware that violence, at some level, was part of the regime.

It is possible to make an argument that what occurred at Medomsley was inevitable. The aims and objectives of the training centre were not clearly laid out. I have found no evidence that clear direction was supplied, or that detailed thought had been given to what the regime being delivered should look like in order to achieve those aims, even if they had existed. Also absent was a staff training programme to suitably equip them to deliver the regime. Staff were dealing with young men from challenging backgrounds who had a broad range of vulnerabilities and complex needs. Staff received the same basic training given to officers working in the adult estate, housing more hardened and experienced offenders. This vacuum was filled by staff interpreting aims and methods from their own beliefs and experiences. These practices were influenced by governmental and ministerial language that often included words like ‘tough’, ‘robust’ and, perhaps most consistently and pervasively, ‘short, sharp shock’. While details of specific practices behind such vague language were lacking, the staff were left in no doubt that trainees were to find the whole experience unpleasant to such an extent that they were motivated never to return. Such an environment meant that some staff believed, whatever the rule book said, that they could best achieve their aims with violence as a training method. This, I believe, is well-evidenced by the fact that many trainees reported that violence was at its height at the start of their residency and tailed off over time. This may well have been because staff believed, even subconsciously, that their methods were working and trainees’ standards of behaviour were improving, which would only have further cemented such practice into the cultural fabric of the centre.

There were governance and oversight mechanisms in place at Medomsley but they were entirely ineffective. Visits from the Board of Visitors or the regional director appear to have been more social occasions than accompanied by any degree of scrutiny. The available evidence strongly suggests that the most routine low-level violence present at Medomsley was endemic across the detention centre estate. Over the years, there were many allegations made by trainees or their families that reached the ears of ministers. Alongside these were a steady stream of articles in local and national press raising questions about the poor treatment of young men. One detention centre warden felt sufficiently confident that those under his charge had no effective voice that he stated publicly in local media that he was dismissing out of hand, and with no investigation, allegations of abuse as he simply judged them false. The fact that allegations continued to be made, but were almost never upheld, should have prompted those at the top of the Prison Service and officials within the Home Office to reassure themselves that their governance and oversight mechanisms were providing the right checks and balances within the system. Ultimately criminal allegations should have been investigated by the police. When, years later, some successful prosecutions were brought before the court, many victims found some of the sentences handed down inexplicably light. During the

actual operation of Medomsley, the local police did not discharge their duty to rigorously investigate serious allegations made to them. In most cases, such allegations were dismissed without being recorded. But even when properly documented, the police effectively handed over the allegations for Medomsley to investigate themselves and then report back the result. This lack of responsibility meant that one of the most important oversight mechanisms that could have halted the abuse was absent.

“

Leaders at every level at Medomsley, including the warden, failed in their duty to protect the best interests of those under their charge.

Arguably the most important attribute of anyone in a leadership role is to set the expected standards of professional behaviour and then consistently, and pro-actively, ensure that they are met. Leaders at every level at Medomsley, including the warden, failed in their duty to protect the best interests of those under their charge. Safeguarding as a concept or a legal duty was not conceived of at the time. Staff nevertheless understood that the trainees were entirely reliant on them in every aspect of their lives for their personal welfare. Either staff in leadership roles were aware of the abuse, in which case they were complicit, or they lacked dedication and professional curiosity to such an extent as to not be professionally competent. The appointment of each new warden was an opportunity for him to scratch beneath the surface of the regime that was being presented and discover the abuse that lay beneath. It is notable that in the entirety of the operation of Medomsley, not a single warden ever formed a relationship with any trainee grounded in sufficient trust for them to learn of the horrors taking place within the kitchens. It is not surprising that among the victims, some of their strongest feelings of injustice and revulsion are reserved for the wardens. Ultimately, they had the power and authority to take action and prevent the abuse of hundreds, if not thousands, of victims had they diligently and proactively discharged the duties of their office. Sadly for the lives of those victims, there is no evidence that they did so.

The worst excesses of sexual abuse continuing for so long without detection required the silence of many. To achieve that silence, perpetrators required a degree of power. Neville Husband was possibly the most prolific sex offender in British history. It is very likely that his offending did not begin and end at Medomsley and extended to his previous employment at Portland borstal. There were allegations of abuse from when he worked at HMP Frankland and Deerbolt youth custody centre, and during his church and amateur dramatic activity. He was a powerfully built man and an arch-manipulator. He physically intimidated, and in some cases assaulted, other members of staff as well as trainees. He had a significant voice in the Medomsley branch of the Prison Officers Association (POA) and that, combined with the longevity of his service there, made him a daunting adversary for any warden to have chosen to combat. Wardens had their own power base eroded by being the only member of staff not in the POA, and it was widely known that the tenure for any given warden was time-bound.

“

Ultimately, they had the power and authority to take action and prevent the abuse of hundreds, if not thousands, of victims had they diligently and proactively discharged the duties of their office. Sadly for the lives of those victims, there is no evidence that they did so.

The power that Husband wielded over trainees was even more one sided. The ability to provide or withdraw food gave him opportunities to punish and reward. The isolation he could engineer for trainees existed not only in the total exclusionary dominance he practiced within the kitchens themselves, but was also assisted by the geography of Medomsley itself. The drive from Newcastle or Durham magistrates courts up to the training centre is across many miles of bleak and barren moorland. That journey will have compounded in the minds of the trainees, many experiencing custody for the first time, their separation from those who cared about them. When Husband told them that if they spoke out, he could make them “disappear”, it would have been easy for them to believe it. The illegitimate power imbalance that existed between Husband and the trainees and other staff further flourished within a culture of collusion and silence from other employees. Husband used this power with devastating effect. Some other staff and trainees became perpetrators, and others facilitators – some by their actions and some by their silence.

Together, societal attitudes, lack of clear direction for the centre, poor and ineffective governance and oversight, failures in leadership, and unchecked, inappropriate power imbalances all contributed to Medomsley being operated for 26 years effectively beyond the reach of the law. It may surprise some within that context that I have decided not to make formal recommendations in this report. To do so meaningfully, I would have to conduct a thorough review of the current state of youth detention in England and Wales as it now stands, nearly 40 years after Medomsley closed its doors. That is beyond both the terms of reference of this investigation and my available resource. Rather, it is for the Ministry of Justice, its ministers, HM Prison and Probation Service, the police and other relevant bodies to consider the issues raised in this investigation and reassure themselves, and the wider public, that there has been sufficient progress so that what transpired at Medomsley could never be repeated.

Having said that I will not make recommendations, I will nevertheless ask that ministers give particular consideration to three issues.

The first is that it is still not a requirement for every child in detention to be proactively, and regularly, asked by an independent party about their custody experience seen through a safeguarding lens. If the right environment was created and they were conducted by suitably trained, trauma-informed professionals, these conversations would provide a degree of reassurance to families and all interested parties, along with building public confidence in the criminal justice system. The number of children in custodial detention is such that the resource required to achieve this annually, or even more frequently, would be extremely small.

The second is around the complaints process for children in custody. I have made a notable observation that the system for children to make a complaint in today's criminal justice system remains broadly the same as the system in place when Medomsley operated. To make a complaint, children must write to the governor, or the establishment. Some children have low literacy skills or will fear the reprisal of doing so. From the complaint investigation work my office carries out, I know that children are more likely to disclose their feelings and experiences to people they know. It remains the case today that family members or trusted people cannot make a complaint on behalf of someone in prison.

The third is that despite criminal convictions, civil cases and compensation paid to the victims of Medomsley, none of them have ever received a public apology. If I were to recommend that any party should do so, then victims would, justifiably, view any subsequent public statements as forced and therefore hollow. I leave it to all of the bodies referenced in this investigation to examine their organisational consciences and determine if there is any action taken today that would diminish, even fractionally, the trauma that is still being felt by victims.

I would like to put on record my enormous gratitude to Richard Tucker, the lead investigator of Operation Deerness, and his deputy Sarah Kirwan. Over 18 months they brilliantly led a small team of dedicated staff, and their hard work has led to this comprehensive account that shines a light on a very dark period in our penal history.

My last words should, of course, go to the victims.

I would like to thank all who came forward to speak to us, some for the very first time. You have exhibited extraordinary courage and, for some, at significant personal cost to your mental health. For some, trying to get a full, public account of what happened at Medomsley has become the work of their lives. In nearly 40 years of public service during which I have known thousands of victims, I have never before seen the level of determination, persistence and resilience shown by a handful of men who have toiled endlessly to hold those responsible to account. Sadly, not all of them have lived to see this report made public but it is their collective legacy that is responsible for it existing.

When victims are asked what they most want, their reply is often justice. This report cannot deliver that. It cannot take away the decades of frustration, fear and mental anguish that some have lived with. These are men, some convicted of the most trivial of indiscretions, whose lives have been ruined by what they endured at the hands of the state. For some it will not go far enough. Many victims believe that far more individuals should have been criminally convicted for their roles in the abuse. While I believe that to be true if the opportunities evidenced in this report had been seized, the passage of time, the lack of documentary evidence, and the deaths of significant witnesses and perpetrators have rendered it impossible to deliver today. However, it is my fervent hope that, for many victims, what this report represents is a victory for your tenacity, determination and courage. You may have had to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles over the last 40 years and more but, in the end, you were heard, and you were believed.

“

My last words should, of course, go to the victims ... it is my fervent hope that, for many victims, what this report represents is a victory for your tenacity, determination and courage. You may have had to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles over the last 40 years and more but, in the end, you were heard, and you were believed.

Executive summary

Part 1: Intentions

That widespread physical and sexual abuse occurred at Medomsley is a matter of fact.

Part 1 provides the context of what should have happened at Medomsley by setting out its organisational structure, its staffing, roles and responsibilities, and the key rules which governed detention centres and behaviour by staff. It summarises the main elements of the daily regime, the key welfare entitlements of trainees and how complaints could be made.

Part 2: Experiences

Part 2 contains graphic descriptions of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, exploring what actually happened at Medomsley. It makes for an extremely distressing and harrowing read but is necessary in illustrating what took place.

It contains anonymised accounts of abuse from victim testimonies and builds an overall picture of the types of abuse that occurred, and the key patterns and themes of the abuse.

The experiences reflected in this part highlight a culture of systemic physical abuse which began as soon as trainees entered Medomsley and was particularly prevalent during physical training sessions. This latter feature is demonstrated in a case study on physical abuse by a former physical training instructor, which shows that routine physical assaults and violent and degrading behaviour were integrated into the physical education programme.

The abuse stretched across many different places at Medomsley, where the trainees would be bathing, or while being strip searched. We found instances where trainees were forced to inflict violence on each other and were being used by staff for personal gain.

The nature and extent of sexual abuse at Medomsley is explored, again, through the use of victim testimony. **These accounts are by their nature distressing and care should be taken as some may find them triggering.**

We include case studies on two of the key perpetrators of sexual abuse, Neville Husband and Leslie Johnston. We examine the various methods used by Husband to groom and abuse victims, all of which were carried out under the cover of the kitchen regime. Husband's links to wider offending, which involved other perpetrators and extended beyond Medomsley, are also discussed. There is evidence that Husband engaged in group-based child sexual exploitation of trainees with other individuals.

This part of the report also provides a factual account of the two deaths of trainees which occurred at Medomsley in 1981 and 1982.

Part 3: Awareness

Part 3 examines what was known about physical and sexual abuse by each authority who had an ongoing involvement at Medomsley.

Societal attitudes at the time impacted on the nature of the regime at detention centres as trainees were seen as inherently bad.

The leadership of the Prison Service knew that physical punishments were being used by staff at detention centres to discipline trainees. There were disclosures of abuse to the warden, including the warden himself witnessing abuse and injuries, but we found that the lack of defined purpose of detention centres meant that power could be abused. Evidence suggests that many prison officers knew or suspected that Husband was sexually abusing trainees at Medomsley but took no action to stop it. The fact that Husband banned the searching of his kitchens or was receiving pornographic material at Medomsley should have been challenged by staff.

Despite increasing complaints regarding the abuse, the Prison Service did not conduct any kind of internal review or put in place policies and procedures to stop this happening. It is unclear whether any investigation took place into complaints of physical abuse due to lack of documentation held by the Home Office, but we know that they had knowledge of the abuse. The Prison Service and the Home Office received complaints regarding the physical abuse of trainees at other detention centres, and it is evident that the nature of physical abuse alleged is strikingly similar to the physical abuse which took place at Medomsley.

Reviews during the period conducted by the Penal Affairs Committee of the Religious Society of Friends (more commonly known as the Quakers), and subsequently by the Home Office's Advisory Council on the Penal System, show that both civil society groups and the government were concerned about the nature of detention centre regimes. Despite these official review findings, neither the Prison Service nor the Home Office conducted any strategic review or introduced significant policy changes to address these concerns. Allegations of abuse were made at other institutions but the evidence is patchy as to whether the Home Office took action at each of these locations.

It has become apparent throughout our investigation that the police did not recognise the violence they witnessed as abuse and accepted this use of force as a legitimate part of the detention centre regime. There was a significant failure by officers in several police services to record and investigate allegations of sexual abuse made by trainees and there were missed opportunities to fully investigate the offending of Johnston and Husband.

Disclosures of physical abuse were made to probation staff by trainees. However, some staff did not believe these allegations and others were unsympathetic and appeared to accept that physical abuse was part of the regime. Disclosures of sexual abuse were made to probation staff, but some staff simply did not believe them. There is also some evidence that social workers were told by trainees about physical abuse and took no action.

It was inconclusive from the evidence assessed whether health services knew about physical abuse at Medomsley. A very small number of medical staff at a local hospital had concerns about the demeanour of trainees and how injuries were sustained. However, in many cases examined by the investigation and by Operation Seabrook, the cause of injuries and whether they were accidental would not have been possible for external medical staff to determine, both then and now. Added to this, trainees were often forced to lie about how their injuries were sustained or did not disclose assaults as they were accompanied by prison staff or had been threatened not to disclose.

Members of education staff expressed concern at the way trainees were verbally abused during physical training sessions. There is no evidence that members of the clergy who worked at Medomsley had knowledge of the widespread physical abuse there, although some witnessed low-level violence which they accepted as being similar to the corporal punishment allowed in schools at that time. However, there is evidence that in a few isolated cases, members of the clergy who worked at or had links to Medomsley were themselves involved in sexually abusing victims there.

Based on the available information, there is no evidence that education staff, health or social services were aware of the systemic sexual abuse taking place at Medomsley.

Part 4: Failings

The final part of our report analyses how and why physical and sexual abuse was able to take place over such a prolonged period and why no one intervened to stop it.

The punitive ethos of detention centres combined with a failure to clearly define their aims and objectives led to a regime which was subjectively interpreted by prison staff. Most of them, initially at least, had a military background and were used to unquestioning obedience and strict discipline.

There was a specific lack of training for staff working in detention centres, which enabled them to shape the regime based on their own views and experiences.

Societal attitudes towards young offenders on masculinity, homosexuality and violence shaped the regime and the treatment of trainees. These attitudes also impacted on victims' ability to disclose abuse and coloured the response by authorities when victims did have the courage to speak out.

Governance at Medomsley was poor and ineffective, and there was a lack of truly independent oversight by the Board of Visitors. Significantly, the internal complaints process for trainees meant they had to effectively complain to the people who were abusing them. Furthermore, the deaths of trainees David Caldwell and Ian Angus Shackleton were arguably avoidable and were not followed by any meaningful review on the part of the Prison Service or Home Office.³

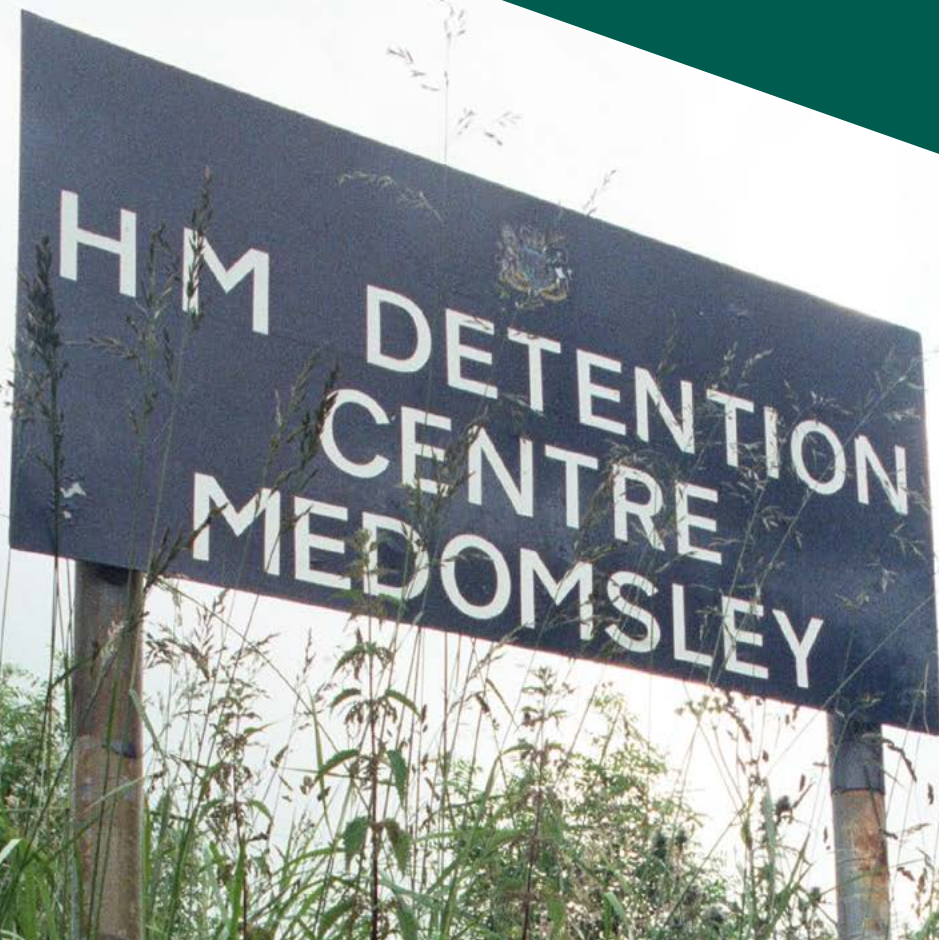
³ Operation Deerness investigation material

A failure by the leadership at Medomsley to set appropriate standards of behaviour allowed poor working practices to develop and continue. The leadership of Medomsley was not active or intrusive enough about the jokes and suggestions being made about the sexual abuse. Furthermore, senior leaders failed to pay close enough attention to the physical training regime or to show professional curiosity in relation to the serious injuries which were being sustained by trainees.

This allowed an imbalance of power to develop among staff, especially in relation to Husband, who effectively managed himself, created his own empire and bypassed rules so that he could select his own victims and abuse them both inside and outside the centre. Much more could and should have been done to protect trainees. It is evident that perpetrators such as Husband and Johnston exploited these vulnerabilities, and that they were allowed to do so was a failure of governance and leadership.

Part 1: Intentions

What should have happened at Medomsley Detention Centre?



Medomsley Detention Centre

Medomsley was a senior youth detention centre located on the site of a former Victorian orphanage near Consett in Durham. It was designed to hold young offenders aged between 17 and 21 who had been sentenced to either three or six months. The offences for which they had been sentenced ranged from non-payment of fines to shoplifting, theft, assault, burglary and robbery.

Detention centres were created in 1952 as a new solution for youth offending to provide short sentences with military-style regimes designed to instil discipline in young offenders and act as a deterrent from further offending.

Medomsley opened in February 1961 and closed in October 1987 shortly before the Criminal Justice Act 1988 abolished all detention centres by combining them with borstals to create young offender institutions.

The centre had an annual average population of 50 to 100 trainees during the period of its operation. At certain times the population fluctuated widely – for example in 1975, the population swung from 72 to 127 at its peak.⁴

The majority of young men sent to Medomsley were sentenced in local magistrates' courts such as Teesside, Middlesbrough or Sunderland. Trainees were often transported directly from court to Medomsley by the police. Other trainees who had been sentenced by crown courts spent time on remand at HMP Low Newton or HMP Durham before being taken to Medomsley by prison officers using taxis or prison buses.

Medomsley was built on the site of a former Victorian orphanage in a remote and isolated location, surrounded by countryside.

“Medomsley initially presents itself as it originally was, a gaunt nineteenth-century orphanage now encased within a 17 ft fence, standing some 800 ft above sea level on the outskirts of a former colliery village. The re-landscaped surrounding countryside is not all that unattractive and looking westwards there is a fine panoramic view of rolling country, but the inevitable winds blowing from either the Pennines or the North Sea are a stark reminder of the Dickensian situation.”⁵

4 Operation Seabrook closed material

5 Prison Department Inspectorate (1977). Report on HM Detention Centre Medomsley

Gateshead Cottage Homes⁶



⁶ The Northern Echo. Remembering the forgotten lads of village orphanage who fought and died in the First World War. Available online at: <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11266795.remembering-forgotten-lads-village-orphanage-fought-died-first-world-war/#gallery1>

Gateshead Cottage Homes⁷



Medomsley closed in 1987 and was subsequently demolished and rebuilt. As of 2025, it is the site of Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre.

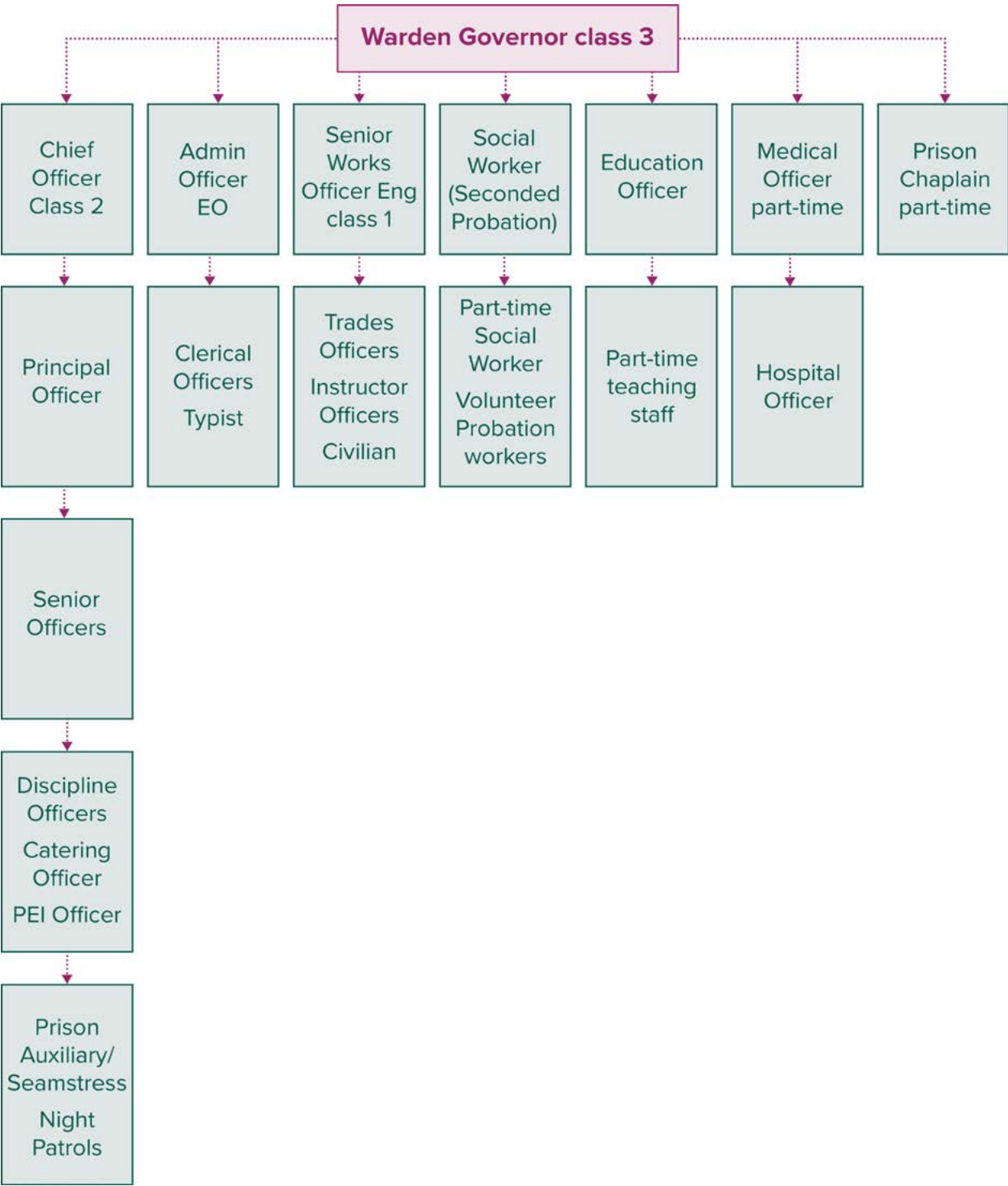
Staffing at Medomsley

We have set out the organisational structure at Medomsley to provide context behind each position held by staff at Medomsley and explain the responsibility that they held.

The following organogram shows the rank structure of staff at Medomsley and includes those who were seconded to work there as social workers or probation staff.

⁷ The Northern Echo. Remembering the forgotten lads of village orphanage who fought and died in the First World War. Available online at: <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11266795.remembering-forgotten-lads-village-orphanage-fought-died-first-world-war/#gallery1>

Figure 1: Organisational structure and staffing at Medomsley Detention Centre⁸



⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

The following table reflects a snapshot of the staffing levels at Medomsley from 1971.

Figure 2: Medomsley staff data, 1971⁹

Staff position	Numbers in post
Warden	1
Chief officer	1
Principal officer	1
Senior officer	2
Discipline officer	16
Hospital officer	1
Catering officer	1
Senior officer physical education instructor	1
Officer physical education instructor	1
Prison auxiliary (seamstress)	1
Night patrol	3

Warden

At Medomsley, the governor or head of the centre was referred to as the warden. He was the sole governor-grade staff member at the centre and was therefore referred to as a singleton post. He held the lowest grade for governors, class 3.

The role of the warden is set out in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules as follows:¹⁰

“The warden shall exercise a close and constant personal supervision of the whole centre. He shall visit and inspect daily all parts of the centre where inmates are working and accommodated and shall give special attention to every inmate who is sick.”

⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁰ See page 29 for an explanation of the Detention Centre Rules. The Detention Centre Rules 1952 is included in Appendix D and the Detention Centre Rules 1983 is included in Appendix E

Circular Instructions 51/1968 also describe the warden's role as follows:¹¹

“The governor has control of the whole prison and is responsible for its management to head office. He must be familiar with the statutes insofar as they relate to prison administration and prisoners, the Prison Rules, standing orders and other instructions, and must also ensure that all prison staff understand their duty and perform it. He will submit to the appropriate division of head office any major suggestions for improvement of the administration of the prison that he considers desirable.”

The warden's primary responsibilities included completing a daily journal with key information about the centre, such as the numbers of trainees being unlocked, inspecting various elements of the regime including the kitchens and parade, and submitting an annual report to head office with relevant observations. According to the 1952 Detention Centre Rules, the warden could delegate any of these tasks to his chief officer should he see fit.

Chief officer

The chief officer held the highest rank among disciplinary staff at Medomsley. He acted as the warden's deputy and took on tasks including regular inspections of the site, interviewing of trainees, and record keeping. The chief officer would also act as warden in his absence and would work an opposite schedule to ensure that either he or the warden were always on shift. The chief officer would line manage the principal officers, who were the next rank down.

Principal officer

The principal officers reported to the chief officer. They managed the standard grade discipline officers and would therefore be largely responsible for the day-to-day running of the detention centre. They were also responsible for managing the staff detail, meaning the scheduling of shifts and regulation of staffing levels, and for ensuring staff training was up to date.

Principal officers, the chief officer and the warden would all provide reports for the annual appraisals of prison officers.

Senior officer

Senior officers were discipline officers who had progressed to a higher grade by passing a promotion exam and selection board. They had direct oversight over standard grade prison officers and were based in the house block of the centre, the area where trainees lived. In addition to supervising prison officers, they held responsibility for desk-based tasks such as censoring mail and security. They also assisted the principal officers and chief officer in their duties and the co-ordination of operational activities.

¹¹ Circulars are official Home Office documents that provide updates and details on policy and procedures. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/home-office-circulars-2025>

The senior officer role was introduced in 1966 as a result of the Mountbatten Inquiry report to bridge the gap between basic grade officers and principal officers.

Discipline staff (prison officer)

Standard grade discipline staff, generally referred to as prison officers, made up the majority of staff. They were the uniformed staff who enforced the centre's regime and oversaw the movements and wellbeing of trainees.

Prison officers at Medomsley were assigned specific roles either full-time or as a relief. For example, some officers would be allocated to reception and report there for every shift. When those officers had rest days or took annual leave, other officers who held the relief reception role would fill in. According to former staff members interviewed by our investigation team, it was standard practice to hold a relief position for one year before stepping into the full-time position the following year.

Prison officers would be allocated to working groups who would rotate on and off shift together as a unit. Therefore, they would be accustomed to working with a particular set of colleagues. All staff generally worked one weekend on, one weekend off.

The shift pattern was known as FGX and was described by one officer as follows:

"Staff shifts were the early F shift from 6:45 to 1:30. The G shift from 12:30 to 9:30. The X shift from 7:45 to 8:15 and the main shift from 8:00 until 5:00. The night shift was 9:00 to 7:00 with two officers, the senior one who remained in the Gate, the other in the house, alongside two night orderly officers."¹²

It was very common for prison officers at Medomsley to work extra hours as overtime and evidence suggests there was no requirement during the relevant period for overtime to be monitored, regulated or recorded anywhere by any member of staff including senior managers.

Specialist officer

Some prison officers would undertake optional training to specialise in a particular role. These specialist roles included catering officer, physical education instructor (PEI) and hospital officer. While they would be fully qualified prison officers, they were generally not expected to take on disciplinary roles within the centre and would only focus on their specialty role. For example, the PEI would work exclusively in the gym running the physical training element of the regime.

Works or trade officer

Like specialist officers, works or trade officers were discipline officers trained in a particular trade such as painting and decorating, bricklaying, or electrical engineering. They would run trainee works parties corresponding to their trade and were responsible for the general upkeep of the centre.

12 Operation Seabrook closed material

Auxiliary staff

Auxiliary staff were civilians and were therefore not qualified as prison officers. They were employed by the Prison Service to staff Medomsley at night, patrolling the housing blocks while trainees slept. They were assisted by a disciplinary officer who was based in the gatehouse at night.

There was also a female auxiliary staff member who worked as the in-house seamstress, working regular hours from Monday to Friday.

Management board

Medomsley had a management board which included the senior staff in both prison grade and civilian roles. They were supposed to meet to discuss all areas of the detention centre and spread news and updates received through Circular Instructions and standing orders. The board was made up of:

- the warden
- chief officer
- admin officer
- senior works officer
- seconded social worker or probation officer
- education officer
- part-time medical officer
- part-time prison chaplain

The part-time medical officer was a qualified doctor who was a partner at a local GP practice. He was expected to attend Medomsley to examine new arrivals and any trainees who reported sick. The senior medical officer was based at HMP Durham and had only occasional involvement but would provide oversight over the medical provision at Medomsley. The hospital officer was a disciplinary officer with a specialty in medical care and would be responsible for holding a 'sick parade' at the start of the day and attending to minor illnesses.

Prison Officer's Association (POA)

The POA was the body representing prison staff. There is strong evidence that most staff at Medomsley were members of the POA except for the warden, who, as a governor grade, was the only person who could not become a member.

The Board of Visitors

The role of the Board of Visitors was set out in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules. They were created as a formal mechanism to ensure the proper administration of prisons which

had been used in England since the Prison Act of 1898.¹³ Their responsibility was to hear and adjudicate on offences by trainees that were referred to them. They were meant to hear and investigate any application trainees made to them and to inspect the centre's food, literature and buildings.

They were independent of prison staff and were respected members of the community, such as magistrates, who were nominated for appointments by wardens and the chair of the board.

Rule 101 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules stipulated they should meet at least once a month to discharge their functions, and should frequently visit and inspect the centre, where they were given free access. They were instructed to bring all abuses to the notice of the commissioners immediately and in cases of 'urgent necessity' could suspend an officer pending the decision of the commissioner.

Detention Centre Rules

The rules which governed the operation of detention centres such as Medomsley were set out in the Detention Centre Rules 1952, which were later revised in 1983. These rules covered the reception process, accommodation, searching of trainees, diet, sickness, discipline and control of trainees, offences by trainees, use of force and restraints, complaints by trainees, and the reporting of offences by trainees.

In relation to the treatment of trainees, the most pertinent rules have been highlighted.

Rule 90 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules stated that: **"Every officer shall at once communicate to the warden any abuses or impropriety which may come to his knowledge."**

In relation to the use of force, Rule 25 stated: **"No officer in dealing with trainees shall use force unnecessarily and, when the application of force to an inmate is necessary, no more force than is necessary shall be used."**

"No officer shall deliberately act in a manner calculated to provoke an inmate."

The rules also stated that staff could not use trainees for **"private benefit"**.

On arrival, trainees should have been taken to the reception area at Medomsley. Prison officers were required to check that trainees were lawfully detained, take their personal possessions, including clothing, and search them. The rules stated that no trainee should be stripped in the presence of another trainee and that the searching of a trainee should be conducted in **"as seemly a manner as is consistent with the necessity of discovering any concealed article"**. They were then to be issued with detention centre clothing and bedding and usually allocated to a dormitory of 12 other trainees.

13 G Zellick (1977). Lay involvement in prison administration – the British Board of Visitors. Available online at: www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/lay-involvement-prison-administration-british-board-visitors

The rules specified that females could not have their hair cut without their consent, but males' hair could be cut as **“short as is necessary for good appearance”**.

Offences against discipline

The 1952 Detention Centre Rules stated that offences against discipline by trainees should be dealt with by the warden, or any officer who the warden had deputised to act for him.¹⁴

Offences against discipline by the trainees were not defined until the 1983 version of the Detention Centre Rules, when they were listed in Rule 50. In summary, offences by trainees were mutiny, or inciting others to mutiny, assault on another trainee or officer, absconding, possession of unauthorised articles, damaging the centre, using abusive or indecent language, treating officers with disrespect, making **“groundless complaints”**, or in any way offending **“against the good order of discipline”**.

The rules set out that every offence by a trainee should be reported and investigated by the warden. When being reported for offences, trainees were meant to be informed of the offence for which they had been reported and given a proper opportunity to hear the facts alleged against them and present their case.

Trainees could be punished by the warden or Board of Visitors, and penalties for offences included a caution, demotion in their grade, extra work, removal and confinement to a detention room, stoppage of payments for work, a restricted diet (this was later removed in the 1983 Detention Centre Rules) and losing their remission. The warden had the power to refer more serious cases of offending to the Board of Visitors after investigation, which was able to hand down more severe punishments to trainees.

In relation to trainees being punished by confinement to a detention room, this was not supposed to be done unless a medical officer had certified the trainee was in a fit condition of health. Every trainee undergoing confinement should have been visited at least once a day by the warden and the medical officer and at intervals of no more than three hours during the day by a prison officer.

The Code of Discipline for prison officers

The Code of Discipline for prison officers 1963 contains the rules governing behaviour by prison officers.¹⁵ It relates to offences against discipline such as discreditable conduct, insubordination, disobedience, neglect of duty, trafficking, corruption, absence without reasonable excuse, and the unlawful and unnecessary exercise of authority. The key sections relating to the treatment of prisons are:

¹⁴ 1952 Detention Centre Rules, Rule 23

¹⁵ Code of Discipline for prison officers 1963

Section IV – neglect of duty, if any officer:

- a) neglects, or without good and sufficient cause fails, promptly and diligently to do anything which is his duty as a prison officer to do
- b) by carelessness or neglect contributes to the escape of a prisoner
- c) by carelessness or neglect in the course of his duty contributes to the occurrence of any loss, damage or injury to any person or property

Section VIII – improper relations with prisoners or ex-prisoners which prohibits:

- a) communicating with a prisoner for an improper purpose
- b) using obscene, insulting or abusive language
- c) allowing any undue familiarity between a prisoner and himself or any servant of the prison
- d) knowing and without proper authority communicating with any ex-prisoner or with a friend or relative of any prisoner
- e) discussing his duties or any matters of discipline or prison arrangement within the hearing of a prisoner
- f) employing an ex-prisoner

Section XI – the unlawful or unnecessary exercise of authority by a prison officer, if they:

- a) deliberately act in a manner calculated to provoke a prisoner
- b) in dealing with a prisoner, use force unnecessarily or, where the application of force is necessary, use undue force

Officers were required to carry out an initial assessment of the trainee's educational and physical ability. Trainees of compulsory school age were expected to attend lessons for 15 hours per week and those with poor literacy skills were to attend classes deemed appropriate for their specific needs. If a trainee could not read or struggled to understand the information regarding his rights, an officer or the warden was supposed to explain the information to them to ensure they understood. Compulsory evening classes for all trainees were intended to focus on life skills such as childcare classes.

The rules stated that trainees should be interviewed by the head of the detention centre, the warden, as soon as possible after they were received at reception. The 1952 Detention Centre Rules stated that the warden was supposed to ensure that every trainee received a **“careful explanation”** of the Detention Centre Rules, the disciplinary requirements and activities of the centre, and the proper methods of making complaints.¹⁶ A further interview with the warden was expected to take place before their release or removal to another institution.¹⁷

16 1952 Detention Centre Rules, Rule 14

17 1952 Detention Centre Rules, Rule 17

Trainees were also expected to receive a medical examination immediately or within 24 hours of them arriving at the centre to record the state of their health and ensure they were physically capable of undertaking the regime. A further medical examination was meant to take place before a trainee was released or removed to another location.

The 1952 and 1983 Detention Centre Rules allowed for the grading of trainees. Medomsley operated a grading system based on the colour of ties given to trainees. All trainees entered Medomsley as grade 1 and were given blue ties. Trainees could then be promoted to grade 2 for good conduct and were awarded green ties. They could then be awarded red ties which was the highest status and were given extra privileges such as unsupervised movement around the centre.

Trainees were entitled to remission through good behaviour. Initially, this was usually no more than one-sixth of their sentence but from 1968, this was increased to one-third of their sentence.

Full copies of the Detention Centre Rules 1952 and 1983 can be found linked at Appendix D and E.

The complaints procedure

Complaints by trainees had to be made in writing by the trainee and put forward to the warden, who was expected to hear the applications on a daily basis and to forward any requests from trainees who wanted to see the Board of Visitors to them. These included complaints raised with a trainee's legal advisor or an MP.

Before a trainee could make a written complaint, the following warning had to be given to them by staff.

"If you wish to make a complaint against an officer, I shall hear it, and it will be fully investigated. You know that it is an offence against prison/borstal discipline to make false and malicious allegations against an officer. You should carefully consider whether you wish your complaint to go forward, and if you do you should make a full written statement, giving the names of any witnesses you wish to call."¹⁸

Circular Instructions 88 of 1961 set out procedures for when a trainee made an allegation against a member of staff. The instruction said that it was an **"offence against discipline for an inmate to make a false and malicious complaint against an officer"**.

If a trainee made a complaint via a letter, the rules stated that the letter had to be stopped, and the recipient written to by the warden explaining why.¹⁹ If a trainee made a complaint during an interview with a legal advisor, the officer was meant to intervene and state that the proper procedure needed to be followed.²⁰ If complaints were raised during

¹⁸ Operation Deerness investigation material

¹⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

a visit by a friend or family member, the officer was also supposed to intervene, and if necessary, terminate the visit.²¹

The daily routine

Trainees were ‘unlocked’ at 6:30am to 7am and immediately required to run around the perimeter of the compound fence before washing and shaving.

Breakfast was served at 7:45am, and from 8:30am until lunchtime at 12:30pm, trainees were expected to engage in assigned work duties. Trainees were paid for this work, and those who worked longer could be paid slightly extra. These payments were made in cash, and no more than one-and-a-half weeks’ earnings were meant to be held in possession. There was also a scheme for trainees who wanted to save this money.

Allocation of work

Rule 44 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules specified that the normal working week for trainees was 44 hours unless they were of compulsory school age.

The process to select trainees to work parties was not specified in the rules. The rules stated that the medical officer had to review each trainee to advise on whether he was fit to undertake certain work and certify them accordingly.

Work positions that could be assigned to the trainees were as follows:

- orderlies were chosen to be part of a department to assist the officers and civilian workers
- cleaners were assigned to the dormitories, gym, reception, gates and hallways to scrub and clean
- kitchen workers were assigned to the kitchen to work seven days a week to keep the staff and trainees fed
- trade workers such as painters or mechanics worked alongside officers and civilian workers to upkeep and maintain the site
- net making
- trainees assigned to the garden parties would either maintain the grounds and gardens, operate the market gardens, or plant and clear fields

After lunch, trainees resumed work from 1:30pm until 4:30pm, followed by showers and dinner at 5pm.

²¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

Physical education instruction (PEI)

PEI was an integral part of the detention centre regime, and it was mandatory for trainees to undergo one hour of physical activity or organised games per day.

PEI training was meant to run opposite the trainee's work detail, so those who worked in the morning would attend the gym in the afternoon and vice versa. No trainee was supposed to undertake PEI training unless certified as fit to do so by the medical officer, who also had the power to excuse them on medical grounds. Individual remedial exercise records were also meant to be maintained for each trainee.

The physical education staff included a senior officer PEI and one additional officer PEI, neither of whom performed disciplinary duties. Training activities included badminton, basketball, gymnastics, football, trampolining, volleyball and weight training. For higher-grade trainees, swimming at a local pool was allowed.

Voluntary evening PEI classes were held in co-operation with the education department, allowing high-grade trainees to attend PEI club nights and choose their preferred activities. At the weekend, sports activities took place in the afternoon, and all trainees were expected to take part. Occasionally, competitive matches with outside visiting teams also took place.

Education and rehabilitation

All trainees were meant to take part in compulsory education classes from 5:45pm to 8pm, with a supper break in between. Education was managed by Durham Local Education Authority. Full-time educators, supplemented by up to 15 part-time teachers, provided instruction in various subjects, with the intention of preparing trainees for reintegration into civilian life and the wider workforce.

Recreation

Recreation was scheduled from 7:45pm to 9pm on weekdays and followed similar timings on weekends. Facilities included dart boards, pool and table tennis tables, televisions, and a library managed by a discipline officer.

Weekend routine and religious services

On weekends, religious services were held and trainees attended church based on their stated religious beliefs.

Visits

Trainees were entitled to receive visits from family and friends during set visiting times, usually on a weekend once a month. Visits occurred from 1:30pm to 3:30pm, where trainees were supposed to be given 30-minute supervised slots to speak with visitors.

Letters

Rule 60 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules outlined that trainees were entitled to send one letter on arrival at Medomsley and then one letter every two weeks after that. In 1972 these rules were amended, increasing the entitlement to one letter each week. The warden had authority to allow additional letters to be sent in certain circumstances, or to allow a letter to be sent in lieu of a missed visit.

Letters were censored by prison staff, and it was within the discretion of the warden or his deputy to stop any letter on the grounds that its contents were “**objectionable**” or if it was of “**inordinate length**”.

Off-site trips

While serving their sentences at Medomsley, there were a variety of reasons for which trainees could be allowed to travel off-site, with or without supervision. These included community volunteering, sports outings, hiking, medical appointments or home leave.

The process of taking trainees out of Medomsley was meant to start with a request to the warden, chief officer or principal officer. If approved, the trainee would receive a gate pass from the gatehouse. When leaving the centre, staff escorting any trainees were expected to go through the gatehouse to show the gate pass, and to log the details of when and where they were going in the logbook. The gate officer would be responsible for checking this had been completed before releasing a trainee.

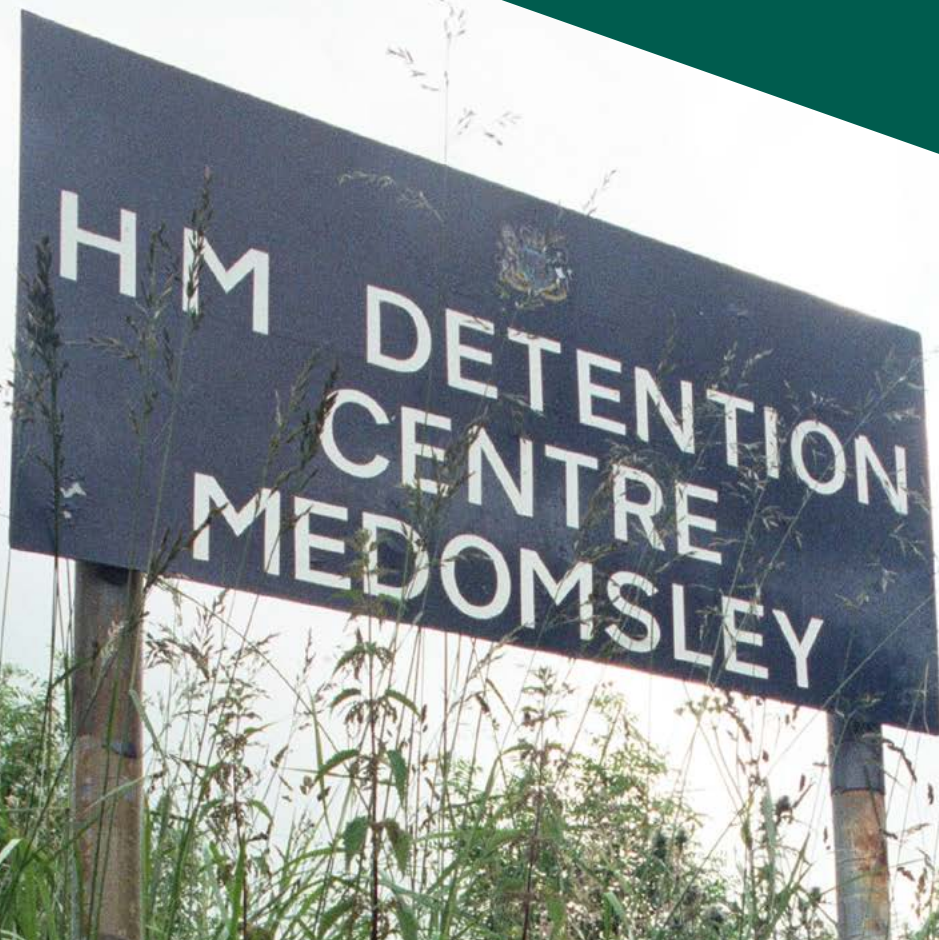
For longer excursions which lasted more than two days, such as camping trips, approval was supposed to be given by the head office and the name of every trainee participating provided to the regional director.

The Prison Governor’s Handbook stated that only trainees who have served at least six weeks of a three-month sentence, or 10 weeks of a six-month sentence, should usually be granted permission to attend an off-site activity.²²

22 Ministry of Justice library: The Prison Governor’s Handbook

Part 2: Experiences

**Experiences of abuse –
what actually happened?**



Warning: Part 2 contains graphic descriptions of physical, sexual and psychological abuse in the words of victims and may be extremely distressing to read.

The content in this part is drawn from the material held by Durham Constabulary from their three investigations, Operation Halter 1, Operation Halter 2 and Operation Seabrook, as well as from interviews completed by the PPO during the course of this investigation. The focus is predominantly on victim accounts, but some material from former staff and third parties is included.

The purpose of this part of the report is to provide an overall picture of the accounts provided to the police of abuse which took place at Medomsley. There have been three police investigations to date, and a number of trials where former prison officers were convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

That serious sexual and physical abuse took place at Medomsley is a matter of fact.

Disclaimer

This collation exercise was not an investigation into the facts of the abuse, nor of individual incidents, as this was not within our terms of reference. It was therefore not necessary or appropriate to test the accounts provided to police, though some have been tested evidentially by virtue of the criminal prosecutions which have taken place.

Some of the accounts of abuse contained in this part of the report were the subject of criminal investigation. However, not all the abuse alleged by victims could be prosecuted for a number of reasons, including a lack of evidence and existing records, the health of victims, the health of individuals being investigated, or where people suspected of offences had died. Crown Prosecution Service policy was not to provide charging advice in relation to people who had died.²³

This part cannot provide a definitive account of what happened, and it should be noted that, in describing what happened at Medomsley, there was no single universal experience for trainees. Some experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse or psychological abuse, and some suffered all three. Some victims reported positive experiences while at Medomsley, and their experiences are also sampled.

The victim testimonies that follow reflect a fraction of the documented victim accounts and it would be difficult to capture every single experience, but common themes in accounts have been highlighted.

The names of all the trainees have been removed, as have any details that could possibly identify them. Neville Husband and Leslie Johnston are named as they were convicted in court for sexual offences and have both now died. The names of former prison officers have also been removed.

23 Crown Prosecution Service. Section 37B in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Available online at: www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/deceased-suspects-cps-policy-charging-decisions

The conviction of the former officers from Operation Seabrook is a matter of public record. But a decision was taken that naming them in relation to offences that occurred, in some cases over 50 years ago, was not necessary and did not affect the content or conclusions of this report.

Most of the former prison officers who worked at Medomsley dispute much of what is contained in the victim accounts provided to Operation Seabrook, particularly concerning allegations of physical abuse. Many former prison officers now accept that sexual abuse took place at Medomsley. However, they state that they had no direct knowledge of this during the relevant period. There is evidence that some staff suspected or were aware of the sexual abuse of trainees, which is explored fully in part 3 of this report. Up to August 2024, the Government Legal Department received 2,831 claims alleging sexual and/or physical abuse at Medomsley.

Material from the police investigations

Investigations by Durham Constabulary between 2001 and 2023 identified that widespread physical and sexual abuse of over 2,000 trainees occurred at Medomsley. The three Durham Constabulary investigations are outlined below.

Operation Halter 1 – began in 2001 and resulted in the conviction of Neville Husband in February 2003 for 11 sexual offences against six victims. This included one count of indecent assault, one count of buggery and nine counts of sexual assault. Husband was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.²⁴

Operation Halter 2 – began in 2003 and resulted in the further conviction of Neville Husband in September 2005 for four further offences: three counts of buggery and one count of indecent assault. The investigation involved a further six victims. The total number of charges against Neville Husband arising from Operations Halter 1 and 2 was 27 offences.²⁵ In total, 24 victims came forward during the period of Operations Halter 1 and 2.²⁶

Operation Seabrook – began in August 2013 and 2,077 victims came forward to Durham Constabulary.²⁷

The aims of Operation Seabrook were to:

- ensure support was provided for victims
- gain a full understanding of how Medomsley operated during the period of its operation
- secure evidence against potential offenders so they could be brought to justice

²⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁵ Operation Deerness investigation material

²⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

The enquiries completed by Operation Seabrook established that widespread and serious physical and sexual abuse of trainees took place throughout the period that Medomsley was in operation. The investigation resulted in the convictions of five former members of staff being convicted of misconduct in a public office.

As a result of the investigation, nine people were charged. However, trials only proceeded against eight defendants due to one defendant dying before trial. One member of staff was found not fit to plead by the court, but following a finding of fact hearing, was found to have committed the acts alleged which amounted to the offences of misconduct in a public office and indecent assault. Two were additionally convicted of assaults which ranged from actual bodily harm to grievous bodily harm. One member of staff was convicted of indecent assault.²⁸

The amount of material held by these three Durham Constabulary investigations is significant. Operation Seabrook is the largest institutional enquiry recorded to date within the UK, and as such there are over 20,000 items of material consisting of witness statements, officer reports, interviews, other documents, exhibits, actions and messages.²⁹

Due to this high volume, an investigative decision was taken to review all statements, interviews and messages and to identify officer reports and documents that detailed any sexual assault and any serious physical assault. The document review was based on a similar methodology but there was an added emphasis in identifying material which would help us inform several investigative strands. Further information on this can be found in Appendix A.

The review of victim statements and officer reports provided the PPO with a significant body of 1,459 accounts of abuse, which allowed the investigation to come to a reasonable assessment of the evidence.

How complaints were handled

In order to complain about physical or sexual abuse, trainees had to submit an official complaint in writing to staff. In many cases, this meant they had to complain to the people responsible for their abuse, and many were too frightened to do this.

When trainees tried to complain about physical or sexual abuse to staff, they were either ignored, disbelieved, threatened not to report abuse or themselves reported for spurious offences. This left them powerless to make the abuse stop.

“It made me realise that there wasn’t anyone there that I could complain to because the staff could do as they wanted.”³⁰

28 Operation Deerness investigation material

29 Operation Deerness investigation material

30 Operation Seabrook closed material

“You quickly learnt to do what you were told and if you didn’t you would feel the full force of the officers. You never complained, it was futile, because moaning, complaining would just result in another assault.”³¹

“I did try and tell one of the officers about what had happened, but I was told that nobody would believe me and that I was lying.”³²

Added to this, trainees would first be given a formal warning that if their complaint was not upheld, it could result in them losing remission and spending longer in Medomsley. Often the threat made by prison staff involved trainees being told that if they disclosed abuse, they would be brought back to Medomsley and would serve a longer sentence.³³

Other trainees were threatened with further violence if they reported abuse.

“[The prison officer] threatened me. Like, he’s basically said if I’m gonna do all this paperwork and you come back like you’re definitely going to get beaten up every day.”³⁴

The effectiveness of the complaints process is explored further in part 4.

Physical abuse

The following examples showcase the numerous themes of physical abuse at Medomsley, containing real accounts from victims.

Reputation of Medomsley

Victim accounts indicate that many trainees were told about Medomsley’s harsh reputation before arriving there. Some were warned by court staff, solicitors, friends or police officers that the regime at Medomsley was strict and violent. The tough nature of the regime at Medomsley was well-known in the surrounding area.

“I recall being in the cells at Teesside, a woman jailor told me to smoke all my cigarettes whilst I could and to say ‘Sir’ to everybody when I got to Medomsley.”³⁵

“I recall being sentenced in the court then being held in a holding cage at Bridewell with some other lads that had been sentenced that day. I spoke to other lads in the Bridewell and told them of my sentence, they told me that I’d be in for a short, sharp shock, and I’d be knocked about every day.”³⁶

“I was taken downstairs to the cells at the court where an older lad told me that he felt sorry for me to be going to Medomsley and that they would kill me in there.”³⁷

31 Operation Seabrook closed material

32 Operation Seabrook closed material

33 Operation Seabrook closed material

34 Operation Deerness investigation material

35 Operation Seabrook closed material

36 Operation Seabrook closed material

37 Operation Seabrook closed material

There are numerous accounts that refer to police officers transporting trainees to Medomsley warning of the need to refer to prison officers at Medomsley as ‘Sir’ at all times, and that trainees might be subjected to violence.

“Before even going into Medomsley, the police officers who transported me warned me about the place, they told me that I must call the officers ‘Sir’. As soon as the police left, I was made to stand to attention whilst being booked in. I then was assaulted by an officer. This officer then banged my head off the wall in the reception, which caused me to drop to the floor. The officer then dragged me up by the scruff of the neck stating, ‘Did I tell you, you could sit down.’ This was my introduction to Medomsley. It certainly didn’t get any better.”³⁸

“The police officers were male. I recall little about them. I do recall them warning me that I’d better watch my behaviour when I got to the detention centre. They told me to address officers as ‘Sir’ and basically don’t be cheeky or you’ll get ‘hit’. I’d previously heard rumours that it was a harsh place. I knew I was in for a rough ride.”³⁹

“I was transported from court to Medomsley Detention Centre in a car escorted by two retired police officers and they warned me to call all of the officers ‘Sir’. They stopped at the top of the drive and gave me a cigarette. I have a feeling they knew what was going to happen to me because they were saying that I needed to be careful and that it was best not to say anything. They said keep quiet and keep your head down.”⁴⁰

Some of the trainees had previous experience being on remand or in adult prisons such as HMP Durham, and therefore had some frame of reference about custodial life.

“I had spent some time on remand in Low Newton Durham and whilst there I was told about Medomsley. People told horrific stories about the place which I believed was to scare you. People talked about the violence in Medomsley but again I didn’t believe it.”⁴¹

Other trainees were considerably younger and had never experienced being away from home for a single night, let alone for three or six months.

It is apparent that Medomsley sometimes held young people who were aged under 17. This was usually because nearby junior youth detention centres were full. The youngest known young person we identified at Medomsley was 14.⁴²

Arrival at Medomsley

Many victim accounts document that arbitrary violence by prison officers began as soon as they entered Medomsley’s gates.

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“On the first day I was taken to the centre by two police officers, a male and a female officer. We had gone through the gates in the police van and we all got out. An officer came from the gatehouse... he came straight up to me and punched me in the stomach. This resulted in me being winded. This was like my introduction to what went on in Medomsley at the hands of the prison officers. When I was punched, the police officers looked quite shocked and one of them said something to intervene and stopped [the prison officer] doing more.”⁴³

“I can remember going through the gates at Medomsley, I was wearing handcuffs. I remember the gates closing behind me and then there were lots of people shouting orders at me. I was being shouted at and told to ‘quick march left right’. I had no experience of marching and really didn’t know what was going on, so I did not immediately start to march as instructed. The next thing I knew I was on the ground, and I was being kicked to bits by a prison officer... This first assault occurred just inside the gates of Medomsley and within seconds of me arriving there.”⁴⁴

“I remember... there was a walkway outside to the reception door and just before we got to the reception door the prison officer punched me straight in the face so that I fell to the floor. I was still handcuffed to the police officer, and he lifted his arm up to stand me up from the floor and took me to the reception. The prison officer told him to take off the handcuffs when we got to reception and [the police officer] left the prison after paperwork was exchanged.”⁴⁵

Reception

The reception area was the first place trainees were taken to. Victim accounts consistently describe the abusive language, threats and assaults that occurred during the reception procedures.

The reception area was usually staffed by at least two prison officers and an orderly, and trainees were told to line up and stand to attention before being booked in. Victims describe being shouted and screamed at and physically assaulted, either for no reason, or for not calling prison officers ‘Sir’ when responding to questions, or other minor incidents such as placing their hands in their pockets.

These assaults included:

- being slapped with an open hand across the face or head
- being kicked in the leg
- being punched in the stomach and/or face with a clenched fist, knocked to the floor and held down with a boot in their faces or kicked while on the ground
- being headbutted in the face

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- having their heads banged into the wall
- being pushed or dragged around by the scruff of the neck or their hair

“We were stood in a line, and the two police officers were still present. There was a prison officer there. He said to me ‘name’. I replied... He said to me again quite firmly ‘name’. I thought he must want my full name, so I replied... He then punched me with a clenched fist straight into my face connecting with my mouth and causing my lip and gum to bleed. He then came right into my face, so his face was nearly touching mine. He began to shout at me saying, ‘Here in Medomsley you will call all officers Sir.’ I was stunned and shocked. I looked towards the police officers for help, but they just looked back at me.”⁴⁶

“When I got to Medomsley the copper took me to the booking-in area where there were three prison officers or ‘screws’ as I call them. It was just a small room with a desk in and I walked inside and stood in front of the desk, not really knowing what to expect. I was stood with my hands in my pockets. Suddenly and without warning one of the screws punched me hard straight in the side of my face. I immediately felt great pain and I thought he had broken my jaw he hit me so hard. I remember he said, ‘Never put your hands in your pockets.’ I was not expecting the punch and was both angry and shocked by what he did. I had literally only been there minutes and hadn’t done anything apart from have my hands in my pockets.”⁴⁷

“As soon as we were in reception [the two officers] just started kicking us and slapping us about the head. They were right into our faces shouting and yelling. They were shouting, ‘Stand to attention you fucking scum.’ They yelled, ‘Take your fucking clothes off and put them in the bag.’ We did as we were told and stripped off our clothes and put them in the bag and we just stood to attention completely naked. I was physically shivering not just from the cold but also because I was so frightened as I couldn’t comprehend what was happening. I just found it unbelievable why we were been treated the way we were as we hadn’t done anything.”⁴⁸

“We were taken to the reception area and were lined up. A prison officer walked along the line. When he got to me, he suddenly punched me full force in the face knocking me off my feet and as I fell to the ground he punched me full force in the stomach. This was a totally unprovoked assault on me causing me a bloodied nose and winded me. As I was on the ground the officer was saying to the other lads that this was what they would all get. I was a young lad, 17 years old and was so shocked by this.”⁴⁹

Many victims received injuries from these assaults, such as bleeding and bruising, which were not treated.

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Of the sample selection of 1,459 documented victim accounts, 887 involved accounts of physical violence during the reception procedures. It is reasonable to conclude that this violence was embedded in the culture and practice of the reception process.

Strip searching

Rule 8 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules stated that trainees should not be stripped in the presence of another trainee and that the search should be conducted in as decent a manner as possible.

Victim accounts show that trainees were made to strip in front of each other and/or to stand naked for varying periods in the reception area or during their medical examinations.

“Upon reception, I was stripped naked and stood in the centre of a room as three uniformed officers ridiculed me. They pointed and joked at my penis and told me that I was a pathetic excuse for a boy. When asked what I had been sentenced for I replied that it was for assault. They said that it couldn’t be true because I was so pathetically thin so it must have been for theft. They forced me into a bath of really hot water as they repeatedly called me a liar and a common thief. At that time, I received several slaps around my head and ears and had my face bashed into a wall.”⁵⁰

“They put you in an inch of water and you had to get washed with other people right next to you. They stripped you off, me and two lads together. They went up and down our bodies with a ruler and whacked your private parts with a stick and a ruler. They went behind you and started whacking your bum with a stick. It was just so degrading.”⁵¹

“I was stripped in front of the three to four prison officers and was made to have a shower or bath. After the shower I think they deloused me as they sprinkled some powder over my head and body, and I was made to stand to attention in front of the officers.”⁵²

Offending by medical staff

Some trainees admitted to the medical centre reported mistreatment by medical staff. Some alleged they were hit, and others reported sexual abuse including rape.

“I was treated at Shotley then sent to [Medomsley] sick bay which was ran by one of the most evil men I have ever met [prison officer]. I was in the sick bay for about one week, during this time I saw [prison officer] just physically and mentally abuse lads that were in there, including me.

He was no type of doctor, it didn’t matter what you were in there for, he would just scream and shout at you or hit you with his baton. It made no difference that you were sick, you still had to get up at the same time as the other inmates in there, [prison

⁵⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁵¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

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officer] would come along on his rounds and just punch you whilst you were sat in bed. I could hear him hitting other lads in the bay.

I was sat in the chair one day when I hear screaming coming from outside. I looked out of the window and saw that it was the lad from the showers that had been slashed up, he was stood on the roof outside and threatening to jump off, he was distraught, he just looked like he had completely lost it. He was screaming and shouting and threatening to jump. The wardens were trying to get him down by saying that he was going to ‘get it’ when he came down. I saw [the hospital officer] turn up, he was furious, he started shouting at the lad on the roof, he was screaming at him ‘get the fuck down of the roof or jump, you’ll do less damage than when you get down here’.

[The hospital officer] was a psychopath, his attitude and behaviour towards patients was unbelievable. He took advantage of the ill, I remember one occasion when I was sat on my bed rather than in the chair and he came in with a warden’s baton and just struck me on the shins with it.

It was actually a relief to get out of hospital. I was apprehensive the whole time I was in there.”⁵³

The number of trainees who reported physical and sexual assaults between 1961 and 1987 committed by medical centre staff is relatively small comparatively. These account for about 1% of the total number of complainants who contacted Operation Seabrook.

Medical examinations of trainees

Many victims described their experiences of being seen by a doctor on their arrival at Medomsley. Their accounts detail that excessive force was frequently used during the medical examination – for example, during the taking of nose and mouth swabs which was often painful for trainees.

“He started taking nasal swabs from me, the ‘Doc’ forced a swab up into my nostril with such force that it caused my nose to bleed, and I could feel excruciating pain. The ‘Doc’ told me the swab had not worked, and he proceeded to do the same procedure again in the other nostril, he again did this with great force. The swab used by the ‘Doc’ snapped on both examinations.”⁵⁴

“I don’t think he was a doctor, he was a prison guard... I remember that he was using a swab which consisted of a 10-inch-long cotton bud. He was really rough when he put the nasal swab up my nose and I grabbed his wrist because he was hurting me. As a result of grabbing his wrist, he shouted at me ‘I will fucking ram this thing through your brain’, and he said this in a violent manner.”⁵⁵

Other victims describe how the medical examination was intimidating, and the staff were largely unsympathetic.

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“Myself and my fellow inmates were marched in front of a doctor in a different room. The doctor asked us individually our names, dates of birth and if we had any medical issues. I told the doctor that I suffered from asthma and that I took medication in the form of a Ventolin inhaler. The doctor moved down the line and eventually spoke to my friend. When questioned, he got his date of birth wrong. I can’t recall what he said but the doctor went crazy. He leaned on the desk and screamed ‘You’re fucking three years old then!’ The doctor asked him if he had medical issues. He replied he had asthma but couldn’t name his medication. In response the doctor simply dismissed him and sent him away without anything. I was given a Ventolin inhaler. The doctor fumed at my friend and told him ‘I’m going to make it fucking very hard for you in here!’ The whole thing made me feel sick. I thought if that’s the doctor what’s the rest of the staff going to be like.”⁵⁶

Other victims describe how parts of the medical examination were degrading and unnecessarily invasive.

“The next thing I recall was to complete providing my personal details and I was then taken to a room where I was stripped searched... During this procedure one of the prison officers put on a rubber glove and during the supposed search stuck his finger up my anus, he also fondled my testicles; I know now this was not how a medical examination or strip search was to be done. He said something similar to, ‘We have a nice one here, nice and tight.’”⁵⁷

Medical treatment of trainees

During the earlier years of operation from 1961 to the mid-1970s, there is some evidence that trainees were mistreated by medical staff both during reception and when attending the medical centre. This included complaints by trainees that their health concerns were often dismissed by the hospital officer who was a prison officer with some medical training. Some said that he was as abusive as the prison officers.

Numerous victim accounts detail that trainees seeking medical attention for common medical issues such as headaches or flu were ignored, dismissed or subjected to humiliation.

One common theme emerging from numerous victim accounts is that after complaining of feeling unwell to the medical officer, trainees would be given an aspirin which was taped to their forehead or other body part, and they were told to run around until the aspirin had melted.

“The medical officer asked me what was wrong, and I said that I had the flu. He then told me that I had ‘wanker’s disease’. He stuck a paracetamol to my head with an Elastoplast and made me run around in the snow until the paracetamol melted. I had flu and that didn’t do me any good.”⁵⁸

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“I remember suffering from headaches as a result of the assaults by [prison officer]. I visited the doctor at Medomsley and told him about my headaches. His response was to sellotape a tablet to my forehead and then made me run around the exercise yard until it melted. The other prison officers just laughed at me. It was pure enjoyment to them to see me humiliated in this way.”⁵⁹

Other trainees who had received injuries as a result of assaults by staff or work-related accidents did not receive adequate treatment for injuries and many of these injuries deteriorated and later required medical treatment at hospital.

“The doctor looked at my finger and straight away said that it was poison. I told him that it was killing me. The doctor didn’t do anything for me, despite diagnosing it as poison. I went back to work in the kitchen, but the pain was agony, it was so intense and throbbing getting worse. I went back to see the doctor again, as I couldn’t stand it. The medic was the same officer who walked the lad into the wall on my first day in Medomsley. My finger was now black and yellow and was extending downwards towards my palm. This time he put a cylindrical tube of stainless steel around my finger with a bandage, which made it much more comfortable. I couldn’t touch anything, the pain was so bad. In the kitchen, I was moved to the dishwashing area. After a week I went back to get it re-dressed, but it was so black and yellow and swollen, and I was in such pain that the doctor decided to send me to hospital. I went to Shotley Bridge Hospital for treatment. As soon as the hospital doctor saw the extent of my injury, he queried with the prison doctor why he had not admitted me before now, as it was so bad. He said it was so bad, that they might have to amputate my finger. This doctor put me on some treatment, but advised me that if it didn’t work, he would have to amputate.”⁶⁰

Many victim accounts detail that their presence at the sick bay was often viewed with suspicion and there was a lack of a caring ‘bedside manner’.

“On one occasion whilst in Medomsley I was very poorly and I had tonsillitis. I had been to the sick bay three days in a row but was kept getting sent to work. On one of the days I went to work in the kitchens. I was feeling really ill and must have looked unwell.”⁶¹

PEI was a common site of injury and illness, and many victims described receiving poor treatment after becoming unwell.

One trainee described how he had become unwell during a fence run. He was punched by an officer for lagging behind. After the run he went to the toilets where he vomited and collapsed. He was taken to the recreation room by a prison officer and a doctor was called.

“He [the doctor] went into the toilets where I had been sick then came back into the room and told the guard he thought I was faking it. I was really poorly by now and

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drifting in and out, not really knowing what was happening... I was given a potty like the kids have and then started to be sick again. I was sick into the potty and then the doctor shouted for an ambulance to be called immediately. I didn't know where I was by now and just remember being in the back of an ambulance being taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital. I remember waking up in Shotley Bridge Hospital handcuffed to a bed with a nurse asking if I was dangerous."

The trainee said he was in hospital for a week before he had his appendix taken out.

"A couple of days later the doctor told me that my appendix were OK and they now suspected I might have an ulcer and I would get some further treatment for that at a later date. I never told anyone in the hospital that I had been hit because I knew I was going back to MDC (Medomsley Detention Centre) and was terrified what would happen."⁶²

Another describes a lengthy wait for treatment following a serious injury.

"There was an occasion that I had been asked to play for the football team. We were training, I think that it was a Saturday and was about lunch time. Whilst playing football I ended up accidentally breaking my leg. I was in absolute agony. It was obvious when you looked at my leg that it was broken. I was taken to the hospital wing and left in a room. I must have been there for about five hours in severe pain without any medical attention before the ambulance arrived and I was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital. I ended up requiring surgery to my leg as it was broken so badly."⁶³

One diabetic trainee describes how he was so concerned about having a hypo attack during circuit training he lied about his insulin dosage so that his blood sugar would be high. He then describes the poor treatment he suffered by officers escorting him to a hospital appointment.

"I am a diabetic and the powers that be had ordered that I attend a hospital for a quick check-up. I deliberately lied about my insulin dosage and took less than I was supposed to take which drove my blood sugar levels up throughout my time in there. This was to prevent a hypo attack (low blood sugar and diabetic coma). I was aware that the higher my blood sugar became then I ran the risk of long-term damage but my concern was at the time was the here and now and I knew what I was doing, and I would have gone hypo on the first morning during circuit training if I hadn't allowed my blood sugar to go high.

I had to go to Shotley Bridge Hospital for the check-up. An officer drove and an officer sat in the back of the car with me on my left. My right hand was cuffed to his left hand... As the car stopped outside of a walk-in outpatient centre at the hospital and in front of many horrified witnesses he opened the door, jumped out still cuffed to me and dragged me across the back seat and out onto the pavement. The only thing that made

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the intense pain feel better was the disgusted look on the faces of people outside the hospital.”⁶⁴

Bathing

Many victims described being made to get into a cold bath with about two inches of cold water in it. Others reported being made to bathe in scorching hot water.

“We were then marched one by one into another room and ordered to get in a bath of cold water. The officers were yelling, ‘Wash yourself you dirty little bastard.’”⁶⁵

“It was clear as soon as I got to the centre that it was going to be very tough. On arrival I forgot to say ‘Sir’ and I was attacked being punched in the stomach. I bent over and was repeatedly hit again. I was forced into a hot bath. I couldn’t bear to sit down, and officers came and started hitting me and forced me by the shoulders into the water. It was so hot it was painful for hours afterwards.”⁶⁶

“I was ordered to get in the bath, the water was scalding hot, absolutely boiling hot, I screamed in pain and was told to immerse myself underwater. To this day I cannot have a hot bath. I got out of the bath and stood in the middle of the room naked dripping wet my skin was burning red and everyone in the room was laughing at me thinking it was funny. I remember the bath water had no chemicals in it and there was no soap to wash with. This was my initiation to Medomsley, it left me shocked and scared.”⁶⁷

“I was then ordered to strip and get into a big old white enamel bath that was in the middle of the room. The bath contained about three inches of warm water, and I was being watched by other prisoners and staff.”⁶⁸

Other trainees describe being taken to a shower room, told to strip naked, and then being hosed down by several prison officers. They found this humiliating and felt that the officers seemed to get some form of pleasure from doing this.⁶⁹

Hair

Rule 77 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules about hair specified that hair should be short and of good appearance. Many victims describe the hair cutting process as another form of humiliation, where all their hair was shaved off.

“About a month after I had been there, four prison guards pinned me down and shaved my hair off. I had long hair in those days, it was over my face, in a New Romantic style. I remember a screw was shouting at me one day and I didn’t see him. He said to me, ‘You didn’t see me cos you’ve got long hair did you. We will get rids of that.’ I said, ‘You

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can't make me cut my hair.' He said, 'Who fucking can't.' They handcuffed me to a chair and shaved my head, four of them, all taking turns, designing my hair. They all thought it was funny."⁷⁰

Assaults while being interviewed by the warden and acting warden

Some victims describe how they were assaulted while in the presence of the governor or warden during their introductory interviews at the centre. It should be noted that these interviews were supposed to be completed by the warden or his deputy and that these individuals would not be wearing uniforms, unlike the remainder of the prison officers.

"On arrival there I was seen in reception and was then told that I had to report to the governor. I was escorted to the governor's officer by two prison officers who stood at either side of me. The governor was seated. The governor asked for my name and when I answered without adding 'Sir', I was punched by both prison officers in the stomach. Both officers punched me once each. The governor witnessed this attack... He wore a suit as opposed to a uniform."⁷¹

"When I first got to Medomsley Detention Centre I had to stand with my hands behind my back and the governor said, 'What's your name?', to which I said... When I said that, this guard that was stood next to me punched me hard in the stomach so I bent over, doubled up. He said 'get up' and when I got up, he asked me for my name again and when I said... he punched me again in the stomach, so that I fell down again. When I got back up after getting myself back together, he said, 'You'll get your name right this fucking time won't you?'"⁷²

Comparisons to military training

The trainees experienced a strict military-style regime at Medomsley, which involved marching, inspections and tough physical training. This regime was accompanied by daily verbal and physical abuse. Trainees were often assaulted for no apparent reason.

"Every day was a military regime. You were required to march everywhere, call the officers 'Sir', and stand to attention. I expected discipline when I was there and accepted the above, however, what I did not expect was the daily brutality. You were regularly punched to the head, slapped, kicked up the backside and ragged about. Usually this was for no reason. Maybe you looked at a guard the wrong way or sometimes you had done nothing wrong. They were constantly shouting at you and threatening you."⁷³

"It was like a military regime and they were all or some of them were ex-soldiers and ex-military, you could tell by the way they went on making you march and line up. I believe I was personally picked on as my name is an Irish name and at the time it was the time

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of the Troubles in Ireland and I believe I was singled out because I was Irish. I am not saying that I was picked on more than others, but it didn't help that I was Irish.”⁷⁴

“The centre was ran like a military camp, everything was done at the double. The bed packs had to be perfectly packed and I didn't do that at first so it was thrown on the floor and I was thumped in the side by the officer. I can't remember who did this, basically digs into the ribs were dished out all day. You never knew when the next dig was coming but you could guarantee it was every day.”⁷⁵

“Life in Medomsley was very military in its regime. We marched everywhere, stood to attention and we had to keep our dormitories spotless and our beds folded neatly. It was a regular occurrence that prison officers slapped, punched or kicked inmates, generally because they had not done as they were told, but it could also be for no reason if they came to work in a bad mood.”⁷⁶

Assaults while cleaning

Most trainees were engaged in cleaning duties during the first couple of weeks of their detention at Medomsley before they were allocated to a work party.

Many trainees described being made to scrub floors, which were then deliberately marked by prison officers using their boots to make black marks. Many trainees experienced frequent assaults while cleaning floors in the form of slaps, punches and kicks.

“I remember being on my hands and knees scrubbing the floors with another inmate next to me using the ‘ChemCo’ paste that was priced pre-decimalisation, the stuff wrecked your hands and I remember complaining to the lad next to me about it. I hadn't realised a screw had come up behind me and was walking up towards me. I was scrubbing with my right hand and the officer stood on my hand with his right heel and twisted the heel around, this popped my fingernail off and it swelled up like it was broken. I shouted ‘what the fuck’, the officer then brought the same heel up and kicked me in the mouth with it; this burst my lip and cracked my upper front teeth right the way across the front of my mouth. My teeth didn't come out just cracked along the front. The officer never said a word and just walked off.”⁷⁷

“We had to wash and scrub the floors. We were given buffers which were bristles on a wooden pole that would swivel at the end. The officer... dragged his boot to scuff the floor I had cleaned. In response I think I sighed or ‘tut’ under my breath. [The officer] spun round used the buffer to strike me in my left-hand side, around my kidney area; he then kicked me in the stomach whilst I was on the floor on all fours.”⁷⁸

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“I was detailed to scrub and polish the floors. I had to clean the toilets, clean the copper pipes and scrub the black rubber marks off the corridor floors. Passing officers would routinely purposefully leave rubber marks on the floors. You’d be slapped about for missing them and be made to polish them out again. You couldn’t win it was like mental torture.”⁷⁹

“I could say that most days I was assaulted by being kicked by prison officers and I would often get my head smashed against the wall. This could often occur while I was on cleaning duties. If I was scrubbing the floor and didn’t hear an officer coming along the corridor, I would get a hiding and this is because we were meant to stand to attention if they walked past. I remember being kicked hard between the legs then I had my head smashed against the wall. I would often have lumps on the back of my head or forehead.”⁸⁰

Physical education assaults

PEI was a mandatory part of the detention centre timetable and was designed to be strenuous. It included circuit training and trainees were tested on their fitness both on entering the centre and when leaving it.

There is evidence that PEI was often used as a form of punishment. Trainees who were problematic or caused disruption during their work duties would often be sent to do double physical education for the day, both during the morning and evening.

Victim accounts describe frequent assaults which took place during these PEI sessions. The assaults ranged from slaps, punches and kicks to being hit with bricks, ropes and medicine balls.

“The gym was the place where most people got assaulted and beaten, you were just slapped and hit for anything, you were made to feel worthless and told you were nothing, you could have been the model inmate in there, but you would still have been slapped and beaten.”⁸¹

“I moved jobs to gym orderly, working under [the PEIs]. I took part in all the PE (physical education) sessions which were hard and gruelling, however, I enjoyed the PE sessions as I felt they made me a harder and stronger person. I actually embraced these sessions and I appreciated the sessions... as they improved my strength. I liked gym that much that I actually did it twice a day. Although I enjoyed the PE, I would say it was still very cruel and physical. Everyone was assaulted at some point, whether it was with a stick or a medicine ball. The stick was brown polished wood, about 6-7 feet long with 8-10 sides in an octagon shape... Although I received punches from both these officers, I actually feel that my gym sessions strengthened my character.”⁸²

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Numerous victim accounts highlight that PEI sessions were used as another way of humiliating trainees. Those who were unfit, overweight or different were targeted by instructors.

“I remember there was a fat kid, he came down the ropes, and he was trying to hang on, the officers were swinging the ropes around and deliberately making it harder for him. When he got to the bottom, he had taken all of the skin off his hands and his legs from the friction of trying to hang on. He got a real hiding after that... The boy covered up as they were both lacing into him, punching and kicking him and calling him a ‘big fat pig’. The male was crying, and his mouth was bleeding. A few of the lads were shouting for them to leave him alone.”⁸³

Trainees with medical conditions and disabilities

Trainees who were less fit or had medical conditions or physical disabilities were deliberately targeted by some of the PEIs.

Several trainees who had medical conditions, such as asthma, describe being made to undertake the physical education sessions despite having been assessed by doctors as not being able to complete them.

“The worst thing for me was the gym sessions. They were my worst nightmare. I had Polio as a child and prior to going into the centre, wore a leg brace and a raised shoe. I was not allowed this in there and had to wear normal shoes. I had muscle wastage in my legs, and I was weak. I also walked with a limp. I went to see the doctor to see if I could be excused from physical exercise, but the doctor was useless. No one was exempt.”

“I remember when first having to do PE I pointed out to the officer that I had a letter of excuse from the doctor because of my asthma, the reaction I got was a verbal ‘fuck you’ from the officer and a slap. I had to do what the rest of them had to do.”⁸⁴

“Soon after arriving at Medomsley, I was taken off-site to Shotley Bridge Hospital to be seen in relation to my asthma, a condition which I suffered from quite badly. Having been seen by doctors, I had my chest X-rayed and I was told that I could not participate in physical activities due to my condition. The staff were made aware of this. The main problem that I suffered whilst at Medomsley was that despite my medical exemption from physical activities I was still made to complete the fitness circuits. These circuits would consist of an assault course within the grounds of the centre. We would climb nets and jump obstacles and repeat the circuit several times. The fitness would take place outside and in each circuit there would be six or seven other people. There was one member of staff in particular that would make me complete the circuits despite my condition.”⁸⁵

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“During my time in Medomsley I had to do PE sessions about twice a week. I never did any gym work. My PE sessions were always running the fence, which was about two and a half miles. I was asthmatic and told the PE instructor... that I suffered from asthma. This made no difference to [the PE instructor], he treated me worse than the other lads as a result. I was always at the back of the run because I really struggled to breathe and to run.”⁸⁶

Some victims were not allowed by prison staff to use their inhalers during these physical education sessions and suffered asthma attacks while completing them.

“I felt an asthma attack coming on; my chest was tightening, and I was struggling to breathe. I asked [the instructor] for my inhaler. [He] shouted at me, ‘No fuck off and go back to what you were doing!’

I got back in line and tried to continue with the exercise. I knew if I didn’t [the PEI] would have beaten me as I had seen him do it to other lads. We came last in the next exercise I was gasping for breath. I was desperate so I plucked up the courage to ask [him] again. I said, ‘I beg you Sir can I have a couple of squirts of my inhaler.’ [He] was furious. He grabbed me by my hair and pulled me down towards the ground. He slapped me about my head and kicked me about my body. I couldn’t get away from him. I could hardly breathe. [He] paraded me around in front of the other inmates saying, ‘Look lads we have got a beggar amongst us!’

I was in agony, humiliated and fighting for breath. The attack by [PEI] went on for around five minutes, it seemed like a lifetime. I thought he was trying to kill me.

As soon as the attack stopped [the PEI] made us start the fence run. I tried to do the run but couldn’t and as a result I came last. I begged for my inhaler [the PEI] would not give it to me. [The PEI] slapped and punched me all over my body for coming last. I was left bruised and in a great deal of pain. I never reported any of the assaults on me as I knew that if I did, I would get more of the same.”⁸⁷

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Case study 1: Perpetrator B

Perpetrator B was the PEI at Medomsley between 1974 and 1985. He was a qualified prison officer with specialty training in physical education and was responsible for running the gym.

Physical training was considered essential to the detention centre regime. Therefore, most trainees would attend the gym daily for training with Perpetrator B. There would be no other discipline officers present during the gym sessions, so Perpetrator B and his PEI colleagues had full oversight of the gym.

Perpetrator B joined the Prison Service in 1964 after having served in the Royal Air Force as a storeman. He shared a military background with many of the other staff at Medomsley, and many victims and former colleagues have reported that he maintained a militaristic attitude in his role as a prison officer. He joined Medomsley as a basic grade PEI but over the years was promoted to senior officer PEI and later principal officer PEI.

Perpetrator B is the most prolific violent offender who worked at Medomsley.

618 victims have made allegations of abuse against him. Of these victims, 243 identify him as their primary abuser. While he was usually referred to simply as '[Surname]', his nicknames at Medomsley also included 'Monster', 'The Machine', 'Mean Machine', and 'The Animal'.

Patterns of abuse

Numerous victim accounts of abuse by Perpetrator B paint a picture of routine physical assaults and violent and degrading behaviour which were integrated into the physical education programme. Below are his most common patterns of abuse.

The fence run

The fence run involved the trainees running around the length of the perimeter fence within a certain time. If someone did not complete the fence run in that time, the whole group would be often made to run it again the following day. This created a very tense, divided atmosphere in which trainees who were less fit or had medical conditions or physical disabilities suffered the most. Many victims have recounted how Perpetrator B would run at the back and speed up any stragglers by hitting, kicking and dragging them along.

"You could just hear the lads at the back screaming as [the PEI] was punching them and whatever on the way round."⁸⁸

"I recall going on the 'fence run' for the first time and I was unfit. I managed the first circuit of the fence, however, I could not keep going and was getting further and further behind the others. [The PEI] punched me hard in the ribs. I fell to the floor thinking he would leave me alone. He continued to punch me and kicked me on the floor and literally dragged me to my feet to complete the circuit.

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After the end of the run, as we were stood on the parade ground, [the PEI] addressed the other lads and said, ‘As he couldn’t make it, you’re all going to have to do this again tomorrow.’ That night I was given a kicking by the lads in the showers for making them do the run again.”⁸⁹

Murder ball

The game was repeatedly described as a ‘free for all’ by victims, in which Perpetrator B encouraged trainees to use violence to retrieve and retain the medicine ball.

“I hurt my foot one day in ‘murder ball’, which was a game without rules, where one team was against the other. We were encouraged to attack each other on the pretence of getting a medicine ball into the opposing team’s goal.”⁹⁰

“He would kick the ball as hard as he could at you, and he didn’t care who he hit or where he hit you. Head, arms or groin. We would be doubled up in pain on the floor crying, but that wouldn’t stop it, and he would kick the ball at you as hard as he could while you were on the floor. He called it ‘murder ball’ and it was murder ball.”⁹¹

“The class would be split into two teams and told to stand at opposite sides of the gym. A medicine ball was put in the centre and the inmates were encouraged to physically fight one another to get the ball over to the other side. People would get hurt, but if anyone bled, like from a nosebleed, then [Perpetrator B] would grab them by the hair and drag them across the floor, saying, ‘Don’t you bleed on my floor boy’, using their t-shirts to mop up the blood.”⁹²

“You were encouraged to punch and kick the other inmates. People very often got hurt. It felt as if you were being used to inflict pain to others for his pleasure. The weaker inmates would get absolutely hammered by the tough lads.”⁹³

The hockey stick

Victim accounts detail how Perpetrator B used a hockey stick as a weapon while trainees played hockey, and that he would find opportunities to hit the trainees with it during the game.

Other trainees describe another ‘game’ in which he would swing a hockey stick around in a circle, making trainees either jump over or duck under it to avoid being hit in the face or shins.

Others describe Perpetrator B as simply walking around holding the stick and casually wielding it as a weapon.

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“Without any provocation, [the PEI] hit me on the shins and upper legs with the hockey stick, all the time screaming at me for sitting down. I jumped up and [the PEI] struck me in the face with the hockey stick, causing my front tooth to chip and crack, pain and swelling and a lump under my eye.”⁹⁴

“[The PEI] lost his temper and started smashing me with the hockey stick. He was hitting me really hard and was shouting and swearing at me whilst he did this. He was hitting me so hard that I thought that he was going to break my legs. I was in agony, and he then went back to the game of hockey, and made me stand whilst the game went on. It was pouring rain, and I had to just stand there shivering in the freezing cold. As a result of the assault, I was covered in bruises from where I had been hit with the hockey stick.”⁹⁵

“[The PEI] would make us run around the gym whilst he wielded a hockey stick around in a circle, sometimes high, so you had to duck and sometimes low, so you had to jump over it. If you were slow or more likely could not see it coming because of others in the gym being in the way, it hit you either around the head area or on your shins. Like a lot of the lads, I got struck by the stick on many occasions, resulting in bruises to the area that had been hit.”⁹⁶

Rope climbing

Trainees describe being made to climb a rope or assault course as part of their physical education and being punished by Perpetrator B when they were unable to reach the top. There are also accounts of him shaking the rope, or throwing objects at the trainee climbing, in an effort to make them fall off.

“During one particular gym session, we were made to climb a rope and when I had reached the top, staff [the PEI] began swinging the rope to get me down. I clung on for dear life, as it was extremely high, but such was the ferocity of the [PEI’s] swinging of the rope that it caused me to lose my grip and slide down it with speed. At that time, I had my legs wrapped around it, therefore, the rope caused severe friction burns to my left leg that required treatment at the Infirmary within the centre. These burns have left permanent scarring to my left leg.”⁹⁷

“I then had to climb up a rope, however I couldn’t manage to get up very far. I came back down however the PE instructor...flew over to me and punched me in the stomach and around the shoulder area. He punched me about four times. He was saying that I better get up there the next time. He then made me do another circuit around the gym. When I got to the rope, I started to climb it again, getting a bit higher than the last time. I still couldn’t manage to do it, and slid down the rope, burning my hands on the rope all the way down. At the bottom, I was laid on the floor. [The PEI] came over again

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and started to punch me four to five times around my body, whilst I lay helpless on the floor.”⁹⁸

Impact of Perpetrator B’s abuse

Perpetrator B created an environment of fear where the threat of violence was constant.

Victims state that trainees feared Perpetrator B and the gym so intensely that they took drastic measures to avoid it, including self-harm.

Trainees have documented injuring themselves, or being asked to assist in injuring each other, to be exempt from physical education, such was the desperation described by trainees and the extreme measures they took to protect themselves from Perpetrator B.

“The regime in PE was really hard. I saw other inmates break their arms or legs to get out of it, and to get away from [the PEI] and [prison officer]. One would brace his arms against something and get other lads to kick his arm. I also saw lads jump off a bunk onto someone’s leg to smash it. I heard it break. When someone managed to break a bone, they were taken out and not seen again.”⁹⁹

“When I was in Medomsley, I asked another inmate to break my leg so I could get out of doing the fence run. I think the inmate was called... We were cleaning in the dormitory using what we called a ‘buffer,’ which was a floor cleaning device, which was quite heavy. I put my leg against the side of the bed, and I asked the inmate to strike it with the ‘buffer,’ which he did, striking me on the leg. I remember I was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital, and I was given an X-ray, however, my ankle was not broken. I did get out of doing PT for some time so that was a bonus.”¹⁰⁰

“I can recall that there was a lad from Carlisle who used to really struggle at PE and would get a hard time from [the PEI]. This lad got somebody to break either his leg or arm so that he didn’t have to do the PE sessions.”¹⁰¹

“Thinking about the worst thing I saw happen to somebody else in there, I remember while I was in the hospital wing, there was a big lad in the bed over the way from me. I think he was there because he drank a bottle of Brasso. I had seen him getting kicked all over because he was overweight, and he couldn’t do the fitness in there. [The PEI] used to make him do the fence... but he couldn’t do it. [The PEI] would try to make him, and he would say if he doesn’t finish then you are all going to do it again. So, the other lads would try and get him round, but he couldn’t do it. He was getting punched and kicked and tripped all over... I used to feel sorry for him, and he ended up drinking a bottle of Brasso.”¹⁰²

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Serious injuries

Perpetrator B's violence and aggression in the gym caused serious injury to several victims, including broken bones and facial wounds. The following accounts of serious injuries relate to incidents that he stood trial for and was consequently found guilty of committing.

"One day I was standing in line, and I said something to the lad next to me. [The PEI] approached me from behind and punched me hard to the kidneys. The pain caused me to fall to the floor. As I went to stand back up, I put my hands on the floor to push myself up. My hand was in a sort of claw shape. [The PEI] deliberately stamped on my hand, causing my little finger and ring finger to bend under my hand. I felt my fingers crunch and felt instant pain shoot up my arm. I told [the PEI] he had just broken my fingers. He told me to shut up."¹⁰³

"[The PEI] was stood holding a pair of football boots, one in each hand. I could tell by the look on his face he was seething. His face was red, I had seen him often enough to know when he was going to lose his temper. He held up the boots as he looked at me and shouted 'mud,' indicating that the boots weren't clean. He then hit me in the face, full force with one of the football boots in a swiping motion, which connected with the bridge of my nose, immediately causing me extreme pain. I knew when I saw him standing there holding the boots he was going to hit me with them. He had held the boots with the tops/laces in his hands so that the studs were exposed. The force of the blow from the boot burst my face open, but he immediately followed the first blow with a second, only this time he hit me with both boots, one at either side of my head at the same time. A bit like he was clapping his hands, but my head was in the middle, and he was holding a football boot in each hand. Again, this caused me great shock. I heard a bang and saw stars, I knew I was bleeding as I could feel a warm wet sensation running down my face and neck."¹⁰⁴

Conviction and sentence

Perpetrator B was investigated for his offences at Medomsley as part of Operation Seabrook.

In 2018 he stood trial on 12 charges, each of which he pleaded not guilty to. Following trial, Perpetrator B was found guilty of seven offences and convicted of: inflicting grievous bodily harm, wounding with intent, three counts of assault occasioning actual bodily harm, and two counts of misconduct in public office.

In 2019 Perpetrator B was sentenced to eight years and six months' imprisonment.

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Humiliating and degrading treatment

Many victims describe the humiliating and degrading treatment they experienced. Some of this treatment has left victims with lifelong phobias or mental health conditions.

“The worst experience in there was not the physical assaults although they were bad, it was the emotional humiliation by [prison officer]. This experience has stayed with me all my life and left me feeling very angry.”¹⁰⁵

“My first job was on the cleaning party which I did for a couple of weeks. I recall one day a prison officer came onto the corridor and spoke to another inmate... The screw told him that his mother had died. I challenged the way that the screw told [the trainee] about his mother’s death as he had said, ‘Your mam’s fucking dead.’ The screw came over and punched me once in the stomach for challenging him.”¹⁰⁶

“I had a stomach bug and I was not well. I recall I had been to breakfast, and we were marching back to change into our work clothes. I felt the urgency of needing the toilet, so I did a detour to the sports hall. However, I did not make it in time, and I soiled myself. A prison officer...came to look for me. I explained what had happened. He shouted at me and told me to go to the boot room, he used insulting words calling me ‘shitty arse’ and that I stunk.

[The prison officer] made me do bunny hops in my soiled clothes for about 20 minutes. I felt so humiliated, I recall feeling so angry towards him. I wanted to kill him. [The prison officer] returned to the boot room and made me do bunny hops for a further 40 minutes. I felt totally degraded. I was then left to stand in soiled clothes for a further two hours as a punishment for being ill. An inmate was sent with a black bin liner, and I was instructed to remove all my clothes and walk naked along the corridor to the shower room where I was allowed to clean myself.”¹⁰⁷

Bunny hops

Bunny hops were a form of exercise that was routinely used as a punishment.

“Bunny hops were horrific things, you were made to put your hands behind your head on the back of your neck and then crouch down and bounce up and down in a motion like a rabbit. I was made to bounce up and down corridors and I also had to bounce upstairs as well. I would be made to do bunny hops at least two to three times a week and it was always [prison officer] that made me do it. I used to have to do them until I was told to stop but if I stopped before he told me to, he would make me start again.”¹⁰⁸

“I was made to do bunny hops for so long that my back would be in agony and my legs felt as if they had turned to jelly. Even when I was in pain from the bunny hops, I would be made to do more if I hadn’t been told to stop, and [prison officer] would drag me by

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my hair up the corridor to the spot that he wanted me to start from. I was not the only person who had to do bunny hops, and you would often see lads being made to do them by other officers.”¹⁰⁹

“If the guards caught us talking to one another while we were working, they would order us into a squat position, the ‘bunny hop’ position. There was another stress position called the ‘chair position’ which was similar but against the wall with your arms stretched out. They would keep us in these stress positions for 10 or 15 minutes, which caused absolute agony. When you couldn’t take it any more you just collapsed, but they would drag you up and force you back into the position. It was obviously wrong even then because I remember on one occasion that the senior PO (principal officer) came down the corridor when this was happening and was furious.”¹¹⁰

Bunny hops were also used as a means of humiliation, as trainees were made to do them whilst naked in front of other trainees and were sometimes assaulted at the same time.

“I was punched in the face by an officer... he told me to strip naked then made me do ‘bunny hops’ naked down the corridor in front of the rest of the inmates. There was an officer at the top and bottom of the corridor and they would kick when you got to the end or follow you up the corridor and kick you if you stopped. I was made to go up and down the corridor until I couldn’t do it anymore. It was done to humiliate me, they would even point at my genitals and make fun of me just to add to the humiliation.”¹¹¹

Work party assaults

While assigned to other working parties such as gardening or working in the fields, trainees were often assaulted by prison staff.

“My first job was on the garden party. I didn’t know what was expected of me or what I was supposed to do. As I marched from the centre to the tool shed, I asked one of the other inmates what I was supposed to do. The prison officer supervising... heard me talking to the other inmate and came over to me like a raging bull, drew his fist back and punched me in a side swiping motion across the face. I staggered backwards into other inmates. [The prison officer] screamed at me that I should not be talking whilst marching anywhere. I then carried on marching with the other inmates to the tool shed. When I got to the tool shed I didn’t know what to do next. The other inmates selected their tools. Apparently you are allocated a particular tool, a shovel, a pick, a rake, a spade or a fork. I asked another inmate which implement I should take. This lad refused to answer me, probably in fear as he didn’t dare speak.”¹¹²

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“Because I was talking, he threw a garden fork at me. One of the prongs of the fork went straight through my wellington boot and went straight through the big toe of my right foot.”¹¹³

“I worked on the garden party which I believe was called two party. On occasions we were taken out of the detention centre to work on the gardens of various establishments in the area. The violent abuse didn’t stop while we were off the centre. The prison officers continued to assault me but out of the sight of the people whose grounds we were working in. I remember being pushed in the back with a rake and shovel and having my face rubbed hard in the soil and mud.”¹¹⁴

“I was put to work in the net shop making trawler nets for fishing. The net shop was ran by a civilian whose name I do not know. He was a violent man. I remember the net being on a rack in front of us. I just couldn’t get used to threading the nets and wasn’t very good at it. I was often hit by the civilian for being too slow. I remember one time, he said I was too slow and without warning he punched me on my elbow and then to my head.”¹¹⁵

However, some trainees had more positive experiences while working with some civilian members of staff.

“I was allocated a job initially and it was ‘works party’. My job was to assist the centre plumber. I recall that he was a nice man, a normal civilian. I didn’t have any problems with him... My duties were to carry his bag containing tools and materials about the centre, and do minor tasks like sawing pipes etc. I quite enjoyed the job and spent time away from the other officers, it was a safer place to be. I did several jobs outside of the centre always accompanied by the plumber. I distinctly recall helping to fix or install a washing machine in a nearby house inhabited by the gym instructor...”¹¹⁶

“I was initially put on cleaning duties for a week then went onto two party which was working on the gardens, after a week of working there I got a job in the laundry. I failed my grade whilst in the laundry so had to come out of there and back onto two party where I remained for the rest of my sentence. I do recall that it was a civilian in charge of the laundry whilst I worked there, and he was a lovely man.”¹¹⁷

“I was detailed to garden party as my job and spent days prodding the ground to aid drainage and an officer was in charge of us. He wore brown overalls with a prison guard hat and there was always an officer in full uniform with him so I had the impression he was a civilian... He was a nice guy who never did you any harm.”¹¹⁸

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Inciting violence among trainees

Officers would encourage young men from Sunderland to fight with rival groups from Newcastle. The officers would instigate fights by saying one of the young men from the rival group had called someone from the other group a ‘wanker’. The officers would also encourage fighting in the dorms.¹¹⁹

“All the guards were involved in the violence. If they didn’t carry it out, they condoned it by walking away or they would encourage lads to fight each other. For example, we had to do a four-and-a-half-mile run round the perimeter fence and had to do it in a certain time. If one of the lads didn’t do the time we were told we all had to do the run again the next day and the guards would tell us it was because of whoever hadn’t done it fast enough and would name them. This would lead to confrontations and fights in the showers and the guards would just turn away and let it happen.”¹²⁰

“They used to make you fight your best mate. But if you didn’t do it, you were in for it.”¹²¹

“There was a big lad from Middlesbrough... he was massive he was 6’5” tall, [prison officer] would make us fight each other, the two hard lads from Sunderland and Middlesbrough, we had to fight like two dogs, in the end me and [trainee] became good friends.”¹²²

Betting on trainees

Victims have described prison officers betting on trainees regarding winning the fence run, also known as the governor’s run, football matches or fights organised between trainees for their own entertainment.

“I heard three officers betting on the governors run, they had £120 on it and they offered me a Mars bar for winning, so I waited for another inmate to cross the line together, so I drew and didn’t win. After this they assaulted me... this was well worth it in my mind.”¹²³

“The team leaders would set one of their lads up to fight with another team leader’s lad. The officers would then place bets to see who won. I was quite a hard lad and handy with my fists. No-one could get a bet on me as it was assumed I would win. I therefore was only ever set up for one fight with a lad... from Liverpool nicknamed the 6-million-dollar man. I would say it was a fair, evenly placed fight. It was stopped when one was knocked down. They didn’t let you go too far but it made you feel like a dog set up to fight another.”¹²⁴

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“So, they shut me in the boot room so in comes this lad, so I filled him in. When I walked out one officer patted me on the back and said, ‘Get on you have just won me twenty quid.’ Then another officer went, ‘Now get fucking bunny hopping you have just lost me twenty quid.’ You’re in a no-win situation. This just all seemed like entertainment for them.”¹²⁵

Visits

Rule 60 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules stated that trainees were entitled to received visits from family and friends on a monthly basis. However, many victims have described how their visits would be cancelled if they were visibly injured.

“I was given a whack on the side of my head that caused a black eye. The officers actually told me my visit had been cancelled because my face was marked. I later learned the explanation given to my mam for the cancelled visit was they said it was because I was ill.”¹²⁶

“My mother and aunt were due to visit me but on their arrival at Medomsley, the visit was cancelled, my mother later informed me she was told I had been causing trouble and that was the reason they couldn’t see me when they arrived, but obviously the real reason was the injuries to my face caused by the prison staff.”¹²⁷

Some visits were cancelled without apparent reason apparently for the amusement of staff.

“There was a great deal of mental abuse as well as physical abuse. On two occasions I had my visits cancelled at very short notice with my visitors already at the centre. The officers enjoyed turning your family members away when they arrived. This behaviour was cruel as the visits were something I really looked forward to and were the only contact I had with the outside world.”¹²⁸

Even when visits were held, trainees felt they could not speak openly with their visitors as officers closely supervised the visits and listened to their conversations.

“A few weeks later I was visited by my mother and father. Prior to the visit the officers warned us not to say anything about the officers or about anything that went on in the detention centre or we would suffer, which I took to mean we would get assaulted. My father asked me what had happened to my ear because it had bruised black due to the punch I had received from [the prison officer]. I said nothing, but my father kept asking if it was the officers who had been hitting me.”¹²⁹

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“On my first visit from my family [the prison officer] told me that I was not to tell my family any tales. I was not to say anything negative. He walked up and down the tables listening to your conversations. I did not dare say anything bad because I knew if I was overheard, I would have been beaten by the officers.”¹³⁰

In addition to personal visits, trainees would sometimes receive official visits from police, probation and legal representatives. These visits would take place in a private room rather than the visitation hall and would not usually be supervised by detention centre staff.

“The only time it went quiet was when there was a visit from the magistrates. The place would be immaculate, staff were nice to you but as soon as they left, that’s when the beatings started again.”¹³¹

Racism towards trainees

Several trainees experienced racial abuse and discrimination by staff, sometimes beginning as soon as they arrived at the centre.

“As soon as I went into the reception area the physical and verbal abuse started. I was immediately punched and kicked by the officers in the reception and shouted at with racist abuse. They were shouting at me to get my clothes off to be deloused. Shouting at me to be quicker, I’d get a punch, move on, I’d get another punch. Calling me a ‘Scottish darky’. I was a novelty to them, an Indian with a broad Glaswegian accent amongst all the other inmates from the Northeast.”¹³²

“[The prison officer] would call me racist names because I was black. I was regularly called ‘n****r’ and ‘Black enamelled bastard’. It was done on a regular basis and [the prison officer] targeted me... other officers also called me racist names. The racist remarks were made in the open in front of everybody including the senior officers and the governor. At no time did anyone challenge the racist remarks being made towards me, far from it – I believe it was their sick way of having fun.”¹³³

“All of the prison officers were racist towards me. When I had finished my shower and come out from the shower room the prison officers told me to get back into the shower because I was still black. They also called me ‘Coon’. The racist comments got to me more than the assaults.”¹³⁴

“Whilst they were beating me up these officers would be saying horrible racist things to me calling me ‘chocolate man’, ‘n****r man’, ‘Black boy’. They nicknamed me ‘chalky’. This was very degrading and humiliating.”¹³⁵

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Using trainees for personal gain

The use of trainees by staff for personal gain was prohibited by the 1952 and 1983 Detention Centre Rules.¹³⁶

There is some evidence from both victims and former staff that trainees were taken off site by prison staff to complete tasks which were not part of the detention centre regime. This work took place off site at officer's houses and involved tasks such as gardening, DIY and even babysitting. In some cases, staff received 'special permission' to remove boys from the centre, even if they were not actually on duty at the time.

"You know, we got special permission... for a week. We bought this house that we bought and got permission to take some lads out to help us. In them days, don't forget, there wasn't health and safety like there is now, so I got permission to take these three boys out ... I took a week's leave and went to the prison every morning, picked them up in the car, drove them to Leadgate, we went in the house, and we would... take plaster off the walls and all the rest of it and getting the house all cleaned and tidied and done up, and painted and everything. We were doing all sorts."¹³⁷

"Well, I, what I can talk about is that I had two lads... I can't remember the other one, but they used to babysit for me and my two kids when they were that size."¹³⁸

This former officer who used two trainees for babysitting told police that staff did not require the warden's permission to remove trainees and that the decision to remove trainees was decided between the principal officer on duty and the gate officer.

"I could take them to do my house and get them to do my garden. A lot of staff had their gardens done... We would pay them by Mars bars and whatever they wanted and feed them obviously."¹³⁹

Use of trainees as bully boys

There is considerable evidence that trainees were often used by prison staff to 'police' other trainees or to inflict violence on them. These trainees were referred to as 'bully boys' or 'Daddies' by their fellow trainees and received payment or preferential treatment from prison staff for undertaking this role.

"The Daddy was... a lad called... from Newcastle. Basically, a Daddy is a person who thinks they are really tough, and they can take anything they want from you, and it's allowed by the screws. The screws then pay the Daddies to keep order."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Operation Deerness investigation material

¹³⁷ Operation Deerness investigation material

¹³⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹³⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

“There was an inmate from Blyth... He hit me in the back of the head as I was coming out of recreation and said, ‘That’s off [prison officer].’ I know this was because of the football match. I think [the prison officer] made him do it. He was acting on behalf of him. He was definitely in with the screws, one of their ‘bully boys’. He used to hit people in there and the screws would see it happen, and nothing ever happened to him.”¹⁴¹

If trainees refused to become bully boys, they would be threatened by staff or would themselves become a target for intimidation.

“As a result, a lad who classed himself as ‘the Daddy’... asked me why I did not hit the fat lad. As a result, we had a fight, and I beat him. Because of this I had a reputation of being a hard lad, but I refused to use that to my advantage or be ‘the Daddy’. The screws used to use ‘the Daddy’ to keep order and intimidate fellow inmates. Because I would not do so they picked on me more.”¹⁴²

Trainees were routinely told to assault other trainees at night times in the dormitories.

“[The prison officer] used me and other inmates as a hit squad. [The prison officer] would come to my dorm on a night and let me out of the room. He would also do this with other inmates. There was usually about four of us. [The prison officer] then opened another dorm door, tell us a bed number and then tell us to beat the person in that bed. After the first two or three weeks this happened nearly every night. We would be unlocked and told to beat someone whilst they lay in their beds. I hated doing this but I only did it so I would not be target, it was a way of surviving.

In addition to this I would also be told to start a fight with other inmates. [The prison officer] would tell me to hurt the person and that if I did not hurt the person enough that I would be the next target. I was told to do this dozens and dozens of times whilst I was there. Towards the end of my sentence one of the inmates who I had been told to pick a fight with on two occasions came over to talk to me. He told me that on both occasions I had picked a fight with him, he had received a further two weeks on his sentence for fighting. For all of the times that I was told to pick a fight with someone, I was never disciplined and never received extra time.”¹⁴³

Psychological abuse

Some trainees describe the psychological abuse as having the most disturbing impact on them while at Medomsley and led to issues such as bedwetting.

“I never received any injuries other than bruises and scrapes, it was more psychological the injury they inflicted. I remember I actually started wetting the bed in there which was due to fear.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴² Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴³ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

“For me it wasn’t just the possibility of physical harm but the psychological effect it had on me. I did not regard myself as a soft lad; I was brought up in poverty with an abusive alcoholic father. I was used to a good hiding. I was also used to discipline in that I had been an army cadet in a rough and ready... detachment. However, Medomsley, had a pervading threat of violence that was constant. After three weeks it had worn me down.”¹⁴⁵

Many victims also refer to the atmosphere of fear and the mental anguish caused by the constant apprehension of violence.

“Although I had been in care homes since the age of 11 or 12 and was used to rules and regulations set by the homes, I was not ready for the regime of Medomsley and the way it was run. The detention centre was run like a military camp with one big exception – fear. The fear of where the next punch from the officers was coming from was always with you. The mental anguish caused by this fear was always there and it was as bad as the actual physical assaults I suffered. Silly things like not being able to talk to anyone really used to get to me, just another form of mental torture.”¹⁴⁶

“The officers just hit you for the sake of hitting you. They were fully aware that not just me but all of the detainees would just accept the blows as to complain or retaliate would result in a more severe beating. The fear of this kept the detainees in check. The fear of when or where the next slap, punch or clip was coming was always with you.”¹⁴⁷

Self-harm

Some trainees found life at Medomsley so bad that they resorted to self-harm. This often took the form of wrist cutting.

“On my third day at Medomsley I tried to kill myself. I had been lying in bed all night thinking how I couldn’t cope with the way the guards were treating me. I remember thinking that they would end up killing me, so I decided that I wouldn’t give them the chance and I would do it myself first. I told [a trainee] who was in the bunk opposite me in the same dormitory. The abuse had a psychological effect on me and I had come to believe that the place was alive, and I had been swallowed by it. In the morning of my third day I took a razor blade to cut my wrists while I was at the sink.”¹⁴⁸

“Whilst I was at Medomsley I witnessed a kid cut his wrists, this happened next to the room that I was in [the recess]. I believe that he did this due to the fact that there were so many people being abused at Medomsley.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁴⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

Official records, victim accounts and interviews with former officers indicate that some trainees swallowed nails, glass or razor blades or drank substances such as Brasso in an attempt to leave Medomsley.

“I saw inmates eat glass and nails, break a razor and swallow the blades, anything to try and get out of [Medomsley] and into hospital. Everybody was being treated like an animal, constantly degraded. There was no need for it. Everybody in there knew what was going on because everyone was at it. It was their regime and how they operated. It wasn’t short, sharp shock at all.”¹⁵⁰

“[The trainee] was in hospital a fortnight. They removed the razorblade, but the needle was passed ‘coz it was facing the right way. But they cut him open and removed the razorblade...I was shown a, the nurses showed us a photograph of that one when I was on hospital watch, the sonar on the razorblade, clear as anything.”¹⁵¹

Sexual abuse

Legal definitions

It should be noted that during the relevant period 1961 to 1987, sexual offences were covered by the Sexual Offences Act 1956. Homosexual acts were illegal under this legislation until the Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalised acts in private between two consenting men who were over 21. The age of consent for same-sex sexual activity remained at 21 until 1994 when it was lowered to 18, before being equalised with heterosexual sexual activity at 16 with the introduction of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000. It remained a criminal offence for more than two men to engage in consensual sexual activity in private until the introduction of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

The following victim accounts indicate that the motivation for at least some of the sexual touching which took place at Medomsley was for humiliation rather than sexual gratification. Examples of this kind of abuse were the routine squeezing of genitals, slapping of buttocks, pulling of the foreskin and penetration of the anus with a finger during searching.

The majority of sexual abuse was motivated by sexual gratification and numerous victim accounts show that widespread sexual abuse of trainees at Medomsley took place between 1961 and 1987. The sexual abuse committed on trainees by prison staff ranged from acts of sexual touching to oral and anal rape.

Victim accounts detail painful and degrading sexual abuse. Some victims were forced to repeatedly perform sex acts on prison officers, including acts of mutual masturbation, or were sexually assaulted and raped as forms of humiliation.

¹⁵⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁵¹ Operation Deerness investigation material

Sexual abuse was at times accompanied by extreme violence and acts of a sadistic nature including strangulation. Some victims were photographed or filmed during the abuse. The sexual abuse took place both within Medomsley's buildings and off-site in the houses of prison staff or linked offenders or other rural locations. In several cases, the abuse carried on after the victims left Medomsley and some of the perpetrators visited them at their homes.

Case study 2 – Witness D

“In 1977 I was sent to Medomsley Detention Centre. I can only describe it as hell on earth. The officers in charge were brutal, the most evil men I’ve ever known. I was assaulted on a daily basis too many times to remember. There was no pleasing them, they obviously were there to inflict as much pain as possible.”¹⁵²

Witness D grew up in the Northeast in a family where he occasionally witnessed violence. Increasingly he found himself getting into trouble with the police, until in the summer of 1978 he ended up in the magistrates’ court sentenced to three months’ detention. He was 17 years old.

He was taken to Medomsley where soon after his arrival he was allocated to work in the kitchen under catering officer Neville Husband. His role involved preparing and cooking vegetables and cleaning up after meal services. This job took up most of his time and he rarely left the kitchen, except to attend compulsory physical training.

Straight away he noticed that Husband had a jovial personality, which was different from the harsh and aggressive personas of the other officers. Husband would ‘play-fight’ with him and other trainees working in the kitchen.

“I noticed that when this happened Husband not only did the wrestling, his hands used to be all over. He would grab lads including me by the genitals and use the wrestling as a cover for this. When it happened to me the first time I was shocked as this was deliberate touching... Husband used to brush past me if I was working at a bench and deliberately make contact by putting his hands on my hips and contacting his front genital area with my backside.”¹⁵³

Husband continued to seek out opportunities to grope Witness D, including when he was showering. Husband also began to physically assault him for making small mistakes in the kitchen. The alternating physical and sexual assaults left Witness D terrified of Husband, and unable to fight his advances for fear of reprisal.

The abuse escalated, and Husband began to anally rape Witness D in the storeroom. He says the abuse was continuous and he lived in a constant state of terror.

Witness D was an athletic teenager who performed well in the gym. The centre hosted a sports day where he won most of the events he competed in. When it was time to run the 200-metre race, he tripped and fell which cost him the race. Perpetrator B approached him and suddenly swung his clenched fist into his stomach causing him to tumble to the ground in pain. Perpetrator B then kicked him in the hip before saying, “**I’ve just lost ten pound on you**”, suggesting he had bet on Witness D to win the race and was angry at his loss.¹⁵⁴ Witness D felt that from this day on, Perpetrator B had it in for him.

¹⁵² Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁵³ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁵⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

One day in the gym, after playing murder ball, Witness D made his way into the showers, where he knew he'd only have 10 seconds to get clean. He noticed that he had left his top at the far end of the gym and quickly sprinted across to pick it up before once again turning towards the showers. As he was running across the gym, Perpetrator B ran to meet him in the middle, where he immediately began to hit him on the head, neck and back.

Witness D continued to run at full tilt hoping to get out of Perpetrator B's reach, but he continued to chase and batter him. He brought his arms up over his head to protect himself from the blows, running and hunching down simultaneously. He found himself veering to the right and before making sudden contact with a concrete doorframe, headfirst.

He regained consciousness with a bloody towel wrapped around his neck and began to vomit. Perpetrator B was stood to the side with a worried look on his face. Another officer appeared with a wheelchair and escorted him into the back of van to be taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital. Before he left an officer said to him, **"You fell down the stairs."** Witness D understood that this was the lie he would have to tell the doctors when they ask him how he was injured.

At the hospital Witness D was diagnosed with a head injury. The medical staff wanted to keep admit him to hospital. However, Medomsley could not spare an officer to stay on watch, so his wound was stitched up and he was taken back to the detention centre. He was moved from his regular dormitory onto the medical wing. The warden came to visit him there but never asked him how he got his injuries.

Witness D was put on light duties for the next three weeks and slowly recovered from his injury, though not completely. His head injury left him with no sense of taste or smell, and he experienced recurring migraines.

The horrors of his abuse did not simply end when he left Medomsley at the end of his sentence. Witness D continued to have nightmares about his experiences within Medomsley and has needed support for anxiety and depression ever since.

"When I left that place, they had turned my life upside down. I felt worthless and violated and have done many times since."¹⁵⁵

155 Operation Seabrook closed material

Perpetrators

17 allegations of sexual abuse which occurred between 1961, the year Medomsley opened, and 1969, the year Husband started working at Medomsley, were reported to Operation Seabrook. Following investigation by Durham Constabulary, there was insufficient evidence to support any charges relating to these allegations.

Neville Husband

The most prolific perpetrator of widespread sexual abuse at Medomsley was Husband, a prison officer employed as caterer from 1969 to 1985. Husband began his sexual offending within two months of arriving at Medomsley and continued to offend right up until his departure in August 1985.

Of the 549 documented sexual abuse allegations, 388 allegations were made against Husband, of which 338 report him as the primary abuser.

Leslie Johnston

The second most prolific sexual offender at Medomsley was Johnston, a prison staff member initially employed as a clerical officer at Medomsley, who went on to be a storeman there. Although Johnston joined Medomsley in 1965, there is no evidence to suggest he committed sexual offences before the arrival of Husband.

Our document review highlighted 33 sexual abuse allegations where Johnston is either named as the abuser or referred to as ‘the storeman’. In over two thirds of these cases Johnston acted alone. In the remainder he offended together with Husband.

The earliest report against Johnston is from 1971, although it has very little detail and suggests the abuse was committed jointly with Husband.¹⁵⁶ The earliest case where Johnston reportedly abused a trainee alone is in 1972, where the victim was also being separately abused by Husband.¹⁵⁷ The latest reports naming Johnston as a perpetrator are from 1985.¹⁵⁸ In one of these cases, he employed a very similar method to his offending to that which he was later convicted for in 1990.¹⁵⁹

Johnston left Medomsley when it closed in 1987. He left the Prison Service following his conviction in 1990.

Other offenders

Some victims alleged sexual abuse by other prison officers or night-time staff. Some of these suspects were named, referred to by a nickname or were physically described by victims.

156 Operation Seabrook closed material

157 Operation Seabrook closed material

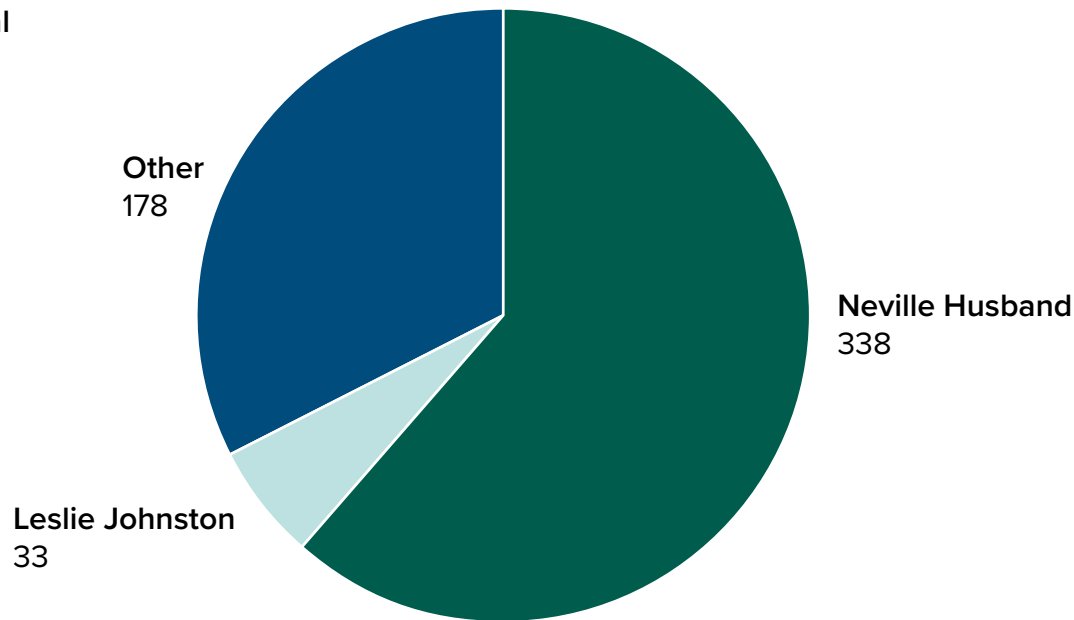
158 Operation Seabrook closed material

159 Operation Seabrook closed material

The following chart reflects the breakdown of sexual offences by Husband, Johnston and other offenders.

Figure 3: Primary sexual abuser

549 total



However, some caution needs to be taken with this figure. It is possible that significant investigative challenges, such as a lack of detailed descriptions of offenders or other identification issues, mean that the figures in relation to Husband and Johnston could be higher.

Neville Husband

Career and history of abuse

There is evidence that Husband sought opportunities to take positions of power and responsibility over young people from an early age. When he was 14 years old, he became a Scout troop leader at his local church. Two years later he became a Sunday school teacher, something he continued until the year before he joined the Prison Service. He was also involved in a Christian charity called Toc H, where he was the chairman of the Wearside district.¹⁶⁰

Between 1953 and 1962 Husband was a Sunday school teacher at Waddington Street United Reformed Church in Durham.¹⁶¹ Between 1956 and 1962 he was the church manager at there.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁶¹ Operation Deerness investigation material

¹⁶² Operation Deerness investigation material

Husband joined the Prison Service in December 1963. He worked at HMP Durham from December 1963 to 1964. After completing his training at Leyhill officers' training school, he was posted to Portland borstal in April 1964. In January 1966 he qualified as a catering officer.

In June 1967, while still at Portland borstal, Husband was investigated by police under the Obscene Publications Act relating to indecent images depicting sexual activity between men. These photos had been obtained by him from Sweden via mail order. When questioned by the police, Husband stated he had obtained the material as research for a book he was considering writing on the nature of homosexuality. The police informed the governor of Portland borstal in July 1967 that no further action was to be taken at this time.

In May 1969, Husband was posted to Medomsley as catering officer where he was in sole charge of the kitchen. There was a relief catering officer who would stand in for Husband when he was absent. However, Husband rarely took annual leave and had very few periods of sickness while working at Medomsley.

In August 1985, Husband transferred from Medomsley to HMP Frankland, where he worked as the senior cook and baker for approximately two years. In May 1987, he transferred to Deerbolt youth custody centre, where he worked for three months before finally transferring back to HMP Frankland. Victim accounts indicate that Husband continued to sexually abuse victims at both Deerbolt youth custody centre and HMP Frankland.¹⁶³

In 1989, Neville Husband had a period of long-term sickness due to chest pains.¹⁶⁴ He was assessed by a doctor in October 1989 who stated he would not be able to return to the Prison Service due to a depressive illness.¹⁶⁵ In April 1990 he was medically retired and received the Imperial Service Medal for services to the Prison Service.

In 1990, Husband began training as a minister in the Waddington Street United Reformed Church and was inducted as a minister in June 1994.

There was a limited police investigation by Durham Constabulary in 1998 into offending by Husband while he was employed at Medomsley. Although Husband was spoken to about two allegations made by former trainees, he was not arrested and the investigation was closed due to a lack of evidence.

In July 1999, Husband was arrested as part of Operation Voice, a Metropolitan police-led UK-wide investigation into the distribution of child sex abuse materials. A search warrant was executed at Husband's home address and over 30 **"hard-core pornographic videos"** were recovered from his study. Husband was arrested, charged and suspended from his ministerial roles within the Waddington Street United Reformed Church. However, the

¹⁶³ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁶⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁶⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

case was later dismissed at court due to a delay in the production of a specialist witness for the prosecution.¹⁶⁶ The church reinstated him as a minister in June 2000.

In 2001, he was arrested and interviewed regarding allegations of sexual abuse made by six victims as part of Operation Halter. In 2003, he was convicted of 11 different sexual offences, including one count of sexual indecent assault on a male under 16, one count of buggery with a male under 18 and nine counts of sexual assault against a male aged 16 and over. He was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. He was again suspended from the church.

Due to the publicity around the Operation Halter investigation, more victims came forward, leading to a further investigation, Operation Halter 2. A further trial took place in 2005 and Husband was convicted of four offences, including three counts of buggery with a male aged 16 and over and one count of indecent assault of a male aged 16 and over. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment to run consecutively with his previous sentence, which meant a total of 10 years' imprisonment.

During the 2005 trial, the trial judge indicated that any further cases against Husband were likely to be discontinued as it was no longer in the public interest to prosecute him and any further cases would be seen as an abuse of process.¹⁶⁷

These comments by the judge had significant consequences for many of Husband's victims.

In January 2006, Husband was removed from the Roll of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments of the United Reformed Church under their disciplinary process.

In April 2007, Husband was further arrested by Durham Constabulary regarding an allegation of sexual abuse at Deerbolt which was a youth custody centre at the time. The Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed with this allegation as it was not in the public interest.¹⁶⁸ This ruling had significant implications for victims who came forward after this date, as it effectively prevented them from getting justice.

In October 2009, he was released from HMP Full Sutton.

Shortly after this in November 2009, Husband was arrested and interviewed by Durham Constabulary regarding an allegation of rape relating to a victim who had been at Medomsley. The Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed with this allegation as it was not in the public interest.¹⁶⁹

Husband died in August 2010.

166 Operation Halter closed material

167 Operation Halter closed material

168 Operation Seabrook closed material

169 Operation Seabrook closed material

Patterns of abuse

Around 14 trainees were selected by Husband to work in the kitchens at any one time. Their duties would include preparing ingredients and bread, cooking and serving meals, washing up, and keeping the kitchen clean. Approximately once a day the warden or the chief officer would attend the kitchen to try the food and check the menu.

Husband had almost total authority over his kitchen, which led to him successfully identifying and abusing trainees, who were often vulnerable due to their age, size, stature, manner or background. He was a powerful, aggressive and highly manipulative sexual predator who employed a variety of methods to commit his abuse.

Selection of victims

Despite the existence of the labour board, Husband selected the trainees he wanted in the kitchen while they were cleaning or standing in line for their meals in the dining hall. Trainees would be instructed to stand to attention with their hands out in front of them. Husband would inspect their hands and select those who had clean hands. On some occasions, Husband would assault the boys by grabbing their genitalia while their hands were outstretched.

Some victims had already been assigned to other working parties, but Husband moved them to the kitchen.¹⁷⁰

At the beginning many of the trainees thought working in the kitchen was positive as they were inside, had access to additional food and avoided some of the physical exercise sessions.

“We were all lined up and the chef who I know as Neville Husband came along and picked out who he wanted to work in the kitchens including me.”¹⁷¹

“I remember the kitchen screw Husband had come along and pointed at me. He had first choice of who he wanted and chose me... I hadn’t heard anything about the kitchens but did notice that the staff were very similar to me, small, timid and a little vulnerable.”¹⁷²

Knowledge of existing vulnerabilities

Many of the trainees who were sexually abused were already vulnerable due to their family backgrounds. In some cases, the information about their backgrounds was contained in files which would have been available to Husband. We found examples of victims being confronted with information or documents from their own personal files.

170 Operation Seabrook closed material

171 Operation Seabrook closed material

172 Operation Seabrook closed material

“I had a limited bit of experience working a kitchen due to being in the navy. Husband already seemed to be aware of this, so I am not sure if he had read my record beforehand.”¹⁷³

“The chef then proceeded to read my Certificate of Service to me... I was emotionally broken at this point, and he used it against me.”¹⁷⁴

Isolation of victims

The trainees who worked in the kitchen slept in their own dormitory as they had to get up earlier than the rest of the trainees. This limited the amount of time they could spend with other trainees. It was clear that the kitchen boys were treated differently to other trainees.

“I’m not sure why I got the job in the kitchen... The kitchen job was strange because you did seem to be isolated from the rest of the other lads. We would get up early and we would get out of doing the gym activities. We never really had recreation time with the others. Nobody in the kitchens seemed to talk, it was a strange atmosphere... I cannot remember the names of the other two lads, but one in particular was singled out by Husband. He had to go and see him nearly every night in his office upstairs while me and this other lad sat listening to the radio downstairs. It was obvious what was going on with this lad although he never spoke about what was happening.”¹⁷⁵

“About two weeks into working in the kitchen as I was exempt from doing physical exercise because I was an asthma sufferer, Husband would allocate me additional jobs in the kitchen tidying up and cleaning down surfaces. Husband would often tell me that he liked me and would give me a cuddle. At first, I didn’t think anything of the cuddling thinking he was just being friendly... This would happen when we were alone in the kitchen. He would also say he liked me, and he would progress to putting his hands inside of my whites and touch me about the chest area and the genital area... I didn’t stop him doing it because I was scared.”¹⁷⁶

Husband would physically remove trainees from the kitchen to his office, the upstairs storerooms, or the walk-in cupboard. Victim accounts refer to different boys being taken out of the kitchen by Husband throughout his time at Medomsley. Trainees would disappear for a time then return, often in a distressed state, and they would refuse to talk about why they were taken away. Some trainees were told to stay behind after their kitchen ‘shift’, for cleaning up, pre-emptive preparation, cake decoration and so forth.

Using the kitchen regime

Once trainees were assigned to the kitchen, Husband was able to use the enforcement of rules to increase his control over them. As the kitchen party had to get up earlier than the

¹⁷³ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁷⁴ Operation Halter closed material

¹⁷⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁷⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

other trainees to prepare breakfast, Husband was able to use this opportunity to ensure trainees showered and would watch trainees while they were in the shower.

“As kitchen staff we started between 5am and 6am, finishing between 6pm and 7pm to clean up after the day’s work. One night I was kept back late after finishing by Husband, I was told I needed to shower, it was about my personal hygiene, which I thought was fine, but I was told to shower so I did, when I came out of the shower Husband was waiting, I was naked and intending to get my towel to get dried. I know that Husband took hold of me and kissed me and then went down on his knees and performed oral sex on me.”¹⁷⁷

Husband went on to sexually assault this trainee.

“I felt very isolated because there was nobody else there. The only access to the shower block was up a set of stairs which were located outside of Husband’s office. Access to the rest of the centre was through locked doors... I got dressed and accompanied by Husband I was taken back to the accommodation area.”¹⁷⁸

After showering, trainees were told to change into their kitchen whites, the uniform worn in the kitchens. Husband would sometimes claim that these uniforms had to be ‘measured’ or ‘checked’ and would use this as an excuse to touch the trainees inappropriately by placing his hand down their trousers. The kitchen party had their own changing room which was upstairs and above the kitchen and it is noted by many victims that Husband would always supervise them changing.

Working in the kitchen

Trainees were expected to perform a number of different duties in the kitchen. The more experienced ones were put on tasks such as bread making, ingredient preparation, cooking and sorting. The less experienced trainees would be assigned tasks such as cleaning and washing up. While they worked, Husband acted inappropriately with them, often while maintaining a jovial manner. The workspace in the kitchen was narrow and Husband would squeeze past trainees pushing his groin into their rears. Many of the victims describe this and refer to being able to feel Husband’s erect penis when he did this. Husband would also push himself into them from behind, and sometimes grope their chest and/or genitalia under the guise of showing them how a task was done properly.

Husband would joke with the trainees, and many described him as an affable, charismatic person to work for at first. However, over time Husband’s sense of humour would cross the line of professionalism. He would begin discussing sexuality, relationships, and sexual experiences with the trainees. He would ask them if they’ve ever had sex or seen pornography and would share his own with them. During all of this, he would provide cigarettes to the trainees, conditioning them into accepting his behaviour.

¹⁷⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁷⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

Every kitchen cohort had a ‘head boy’. This person was chosen by Husband to supervise the other trainees and was often seen as his most desirable target.

Grooming, the use of pornography and sexualised conversations

Husband used pornography as a way of grooming and inciting trainees to engage in sexual activity with him. Although Husband had previously been investigated in relation to receiving indecent images, there is evidence from prison officers who worked as gate officers at Medomsley that pornography in the form of magazines and videos was being sent to Medomsley addressed to the catering officer.

“I used to have to take the tea into his office which was next to the kitchens by a corridor; it had glass partitions and a big old-fashioned desk inside. He kept gay pornography in a big drawer at the front of the desk... he would make me come around the desk and stand by him, he would often already have his porn out and would be looking at it, obviously getting himself aroused. He would show me the porn and ask me if I liked it and would I like it done to me. I was so frightened I would just say yes... he had a rule in the kitchens that you were not allowed to wear underpants underneath your trousers for hygiene purposes... he was always at me touching me every day, he would show me porn and talk dirty to me saying, ‘I would love to do that to you.’”¹⁷⁹

“There was a locker upstairs where you got changed, and this locker was never touched. So one day one of the lads clicked the lock on it and it was full of vibrators and suspenders and basques and all that, and he come in the room and caught us lookin’ and he was like slap, beatin’ us all up, you know what I mean, ‘don’t go in there ever again’ and all that, and the next day he’d show us dirty books and get hi’self excited basically.”¹⁸⁰

“I remained in the kitchen and Husband came in and asked what I was doing and how far on I had got with the job, he told me to leave it and we went into his office... Husband showed me a pornographic magazine of naked women and asked what I thought of them, I recall saying that they were nice. After this I left the office and went about the work I had been allocated. The following day he again took me into his office and this time showed me photographs of naked males, these were pictures of boys stood naked, some were bent over exposing their backsides and there were also pictures of naked boys together on a bed, one having hold of the others penis. Husband asked me what I thought, and I said something like each to their own.”¹⁸¹

Some victims refer to Husband as being kind and even gentle. It is apparent from the numerous victim accounts that he had the ability to be both gentle and extremely violent and would often switch from one to the other.

“Once in his office he talked with me. He asked about my name commenting that it was such a beautiful name, asking where it came from. He seems really kind and gentle.

¹⁷⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁸⁰ Operation Deerness investigation material

¹⁸¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

He seemed like a really nice bloke. He asked me if I would like to work in his kitchens... Husband told me that he would look after me whilst I was there so long as I did what he wanted me to do and what he asked me to do.”¹⁸²

“Within the first few weeks a male who I know to be Neville Husband befriended me. He was the head chef in the kitchens, and I suppose he was one of the first members of staff to be friendly towards me, I suppose thinking back it was his way of breaking me in... I was petrified and felt that Husband was my only friend in the centre. Within a short space of time Husband had singled me out and made me ‘number one’ in the kitchens. I thought this was a privilege at the time because I was treated more like a member of staff and I was allowed to tell the other boys what to do. I could have as much food as I wanted to, the job involved getting up an hour before the other boys and switching on the ovens... I worked with Husband on a daily basis. Thinking back now I would describe him as flirting with me, I know this sounds stupid, but it was like he was chatting me up and eventually it was as if I was his ‘girlfriend’. I feel a bit daft for saying this but that’s how it was... To me Husband became my main abuser in the centre, thinking back now I think he deliberately groomed me so that he could sexually abuse me.”¹⁸³

“Husband was overly friendly with me almost straight away, he started to come up close to me and touch me and brush himself against me. He told me he had a psychic ability, a sort of sixth sense, and he knew I was curious about men and wanted to be with a man. He said that he could tell that I was interested, and he kept talking to me like this. I tried to keep my distance from him, it was so weird for me to be spoken to like that. He generally would talk to me like that when no one else was about. Of course, thinking about that now I realise he was befriending me and grooming me prior to what he did next. It was shocking behaviour, but as a young lad I just didn’t realise what was happening at the time.”¹⁸⁴

“He would talk calmly, used to say, ‘If someone is gay, there is nothing to worry about’, and would say, ‘If my son were gay, I wouldn’t have a problem with it.’ Thinking back, he was sort of grooming, testing the water.”¹⁸⁵

One trainee was sent to work in the kitchens a few weeks after arriving at the centre and describes himself as a pretty boy who had long hair and looked feminine. Husband asked this trainee to go upstairs to a private area where he then asked to take photographs of him in his underpants. In exchange Husband gave him a big tin of corned beef. This happened a few times and he describes that he was always rewarded with food or cigarettes.¹⁸⁶

“I remember him telling a few of us a weird and perverted story. He said that a boy has bragged to him about the size of his penis and that he could perform oral on

182 Operation Seabrook closed material

183 Operation Seabrook closed material

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himself. Husband said he demanded that he did it in front of him. When the boy showed him, he said that he made him finish in his own mouth. At the time it was such a bizarre story to tell us. I was young and was again confused and was left feeling very strange after hearing that. Now I think it was his way of normalising his behaviour and grooming us.”¹⁸⁷

Using trainees to facilitate abuse

Husband also used trainees who worked for him to identify and select trainees who would be kept behind at the end of the day.

“He was usin’ me to get the other lads to stop back on a night... They all respected me. I was supposed to be the number one in the kitchen, and he would say to me... he’d just come, like I say, at dinner time and say, ‘Who’s been a good boy today? Who’s been the best worker today? Who should we get back to stop tonight?’... I was just happy to help the lads out so they can get a few bits of shortbread and cups of tea... I would get that [too], yeah, and the other lad, yeah, yeah. Like a perk sort of thing.”¹⁸⁸

These trainees were often not aware of the real reason why they were made to stay late until they witnessed what happened after an incident of abuse.

One trainee didn’t know what was going on until one night when another trainee ran out of the shower area crying after being sent upstairs to be with Husband.

“I just knew something had happened by the look on his face and [he was] naked, and all his clothes in his hands.”¹⁸⁹

Inciting other trainees to commit abuse on each other

Husband frequently incited trainees to commit sexual abuse on each other while he either watched or participated. One trainee was taken to a linen storage cupboard by Husband.

“He went away from that room and returned with my brother. He put his arm around both of us and pulled us together and started to kiss my brother. He asked us to perform oral sex on each other... There was no way that I could do the act on him and then Husband started kissing my brother... I can still visualise a look that my brother and I had with each other.”¹⁹⁰

“I remember that there was an incident one day where a new lad was pinned down on his bed by the other inmates and Husband stuck a broom handle up his bottom. Husband was in the dormitory at the time and had ordered the boys to pin him down. It was like an initiation thing. I was sitting on the top bunk and watched as three other boys pinned this lad down... Husband was telling the lads what to do.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁸⁸ Operation Deerness investigation material

¹⁸⁹ Operation Deerness investigation material

¹⁹⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁹¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

“When I went into the kitchen I was grabbed by two unknown inmates by my arms and legs without warning or consent... I was forced backwards onto my back across a table. I struggled to break free while the chef was stood by my feet watching what was happening. The chef was smiling. The chef then told the lads to cut the trouser bit that I was wearing. They used a knife to do it and they pulled my trousers and underpants down to my ankles exposing my bare genitals. I was in fear of being sexually assaulted and I managed to struggle free pulling my trousers up and ran back to education, to my cupboard and hid inside crying. I did not report what happened in fear that I would receive a good hiding for it.”¹⁹²

Use of threats

Husband used a variety of threats to intimidate victims. He threatened to report trainees for offences which would mean the loss of remission, or to seriously harm or even kill them.

“He came into the office and grabbed me by the throat and threatened me. He said, ‘Do you realise you could be doing a lot more time in here.’ He suggested that he could lose me time and if he reported me to the governor I would serve longer. He threatened me and asked if I wanted to lose time. I said no. He said that I was going to have to abide by his rules.”¹⁹³

“He then told me he just wanted a word with me. He told me that if I told anyone about what had just happened, no one would believe me. He told me I was a criminal and he was a government employee. He told me that he would make my life hell. I believed every word that he said to me. Fear had been installed in me from the very first moment I entered Medomsley. I knew I had to do what he was telling me to do whether I liked it or not.”¹⁹⁴

“On two occasions Neville Husband followed me into the toilets and into the toilet cubicle. The first time he asked me to masturbate him. I did what I was told as he threatened that I’d go down the block [solitary confinement] if I didn’t do as he asked.”¹⁹⁵

“Whilst there I was allocated to work in the kitchens. I do not know how I was selected to go there. I was just told. The chef was called Neville. All the kitchen lads used to work around this large bench. Neville would push past you and deliberately push his groin into your back. He would regularly grab your groin over your clothing or touch your bottom with his hand. I am sure that he would have an erection when doing this. He did this to me and others. He would walk around with a big knife in his hand. He told us that he could slit our throats and get away with it, or hurt us and no one would care. He thought he could get away with what he wanted to do.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁹³ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁹⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁹⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁹⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

“I just remember feeling so scared that I would have done anything. I thought I would never get out of the place. He forced me to do these things mentally because he used to say things like, ‘You’ll never get out, you’ll never see your mam again.’”¹⁹⁷

“All the time he was telling me he could do what he wanted with me. If I didn’t do as he told me then there would be consequences. He told me to stay where I was. I was too petrified to move... He was talking to me, telling me he was a respectable man in the community, and I was just a criminal, he could do whatever he wanted. He stopped after about five or 10 minutes. He told me stand up and pull my trousers up. He told me to get out, warning me not to say anything to anyone, threatening me to keep my mouth shut... On a couple of occasions he put my arm behind my back, and forced my head towards the boiling pot... Husband threatened me that my mother would not recognise me if I was put in there. He said I could die and there would be no come-back for him or anyone. No one would care.”¹⁹⁸

“I didn’t tell anyone what had happened, and Husband acted as if nothing had happened. I was frightened of Husband as he could be very intimidating, I knew not to say anything because he threatened that no one would believe me, and he would say things like he had forced other lads to kill themselves in Medomsley.”¹⁹⁹

“Husband had threatened me saying he would come for me later and I was petrified. I wet myself as I so scared, I was vomiting and was in a real mess. At the cells I didn’t dare sleep as I was certain he would come and kill me... The night guard then came on and he was okay with me, he let me have a shower and sorted some clean clothes then took me back to the dormitory in the early hours of the morning. I was still too scared to sleep so this guard sat in the doorway all night.”²⁰⁰

Use of violence, implements and weapons

Husband often used violence, implements and weapons during his attacks. The violence included assaults and strangulation.

“A few days after this whilst working in the kitchen Mr Husband kept me back after the other lads who worked in there had left the kitchen area and took me to a room above the kitchens which was his area. This is a room which had a shower in it, some benches and a sofa. He told me to take my clothes off and I told him I wouldn’t do it and that I wasn’t a ‘puff’, meaning I was not a homosexual. He smacked me hard around the head and again told me to strip off and he laughed at me. At this I did take my clothes off and he put a cord around my throat and neck and began to strangle me with it. He made me bend over the sofa in the room and I felt him putting some cream around my anus and the next feeling I got was extreme pain in my bum. I felt that I was dying as the pain was horrendous and I was aware that he was raping me after inserting his penis into

¹⁹⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁹⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

¹⁹⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁰⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

my bum. I also recall seeing dildos lying around that room. Afterwards he told me to get dressed and leave.”²⁰¹

“I would like to add that every time Husband took me upstairs to abuse me that after a while his gratification had more to do with the violence he inflicted upon me. He would put his hands around my throat and squeeze until I could hardly breathe. He also had a silk scarf, and he would use it to practically strangle me. I could see Husband getting off on it. He would pant as if he was having sex. It was all about the control and power he had over me. He could do it enough to the point where I could not breathe then he would release it. I would get to the point of being lightheaded, but never lost consciousness.”²⁰²

“Husband then took his trousers down and then forced me to perform oral sex on him as he held the knife to my throat.”²⁰³

“One incident that I do recall was after I had a visit from a probation officer where I had to wear a shirt and tie, after this visit I was taken back to the kitchen. It ended up where Husband had approached me and kept me back to abuse here, he used the tie I had been wearing to tie me up. He tied one end of it around my genitals and the other end around my ankle and I was then forced to perform oral sex upon Husband. If I resisted the tension impacted upon my genitals, I thought I would castrate myself.”²⁰⁴

Working in the chapel

There are several victim accounts which indicate that Husband would spend time in the chapel at Medomsley and also committed abuse of trainees there.

On 25 April 1977, Witness K was sentenced to three months at Medomsley. He was 20 years old at the time. He was told to clean the chapel where he states he was sexually abused by a person whom he believed to be the chaplain.²⁰⁵ He later identified the male who he had believed was the chaplain as Husband.²⁰⁶

Escalation and wider offending

When Husband had established a predatory relationship with a trainee, he would then escalate the sexual acts that he forced them to engage in. He would also take trainees off-site and begin including other people in the abuse, like Johnston.²⁰⁷ Or he would introduce them to other men, some of whom would go on to engage in sexual assaults on the victims.²⁰⁸

201 Operation Seabrook closed material

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“I was taken to a farm... I don’t know whose car it was but remember it being a dark coloured car which had four doors... there were four of us in the car, two officers in the front of the car and myself and another prisoner in the back of the car... When I got there I realised that it was a farm used by the centre because I had been there before to do cabbage cutting with the gardener. When we arrived, we were taken into a building which was a bit like a barn, the type of place used to keep animals, the gate to the barn was shut behind us. There was already two males present who I assumed were farmers, the reason that I thought that they were farmers was because they were dressed in heavy raincoats. [One of the officers] told me that I had to have sex with the other lad and that he was then to have sex with me. I told him that I wouldn’t do it and he became angry telling me that I would do what I was told when I was told. I still refused to do what I was asked and was then taken back to the centre in the car by the other officer.”²⁰⁹

“I was taken by Husband, and I’m sure there was another inmate, to what I would describe as ‘a village hall’ in the Shotley Bridge area. I couldn’t say where it was. All I did was move chairs and stuff like that. I was introduced to a man called ‘Don’... he was what I would class as a lovey actor type... but they wanted us to meet up with him in a pub in Newcastle... and get up to some sort of activity that I had no intention of doing.”²¹⁰

Husband took advantage of legitimate reasons for removing a trainee from Medomsley to commit abuse on them.

One trainee was taken in in a van to Shotley Bridge Hospital for an X-ray. Two weeks later he was told he had to go for another X-ray. He was taken by Husband and after going to the hospital, Husband took him to a house in Consett.

“We knocked on a door and I remember a little fella answered it and looked at me... as soon as I got in there I was grabbed from behind by Husband who grabbed my arms and pulled them behind my back, he then pushed me forward so that I banged my head against a door in the kitchen.”²¹¹

He was sexually abused by both men.

“After it was finished Husband was pulling his trousers up and I stood up and the little fella had a polaroid camera. He took three or four pictures of my buttocks and then gave me a cloth or a flannel to clean myself up. Husband put me in the van and we drove back to Medomsley.”²¹²

Perpetrator D, the individual concerned in this case of abuse, was identified by Operation Seabrook. He had been previously convicted of sexual offences on males under 16 and it is also strongly believed that he was connected to the same drama group as Husband.²¹³

209 Operation Seabrook closed material

210 Operation Deerness investigation material

211 Operation Seabrook closed material

212 Operation Seabrook closed material

213 Operation Seabrook closed material

There is evidence that Husband frequented places such as the sauna at Stanley swimming baths, which had a reputation for being a place homosexual men met. At this location, he interacted with Perpetrator A, a male who was sexually abusing a male victim under the age of 16, Witness T. Witness T described meeting Husband at the sauna:

“The first time I met Mr Husband was... [at] Stanley Baths... when I first went to Stanley Baths, I was under the age of 16. I know that because to get into Stanley Baths into the sauna section you had to be over 16 years old... [Perpetrator A] was sexually abusing me then... We went there one day and I was in the sauna and Mr Husband was in the sauna... he just proceeded to sort of like stroke my leg... [Husband] came out, joined me and [Perpetrator A] for a cup of tea.”²¹⁴

Perpetrator A, who sexually abused Witness T, told him after this meeting that Husband was “a friend that he knew and he liked me and he’d like to see me some other time maybe at the house”.²¹⁵

Witness T states that Husband attended Perpetrator A’s house and he describes being shown pornographic videos by Husband and being sexually abused by him there.

“I always remember it, the first time Husband came to the house. I used to call him the mystery man because he used to carry a black brief case and I remember cos I used to think at first that he showed me a video but it wasn’t. Do you remember those cine cameras, it was one of those.”²¹⁶

Witness T subsequently disclosed to a local chaplain what was happening with Perpetrator A and he was arrested and sent to prison.

Witness T then describes being sent to Medomsley in 1976 for three months. Neville Husband approached the victim and asked him about Perpetrator A, who by this time had been convicted and sent to prison.

“So, I remember that day in question when he [Neville Husband] pulled me out and he got me by the ear cos that’s the way it was done at Medomsley maybe. I don’t know. And he pulled me from the crowd, and he pulled me to the kitchen into his little office and then I always remember the first words were, ‘I’m sorry I had to do that I had to make it look good.’... I panicked then because I was the one basically to put it into a nutshell, I was the one that put [Perpetrator A in prison]... I think the first words I said cos I had to, I said, ‘Oh,’ I says, ‘Don’t worry I didn’t say anything about you.’ I’m positive I said that.”²¹⁷

Neville Husband went on to sexually abuse Witness T while he was at Medomsley.

214 Operation Seabrook closed material

215 Operation Seabrook closed material

216 Operation Seabrook closed material

217 Operation Seabrook closed material

One victim says he and another trainee were taken off-site to a “posh” house to be sexually abused by Husband and several other men. He says the other trainee recognised one of the abusers as the magistrate who sentenced him to detention at Medomsley.

“There were people stood in the corners of the room. I will never forget what [the trainee] said about one of the men. He told me that one of the men was the bastard who sent him to Medomsley. [The trainee] never said it was a magistrate but that is what I understood him to mean. He said it with surprise as opposed to anger and as he said it he was looking in the direction of three to four men and I didn’t know which one of those men he was referring to.”²¹⁸

There is evidence that one of the people known to Husband who was involved in his offending was a local serving police officer, Subject A.

“The male... was watching me masturbate Husband. I could tell that the male was masturbating himself whilst watching us. The wall came up to the male’s stomach so I could not see his penis but by his movements and shaking I could tell that’s what he was doing.

I know this man was a police officer... I did not know this at the time but around one or two months later I saw him in **** in his uniform, he had stripes on the arm of his coat and it definitely had stripes on.”²¹⁹

Abuse outside of Medomsley

Husband was a key member of St Cuthbert’s Drama Group which rehearsed at St Cuthbert’s Church Hall in Shotley Bridge. He wrote and acted in some of these plays. In the 1980s he brought trainees from Medomsley to help serve refreshments during these performances.

At least one trainee alleged that another member of this drama group sexually abused him during one of these visits. The male in question was later identified and arrested, but was not charged due to insufficient evidence.²²⁰

There is evidence that Husband also targeted at least one other victim who was not a trainee from Medomsley while at this drama group.

“I became involved in a drama group which was operating at St Cuthbert’s Church Hall situated at Church Bank, Shotley Bridge... It was apparent to me that Neville Husband took an interest in me and seemed to pay more attention to me than others. I felt that he was treating me like a favourite... my parents even picked this up... Husband made comments which were from innocent situations but turned into suggestive and sexually loaded phrases. When I was washing my hands, which were covered in wallpaper paste, Husband came up to me and said ‘Oh what have you been up to?’ He said, ‘You know what that looks like?’, indicating the wallpaper paste, he then tasted or pretended to

²¹⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

²¹⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

²²⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

taste it and said, ‘No it tastes different’... I was of the opinion he was being sexually suggestive meaning that the likeness was to sperm. He quite often had a camera. He took a couple of photos of me whilst I was playing the pipes... he told me I was extremely photogenic and had the potential to become a male model and mentioned that he would like me to model for more of his photographs. He asked me if I would mind taking my t-shirt off and him photographing me. I agreed and did so and he took quite a few shots of me on the stage in different poses at his direction... After these had been taken and the photo session completed Husband chased me and tickled me just above the hips whilst I was trying to get my shirt back on. Husband gave me £10 and said there was more where that came from if I did more pictures for him.”²²¹

Abuse post-release

For some victims the sexual abuse did not end once they were released. Husband visited several particularly vulnerable victims post-release and continued to abuse them. He would attend their home addresses, sometimes under the guise of a hobby such as fishing, or to check on their welfare. These victims were often abused by other men after being shared with them by Husband.

Leslie Johnston

There is evidence that Leslie Johnston and Neville Husband shared victims between them. Of the 33 sexual abuse allegations we reviewed where Johnston was one of the perpetrators, just under one-third of them had been abused by both Husband and Johnston together.

Career and history of abuse

Johnston joined the Prison Service in 1965 as a clerical officer at Medomsley. He held this post for two to three years before moving to the stores to work as a storeman.²²² The storeman had access to all of the centre and worked closely with all departments, especially the kitchen, due to the daily movement of produce. Two senior trainees were allocated to work within the stores.²²³

In May 1969, Husband joined Medomsley as a catering officer, and he and Johnston became good friends. They shared similar interests in religion, joined the Freemasons at the same lodge and sometimes went to social functions together.²²⁴

When Medomsley closed in 1987, Johnston moved to Kirklevington Young Offender Institution (YOI). The following year a trainee at Kirklevington YOI accused Johnston of sexually assaulting him. This trainee was 16 years old.²²⁵

²²¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

²²² Operation Halter 1 closed material

²²³ Operation Halter 1 closed material

²²⁴ Operation Halter 1 closed material

²²⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

On 6 July 1989, Johnston was arrested and taken to Stockton police station regarding the allegation. He admitted the sexual assault on the trainee and further admitted that he had been committing acts of gross indecency with trainees at Kirklevington YOI and previously at Medomsley for four to five years. He stated these acts included oral sex and mutual masturbation, and were sometimes with former trainees at his home address following their discharge when his wife was away. Johnston denied any acts of buggery with serving or former prisoners at this time.²²⁶

Johnston was charged with two counts of indecent assault and appeared at Teesside magistrates' court on 8 July 1989. He was remanded in custody while police made further enquiries and later charged with a further sexual offence on Witness A, another trainee who had been at Medomsley in the summer of 1985.²²⁷

On 12 February 1990, Johnston pleaded guilty to two counts of indecent assault. He was fined £250 and received nine months' imprisonment which was suspended for two years with a supervision order for 12 months.

In 2001, when Operation Halter, the investigation into Husband began, Johnston was treated as a witness and a statement was obtained from him. Durham Constabulary have told us that this was because Johnston had already been convicted of an indecent assault on Witness A and at that time they had not received any further allegations against Johnston from other victims.

Johnston died in 2007, before Operation Seabrook began.

During this investigation, numerous victims alleged sexual offences against Johnston including anal and oral rape, and Durham Constabulary asked the Crown Prosecution Service to review these allegations to establish whether there would have been sufficient evidence to charge him. These allegations were not reviewed by the Crown Prosecution Service due to their policy not to provide charging advice in relation to offenders who have died.²²⁸

Patterns of abuse

Much of the sexual abuse Johnston committed took place in the kitchen, but also in other places in the centre such as the greenhouses.

Johnston sexually assaulted trainees who were employed in the storerooms.

"Within two to three days of working in the stores, Johnston shouted me into his office, stood me in front of his desk and started touching me inappropriately. He placed his hand on my groin area over my clothing. He attempted to take my trousers down. I resisted and pulled away saying, 'What are you doing?' At this he told me to leave. A day or two later he made a second attempt. I was taking items to and from stores as part of my role when Johnston approached me. There was no one else in the room. He took

²²⁶ Operation Seabrook and Operation Halter closed material

²²⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

²²⁸ Operation Deerness investigation material

hold of me next to some shelving and was successful in unbuttoning my flies and taking my trousers down. I was very scared. He placed both hands under my pants and started to touch me around my genital area, he pulled my penis out and touched it while telling me to get an erection.”²²⁹

“He pulled me to one side, and he took me to a storeroom behind the bar where they kept the crisp and bottles. He shut the door behind him, and I wondered what would happen, probably expecting a beating but he said, ‘I’ll give you something if you’re good.’ The next thing I knew he was taking his pants down and told me to play with it (his penis), it was clear what he wanted me to do, and I actually ended up performing oral sex on him until he ejaculated. I was shocked, I didn’t know what to do, I could see him getting angry and his word had a threatening tone as he told me what to do. I think afterwards he tried to give me a packet of crisps before leaving me. The same thing happened every weekend for the rest of my sentence... there was always the threat of physical violence, I knew my life could be made very difficult, he was the boss, in charge, and I had to accept it.”²³⁰

Johnston also targeted other trainees who worked as orderlies such as those who worked in the admin block making tea for the staff. He used excuses such as asking for cups of tea to interact with trainees before subjecting them to sexual assaults.

“When the storeman came back for his cup of tea, he shut the door behind him. He would briefly start talking to me, before he then said, ‘Fucking suck that,’ meaning for me to suck his penis, which he had already taken out of his trousers and was clearly erect. I then had to suck his penis until he ejaculated into my mouth, him standing, whilst I had to kneel on the floor. Once he had ejaculated, he slapped my head and said, ‘Get up you dirty cunt.’”²³¹

Offending with Husband

The sexual offences Johnston committed in the company of Husband were often more extreme in nature and frequently involved violence, the use of restraints, weapons and blindfolds. These attacks left some victims in fear for their lives.

“I believe it was the next morning when Husband came to my cell again with Johnston and that’s when I was raped by both of them. I tried to do a kung fu kick when they came in, but I was thrown to the floor by Husband, who then proceeded to get a knife out, which had a six-inch blade. Johnston was shouting that they were going to murder me. Husband then took his trousers down and then forced me to perform oral sex on him as he held the knife to my throat. I was in great fear for my life. It was horrible and he was sexually excited. As this was happening Johnston took my trousers down and started to rape me from behind, he penetrated my backside with his penis. I was in

²²⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

²³⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

²³¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

unbelievable pain and so fearful, I remember thinking ‘you’ll not get out of here alive’. I was in fear of my life.”²³²

“I was told to stay back after work, there was a storeroom above the kitchen and I had to go up there, I remember going up the stairs and the next thing I remember was that I was naked and I was down to my underpants, I didn’t know initially that I was in the storeroom because I was blindfolded. I was forced by Husband to perform oral sex upon him... There was another bloke there I only knew as Les, he was a storeman in the centre. They had put a noose around my neck, and I was told that I could easily be found hanging and they pointed to the beams in the ceiling, I believed them... I could hear them laughing, I had never been so confused or frightened, these people were supposed to be looking after me. I was taken back to the dormitory.”²³³

“I’d just had a shower and got dried so was stood in my underpants. A few seconds after this Husband and the storeman Johnston came in the room and threw a black cloth at me saying put it on. I didn’t know what to do with it and they said put it on your eyes. The black thing was like a blindfold, I had to tie it at the back of my head, and I thought they were going to beat me.”²³⁴

This victim then had his wrists tied and was taken to a room in the kitchen area where he was restrained with a stick.

“My underpants were pulled down from behind to my knees. A penis was pushed up my anus and he had sex with me. I felt hands on my back pushing me down as well. It finished after he ejaculated, there were moaning and groaning sounds and the pressure lifted from the stick for a few seconds but then it was pulled down again and someone had sex with me again. I know there were two people present as one was behind me in me and the other was holding the stick at the front of me. I could not move, was in pain, in shock and terrified. He finished, pulled my pants up, untied my wrists and took me back upstairs, telling me not to even think about telling anyone as who would they believe, me or you.”²³⁵

Victims also describe being subjected to extreme and prolonged humiliation such as being urinated on during the attacks.

“I was on my back, on the floor and Neville Husband came and stood at my feet and kicked my legs apart. Leslie Johnston had walked around behind me and was stood over me behind the area of my head. I was frightened and wondered what was going to happen next... all of a sudden, I became aware of a warm, wet sensation over my face and my chest, for a moment I thought that there must be a leak in the roof or something. I looked up and I could see Leslie Johnston had his penis out and was urinating over me. Both men had their penises out, both were sexually aroused, and both were

²³² Operation Seabrook closed material

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masturbating themselves over the top of me. Both of them masturbated themselves to the point where they each ejaculated over me. As Neville Husband finished himself and ejaculated on me, I remember him saying, ‘Welcome to Medomsley.’”²³⁶

Abuse post-release

Johnston continued to abuse victims following their release from Medomsley. When one trainee left Medomsley things didn’t work out for him, so he telephoned Johnston, who allowed him to live at his home address with him and his family.²³⁷ After a while this victim moved to a room in a local pub where Johnston worked and continued to abuse him.

Witness A was also abused by Johnston following his release from Medomsley. Johnston visited Witness A at his address and took him to his own house when his wife was out.²³⁸

Other sexual offending

The figures on sexual offending by perpetrators other than Husband and Johnston reflect that 32% of the sexual offences we reviewed were committed by other offenders. This suggests that sexual offending at Medomsley extended beyond these two key perpetrators.

It should be noted that allegations of sexual abuse by prison staff were made against all levels of officer, from discipline officers to senior leaders including the warden. Durham Constabulary investigated over 30 former members of staff but some prosecutions could not be brought against individuals as they had either died or were too ill to be prosecuted.

Some of these cases involved allegations of sexual abuse.²³⁹ The following accounts describe some of these other allegations of sexual abuse committed by prison staff. Some victims have described sexual abuse which took place in the hospital wing.

“Sometime the following day a man came into my room. I made the assumption that he was the doctor. He told me to pull my pants down and turn over. He then injected a syringe into my backside. I never asked what it was, as far as I was concerned, he was the doctor. I presumed that it must have been antibiotics or something like that. It is only as I have become older that I look back and think why was it done this way? Why did they not give me tablets? After he gave me the injection, he just left the room. I felt drowsy as a result of the injection. It was the second night on the hospital wing when the doctor came in and gave me the injection again in my backside. I was lying on my front when I was given the injection. After the injection I felt very drowsy. I felt him approach me from behind he got on top of me and raised me up by the waist. It was at this time that he raped me... I never slept at all that night.”²⁴⁰

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Evening assaults

Numerous victim accounts refer to sexual assaults which took place in the evening, often in the dormitories while trainees were in bed or while they were out of bed to use the toilet. Night duty staff consisted of two specially employed auxiliary staff who only worked nights and were locked into the centre during the night, as well as at least one full-time prison officer who was stationed at the gatehouse.

“There was one night in particular when an officer came into the dorm when I was in my bed. It was dark and he came to my bed and he slid his hand under my bed clothes and he took hold of my penis and started to masturbate it. I was shocked, felt uncomfortable and told him to stop or I would tell [the other prison officer] what he was up to. He did stop and it never happened again as I think he knew I would say something.”²⁴¹

“It was dark and nighttime, maybe 10pm. I was around three weeks into my sentence at this point. He was alone. He started to touch me up; I felt sick to my stomach in fact I was sick later on in the toilet after the assault. The officer made me give him a blow job and finish him off by masturbating him. I can’t recall what was actually said by the officer, something like ‘do it fast’, he was doing a lot of moaning and groaning. The officer dropped his trousers down to his ankles, put his penis in my mouth, this lasted around five minutes with his hands down by his side or on the top of my shoulders. He then made me masturbate him until he ejaculated and came all over my hand.”²⁴²

“I remember you could hear the officers going into the other dorms during the night and you could hear shouts and screams coming from the inmates. The officers did not come into our dorm, so I never saw this happening. All of the lads in our dorm were quite big and they left us alone on a night. It was a relief to go to bed sometimes to get away from the officers.”²⁴³

Deaths at Medomsley Detention Centre

During the relevant period, there were two deaths at Medomsley: the deaths of Ian Angus Shackleton and David Victor Caldwell. Ian Angus Shackleton was a diabetic who died in September 1981 and David Victor Caldwell was asthmatic. He died a few months later in January 1982.

The death of Ian Angus Shackleton²⁴⁴

On 3 September 1981 Shackleton was sentenced to three months at Medomsley. He was 18 years old. He had educational needs, had been in care and had attended a special school. At the age of nine, he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes which he struggled to manage. He was prescribed 100 units of Mixtard Insulin which he injected daily but did not always make sensible lifestyle choices to manage his condition.

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²⁴² Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁴³ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁴⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

When he was held in the police cells after sentence at court, it was noted that he was diabetic, and his father brought his medication to the police station. Due to confusion over his property record, this medication did not go with him to the detention centre.

Shackleton was examined by the medical officer on the evening of his arrival at Medomsley who administered a urine test to diagnose diabetes. Shackleton told the medical officer that he was prescribed Monotard Insulin and he indicated on a syringe the correct dose (80 units). The following morning, on 4 September, Shackleton was examined by the same medical officer and was provided with his insulin.

On 5 September Shackleton was seen by the hospital officer. It was noted he had been unwell overnight. A further urine test was administered which showed low sugar and a high level of ketones. At the request of the medical officer, the hospital officer contacted the local police station, asked them to check with Shackleton's family to establish the correct dose of insulin, and asked for the doctor to attend. Shackleton was subsequently examined by the doctor who admitted him to the hospital wing.

The police attended the home address of Shackleton and spoke with his sister. She was unsure of the type of insulin her brother took but thought the dose might be 14 or 15 units. An agreement was made for Shackleton's father to contact the police station later to confirm. Meanwhile, an officer at the police station had located the syringes and medication left by Shackleton's father two days previously. He contacted Medomsley and told the medical officer that it was Mixtard Insulin and gave the information given by Shackleton's sister about the dose.

The doctor made arrangements for Mixtard Insulin to be collected from a pharmacy in Newcastle the following day as there was none available locally. It was decided that Monotard Insulin could be given in the interim.

Shackleton was given some glucose in water during the day, and it was noted by the hospital officer that he was 'awake and lucid'.

On the morning of 6 September, the hospital officer examined Shackleton. He said he looked well. He performed a further urine test and prescribed 14 units of insulin. During the day he was given glucose in water and was noted as stable at 4:30pm when the hospital officer went home.

By 8pm Shackleton's condition had deteriorated. He was described as weak and drowsy. The doctor was called. He diagnosed hypoglycaemia (lack of sugar in the blood) and administered dextrose. Shackleton's condition improved.

During the night, a prison officer was working overnight in the houseblock. He described taking it in turns to check on Shackleton. During his checks he noticed that Shackleton was agitated and restless and tried to rouse him. He contacted the gate officer who phoned the doctor. The doctor instructed him to give Shackleton milk and sugar which he struggled to do as Shackleton kept spitting it out. On at least two occasions Shackleton got out of bed and was found by the officer on the floor. The doctor was contacted twice

more regarding Shackleton, but he repeated his advice about milk and declined to attend Medomsley when he was requested to by the officer.

On the morning of 7 September, Shackleton was examined by the medical officer who believed him to be in the early stages of a diabetic coma. The doctor attended and arranged for Shackleton to be admitted to hospital and an ambulance was called. Shackleton was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital where attempts were made to stabilise him. He developed septicaemia and a decision was made to transfer him to the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle.

On the journey there, Shackleton went into cardiac arrest and died.

A postmortem was subsequently carried out and the cause of death was cardiac arrest following acute pulmonary oedema due to diabetic ketoacidosis and coma. There were no injuries or marks of violence on the body.

During the inquest, evidence was heard that both types of insulin worked in very similar ways. Monotard builds up to its maximum effect at 12 hours and continues until 22 hours. Mixtard is similar but provides a boost towards the latter part of its duration. The hospital doctor gave evidence that the reductions in insulin from his normal dose could have contributed to the ketoacidosis, but noted that this could also have been affected by the presence of infection before arriving at Medomsley and/or Shackleton not managing his diabetes effectively, contributing to a decline in his stability on arrival.

The coroner gave a verdict of misadventure and said in the inquest hearing, **“You should not blame anyone.”**

The death of David Victor Caldwell²⁴⁵

On 15 December 1981, Caldwell was sentenced to three months at Medomsley. He was 18 years old and could not read or write. On the day of admission to the centre, he was examined by the hospital officer and no signs of infection were noted.

On 16 December he was seen by the doctor who recorded that Caldwell suffered from asthma but was fit to do PEI with an agreement that he could rest if necessary. He was allocated to a remedial PEI class, which was a daily session between 2pm and 2:30pm. This included jogging outside.

For the next 10 days Caldwell was employed on internal cleaning parties, attended remedial education classes and took part in PEI. On 26 December, Caldwell reported sick to the hospital officer requesting another asthma inhaler which he was given. This was noted in the sick register book.

On 28 December, Caldwell reported sick to the hospital officer saying he had hurt his fingers during PEI. He was excused from PEI for four days and told to return two days later.

²⁴⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

On 29 December, Caldwell was visited by his sister. She said she saw bruising to his face and saw that his hand was swollen. Caldwell told her bruising on his legs was caused by 'the screws', and that he got hit sometimes for not saying 'Sir'.

On 30 December, Caldwell was seen by the doctor who sent him to the hospital for an X-ray on his hand. There were no broken bones, and his hand was strapped.

On 2 January 1982, Caldwell was given grade 2 trainee status and allocated a job in the workshops.

On 8 January, Caldwell reported to the hospital officer saying he had a sore throat and was given some antibiotics. Later in the day he took part in 'organised sport' where he was required to jog around a tarmac games area. Caldwell was seen standing around and it was noted that he complained of being cold afterwards. There was snow on the ground.

On 9 January, Caldwell acted as a linesman for a football match.

On 10 January, Caldwell took part in PEI and was instructed to walk around the perimeter fence. Caldwell was seen standing around for most of this time. Again, there was snow on the ground. Later that day it was noted that Caldwell was a 'jockey' during free association.

On 11 January, Caldwell reported to the hospital officer feeling unwell with a bad chest. He was given some medication and excused from any physical activity. He attended a workshop at the local college and was seen to engage well. In the afternoon he was visited by his probation officer who said he was cheerful and made no complaints about his treatment.

On 12 January, Caldwell reported to the hospital officer and requested another inhaler. The hospital officer noticed he was wheezing heavily and requested the doctor. The doctor attended and he was subsequently admitted to the hospital wing diagnosed with an acute episode of asthma.

Two other trainees were in the hospital wing that day. One of them said they watched TV together and the other remembers Caldwell wheezing during the day and being given medication by the hospital officer. That evening a trainee visited the hospital wing and saw Caldwell, who was not well and was coughing a lot.

Later in the evening a trainee in the hospital wing saw Caldwell sat on his bed gasping for breath, and he went to get help. The hospital officer said he placed Caldwell in the recovery position and went to call for an ambulance which took him to Shotley Bridge Hospital.

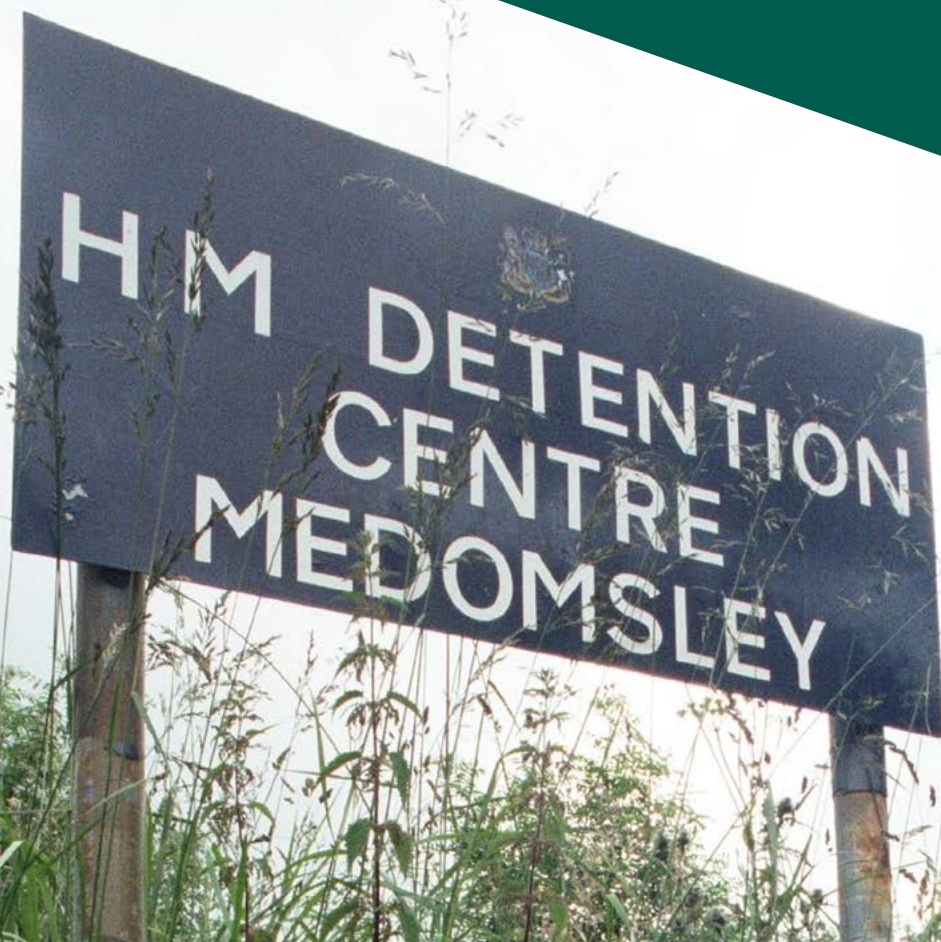
At 8pm on 12 January Caldwell was declared dead. The police attended the hospital and examined Caldwell's body. There were no signs of injury.

A postmortem concluded that Caldwell died of respiratory failure as a result of an asthma attack.

On 11 February 1982 an inquest concluded the death was as a result of natural causes. The family said the death was due to neglect, which was reported in local media. These allegations were investigated by the warden who wrote a report to the regional director. Caldwell's family decided they did not want to pursue their complaint any further.

Part 3: Awareness

**Knowledge of abuse and
missed opportunities to end it**



The abuse at Medomsley continued, unchallenged, for the entire 26 years of its operation. To begin to understand what opportunities existed for an intervention that would have broken the continuing chain of abuse, it is first important to establish which organisations, with sufficient agency to make a meaningful intervention, knew of what was taking place.

The findings in this part are based on analysis of the known regulations, policies and practices in place during the relevant period, the accounts of victims and former staff from Medomsley, and documentary evidence from a variety of sources.

Where information could not be found due to an absence of records, this has been clearly stated.

The Prison Service

The Prison Service is the government organisation that oversees the operation of all prisons and prison-like establishments.

The staffing structure at Medomsley is described in part 1 of this report. The centre was led by a warden. Above the warden there was a regional director, who would oversee the running of prisons, borstals and detention centres in their area and would report to headquarters.

The Prison Service headquarters comprised of several departments with different areas of focus, including one department which was referred to as the establishment division and dealt with the conduct and performance of staff.

Knowledge by the Prison Service

There is evidence that the national management of the Prison Service had some knowledge that physical abuse was taking place at Medomsley as early as 1965 due to the complaints made to the Home Office.

There were clearly other reports of complaints being made to the Home Secretary about the use of violence. In June 1967, the director of borstal administration in the Home Office wrote to all wardens advising that there had been an increase in the number of complaints made by trainees and ex-trainees of detention centres accusing members of staff of assault. Read more on this on page 122.

One victim from Medomsley recalled a senior officer making reference to a Home Office instruction when he and other trainees were being made to hold a stress position – a chair position against the wall. This suggests that some form of guidance was being spread to Medomsley regarding the use of stress positions.

“They would keep us in these stress positions for 10 or 15 minutes, which caused absolute agony... I remember on one occasion that the senior PO [prison officer] came down the corridor when this was happening and was furious. He said, ‘What have you been told about doing this? You know what the Home Office has said about this.’”²⁴⁶

Disclosures of physical abuse to prison staff at Medomsley

48 trainees document that they made complaints to staff of physical violence by other staff members. 19 of these were made directly to the warden.

“I was then taken to the governor by officers whose identities I do not know. I think [the prison officer] came as well and they all accused me of assaulting him. The governor asked me what had happened, and I told him I had been assaulted by [the prison officer]. He could see the injuries to my face. I think that the governor believed me as I wasn’t punished, just kept ‘in the block’ for the day.”²⁴⁷

One warden described placing two of his officers on discipline charges following complaints from trainees about two PEIs being aggressive and overzealous towards them in the gymnasium. He accepted that receiving complaints from trainees was unusual. They rarely complained as complaints had to go through the officers first.

“I used to see the boys every day, and when I was on duty I would go down and take any applications from boys. The boys came – somehow they got through the staff. I don’t know, they must have told the staff they were doing something else, but they actually said, ‘I want to make a complaint about what’s happened in the gym.’ And this was most unusual because it was fairly rare to happen. So, I actually took their complaint and wrote down what they were complaining about, and I asked them then to write a statement for me. And I then used that statement in a disciplinary enquiry.”²⁴⁸

He said both officers were found guilty during a discipline hearing and were given a written warning.

“I mean they were both on discipline charges during my time, because the boys had complained about them. And I did try to get them to moderate a bit, and just to calm the atmosphere, but it’s very difficult to actually – I don’t know. It’s very difficult to interfere with a set programme that had been going for years.”²⁴⁹

No documentary evidence of these cases remain as the officers’ personnel files and the governor’s journals from that time have since been disposed of.

Many trainees said they tried to report their abuse to prison staff, but were told not to say anything, threatened about consequences of complaining or told to say that their injuries had occurred accidentally.

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“One day I confided in the gym teacher about what had happened. I got on well with [the officer] as I was good at sport, he was a nice officer. He told me to keep my mouth shut about it and not to mention it again. I took his advice and kept my mouth shut, but the beatings and threats kept happening for a while longer.”²⁵⁰

“I was marched in front of the senior officer, he asked me what had happened to me, I told him that I had been set about by the officers in reception, then set about again by officers after having my hair cut in the mess, then again at 3am in the morning after doing bunny hops. I told him that his officers had set about me, he replied, ‘You don’t want to say things like that, we can make life easy in here or hard in here.’ He instructed for me to be taken away, I was marched back to the cell in the punishment block, I was left alone for quite some time.”²⁵¹

One trainee said he was assaulted by the PEI causing an injury to his eye which required stitching.

“When I came back I got taken out of the kitchen by [the prison officer] and they took me down the warden’s office and I was told to write a report about what happened to my eye. They went off for a tab and I wrote a report about what really did happen. [The prison officer] came back and tore my report up. I had to write what they said and told me that I fell over and it was an accident, I had to sign it.”²⁵²

There are some accounts in which prison officers showed acts of kindness, but their lack of positive action demonstrated a wilful blindness to the violence by other officers.

“[The PEI] made my life hell whilst in there. I went to bed in fear of him. I woke up in fear of him and I spent all day in fear of him... I recall doing the governors run and coming second. One of the screws gave me a Cadbury’s cream egg for doing so well. He gave me the egg and told me to enjoy it out of sight... I knew this officer was not happy with the way [the PEI] treated me.”²⁵³

One trainee said that two officers had assaulted him, causing an injury to his ear. He disclosed what had happened to another officer who helped him seek medical treatment and took him to see the warden.

“He sat me down and made me a cup of tea and gave me a wet tea towel for my face and waited for me to settle down... The officer got me back into bed and said he wouldn’t stop at work until it was sorted. He was supposed to finish at 6pm but he was going to stay until it was sorted. He was going to sort out the nurse to come and see me when they came on duty and was also going to take me to see the governor so I could officially complain... They gave me a couple of tablets and treated my ear. They packed it with some padding. [The prison officer] then took me with him to go to the governor’s office. I remember that on the way he stopped at an SO’s (senior officer’s) office and

²⁵⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

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went inside. I was left outside, and I could see him arguing with about three or four officers inside. I could hear raised voices and swearing. He came out of the office and slammed the door. We went to the governor's office, the old screw said he couldn't go in but for me just to tell the governor exactly what had happened. I walked into the office, the governor was sat down at his desk and asked me what I had to report. There were two chief officers stood there with me, one on either side. I told him everything that had happened... After I had finished telling him what had happened, he just said to me that I only had a few days left in the prison and his advice would be to use my time wisely over these few days and when I got out of prison to put a steak on my face. He then told me to get out of his office.”²⁵⁴

There are seven documented incidents where a family member reported physical abuse to the warden and other staff at Medomsley. There is no evidence of formal action being taken as a result of this.

“I do remember that when we had to march I was slow at getting the hang of it and when I was trying to get it right and I couldn't, I would get hit across the face with leather gloves. Several officers would do this and it was standard behaviour. It was common that we would be hit and slapped by the guards. On my mother's first visit, which was after about two weeks, she complained to staff as I had quite a lot of bruising to the side of my face from being slapped. Nothing was done about this.”²⁵⁵

Many trainees reported that they suffered further violence after they or a family member had complained to prison staff or were themselves punished by a loss of their remission.

This trainee tried to report sexual abuse to an officer he trusted.

“After the second time so I had the courage to report it to one of the officers... I spoke to him the same day. I explained exactly what had happened, and how many times... I was crying in the office, telling him what [the prison officer] had done. He said he would write a report and have it looked into for me, and hand it to his superior. He did write something down, but I couldn't read or write at the time, so I don't know what he wrote. That had made me feel a little bit better.”²⁵⁶

This trainee said he was later assaulted by the officer he disclosed his complaint to.

“Later on as I was walking along a corridor when [the prison officer I disclosed to] jumped out of the side and punched me in the stomach, I fell to the floor, my face was purple. I couldn't get my breath, and I think [he] panicked. He lifted me up and said, ‘Don't say anything. If you do I'm going to do it again. I'll chin you.’ It caused a big bruise on my stomach. I think he did it because I had reported [the prison officer who sexually abused me].”²⁵⁷

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“I remember having a visit whilst there off my mother. She noticed I had a bit of a ‘fat lip’. I told her one of the officers had done it. Before leaving she actually spoke to one of the officers to show her displeasure at my injury. Of course afterwards I was given a physical beating by two of the officers for having even mentioned it to my mother. The whole place was ran on fear and threats.”²⁵⁸

“I was put on report and taken to see the governor, I made a formal complaint to him that I’d been assaulted. This was ignored and I lost two weeks’ remission. Again, Neville Husband was called in but I kept my position in the kitchen but another two weeks remission was lost – in total I had lost four weeks.”²⁵⁹

One trainee told his father about being assaulted during a visit. Once visiting was over he was summoned to see the principal officer, who told him that his father had complained to staff after visiting that his son had been hit by the staff. [The officer] told him not to tell anyone about his treatment at Medomsley and to keep his mouth shut.²⁶⁰

“I decided to tell my mam and dad as things were becoming more serious. I understand that my mam informed the prison governor about what had been going on.”

This trainee was not aware of any action as a result of his parents’ complaint.²⁶¹

One trainee believes he was moved to another prison following his mother making a complaint. He said his mother saw injuries during a visit and complained to the warden. The following day he was put in a taxi and moved to another detention centre.²⁶²

Seven trainees tried to report their abuse to officers, but the complaints system was skewed in favour of the staff and trainees were discouraged from complaining or threatened about repercussions.

“I tried to report the assault to [two prison officers], but they just told me to say I had fallen over or I would get more of the same. I realised at this point it was pointless trying to report anything.”²⁶³

Witnessing injuries on trainees

There is evidence that senior staff including wardens saw injuries to trainees and either showed no professional curiosity as to how they had sustained those injuries, ignored them or took action to conceal them.

One trainee said that he was physically assaulted in the reception area. The following day he was taken to see the warden.

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“When I went into the governor he saw that I had black eyes and a swollen nose. He smirked at me and said, ‘I see you’ve met the reception committee.’ He obviously knew what was going on.”²⁶⁴

One trainee described an incident where an officer threw a breadbasket at his head, causing an injury. This was witnessed by other trainees who gave evidence during Operation Seabrook.

“I instinctively looked up and saw it was [prison officer] who had hit me, and he was laughing at what he had done. The breadbasket stuck on my head, and I can only describe it as Jesus with the crown of thorns on his head. I can only presume he hit me as I was leaning on the dining room table... I noticed very quickly that [the prison officer] was no longer laughing, and he looked shocked at the amount of blood coming from my head and he realised the assault was really over the top... I had only been sitting on the chair for a very short time when I saw the governor of the detention centre coming down the corridor towards us. He demanded to know what had happened and he pulled back the towel on my head to see what injury I had. The governor and the officers went up to the governor’s office which was only a short distance away from where I was sitting. I heard the governor shouting, demanding to know how the officers were going to explain what happened to me, as I would have to go to hospital. I heard [the prison officer] saying how he was sorry and how he would sort things out and he would personally take me to Shotley Bridge Hospital.”²⁶⁵

Physical abuse witnessed by the warden

On some occasions, victims described assaults or ill treatment which took place directly in front of the warden (or the person deputising as the warden).

One former officer told us:

“It was a very physical environment, physical assaults, there was an occasion in the governors room where a PTI (physical training instructor) was dragging two inmates round by the hair around the fence... but that situation it was in full view of everybody that was there, including the governor.”²⁶⁶

Many trainees described being physically assaulted by prison staff while in the presence of the warden. There is no evidence in any of these cases that the warden objected to the behaviour of his staff and in one case, the warden (or deputy) appeared to be aware that physical abuse was about to occur.

“The governor sat with two others at his table and after I had told him of my request I was asked to sit outside for 15 minutes whilst they came to a decision. There was a knock on the door which meant I had to go back in. As I went back in, I stood with my hands behind my back. I was told that my application had been denied as they classed

²⁶⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁶⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁶⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

my gran to be not a close enough relation. I said to the governor, ‘You fucking heartless bastard’, at which point [the prison officer] punched me full in the mouth using his clenched fist. A second guard set upon me, punching me to my ribs and body using his two fists. This took place in front of the governor.”²⁶⁷

“We were instructed by the escorting officers to stand in a line outside of the governor’s office. One by one we were taken individually into the governor’s office as part of our induction into our detention. I believe I was one of the first to go into the governor’s office to see him. I was made to stand to attention in front of the governor. I was flanked at either side of me by two officers... the officer who was standing behind me on my right-hand side hit me full force to my head with his hand. As he hit me, the officer who struck me said something about how I should be looking straight ahead towards the governor when the governor was talking to me.”²⁶⁸

“When I arrived at Medomsley I was taken straight to the governor’s office, where I was made to stand in front of the governor who was at his desk and was informed by one of the escorting officers that I had called the judge at court a bastard when I got sentenced. I had done that as I thought six months was too high a sentence. As a result of this the governor told me to ‘turn and face the wall’, which I did. Then one of the other officers, I don’t know which one, bashed my head against the wall which hurt me and left a mark.”²⁶⁹

“I was taken to a big room with a desk in it and the governor was sitting at the desk. There were two prison officers standing either side of me and he asked if my mother was a prostitute. I said ‘no Sir’, and the two prison officers standing either side of me punched me in the side of my head at the same time. They kicked me really hard up my backside near the bottom of my spine and kneed me in my right thigh. When I got back up I was asked the exact same question again. I thought I should maybe say yes but I didn’t and said no. The prison officers started to hit me again until I eventually said yes to stop the assaults.”²⁷⁰

There is one documented incident in 1965 where a deputy warden reported physical abuse by an officer on a trainee. He witnessed an officer strike a trainee in the changing rooms and reported this to the warden in writing. The typewritten note on page 106 indicates that the warden gave a warning to the officer concerned.

²⁶⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁶⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁶⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁷⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

H.M. Detention Centre
Medomsley.
Consett, Co Durham.
10 - 11 - 65.

Sir,

I respectfully state for your information that when I made my evening visit last evening the 9 - 11 - 65, at about 6 - 20 pm, I went to the Gymnasium where a class of inmates were preparing for their evening class.
The class were in fact changing in the shower room.
I went to the door of the room to indicate my presence, and observed Officer [redacted] strike an inmate, this a distinct blow, it may have been intended as horseplay, but a dangerous practice in view of recent statements about this sort of thing.
Officer [redacted] was not aware of my presence at the time but subsequently was.

[redacted]
Deputy Warden.

To.
The Warden.

I saw [redacted] re the above. He assured me that this was playfulness on his part. I warned him forcefully that this type of behaviour is intolerable.

[redacted]
Warden
10. 11. 65.

This was the only occasion any formal action was noted in the surviving prison staff personnel files for any inappropriate use of force against trainees at Medomsley.²⁷¹

Summary of knowledge of physical abuse by the Prison Service

Documentation shows that by 1967, the director of borstal administration was aware of the widespread practice of detention centre officers giving out their own punishments. However, it is clear that his memo did little to change the culture of detention centres.

It is apparent from the victim accounts and in some cases former staff interviews that physical violence was used routinely against trainees at Medomsley as part of the day-to-day regime. There is strong evidence that the violence started on arrival during the reception process, was at its worst during the first few weeks, and in some cases eased up over time and towards the end of the detention period. This points towards the use of unauthorised and illegal violence by staff, whether consciously or not, as part of a training regime. The relaxing of the regime as trainees went through the programme may have been because staff, in their own mind, believed they were being successful and the

²⁷¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

programme was delivering better behaviour. However, this perceived improvement was often superficial and was brought about by fear.

Some of this violence resembled forms of irregular, low-level violence employed by staff in schools to enforce discipline (despite the lack of a clear legal sanction for this violence). However, much of the violence went far beyond this and resulted in serious injuries such as fractures, head injuries, scarring, and long-lasting physical and mental health consequences.

In some cases, assaults were committed in the presence of leaders such as the warden, his deputy or a principal officer. When violence was witnessed, no action was taken against the officers perpetrating this violence. In other cases, victims reported physical abuse verbally to the warden or his deputy and presented with injuries, but again this resulted in no investigation by the warden.

Trainees who suffered serious injuries and were taken to hospital were told what account to provide to medical staff to explain their injuries, which indicates officers knew what they had done was wrong.

What did the Prison Service know about the sexual offending of Neville Husband?

As mentioned, Husband came to the notice of the establishment division of the Prison Service in 1967.

In June 1967, Husband was investigated for offences under the Obscene Publications Act while working as a prison officer at Portland borstal. The local police informed the governor of Portland borstal of the arrest and had been instructed by the director of public prosecutions to investigate Husband's possession of homosexual pornographic material which he had obtained from Sweden. The governor was shown **"sample photographs of men in obscene and lewd postures"** by the police.²⁷²

Husband went to see the governor of Portland borstal following his police interview and told him that he was in possession of the material as he was considering writing a book on homosexuality.

An internal memo sent from the governor to the establishment officer in the Prison Service refers to an earlier telephone conversation between the governor at Portland borstal and the assistant director of the Prison Service regarding Husband.

The same memo details sent to establishment division 3 explained that Husband was under investigation and offered support of his position.²⁷³

"Mr Husband is a good cook and baker, a married man with one child, bluff, hearty and something of a comedian. He says that he has not discussed homosexuality with any inmates or staff here. He certainly has no obvious homosexual or effeminate traits,

²⁷² Operation Halter 1 closed material

²⁷³ Operation Halter 1 closed material

and I see no reason why he should not continue to perform his daily duties whilst this investigation is proceeding.”²⁷⁴

There is no evidence that Husband was suspended or that there was any form of internal investigation into the matter. The police investigation at the very least should have prompted a disciplinary investigation under the Code of Discipline for bringing discredit on the Prison Service. There is nothing to suggest this was considered.²⁷⁵

The absence of professional curiosity or sufficient emphasis on a duty of care by the governor at Portland borstal and the establishment division meant that when the police informed the Prison Service that no further action would be taken against Husband, he remained as a prison officer and was free to move to another institution which held young males.

It is unclear whether the information about the police investigation was shared with subsequent wardens at the institutions that Husband worked at.

Husband’s offending at Medomsley

There is strong evidence that prison staff colleagues of Husband were aware of sexual abuse taking place in the kitchens at Medomsley. The extent of this knowledge ranges from rumours which frequently circulated among staff, to direct knowledge of concerning behaviour by Husband, disclosures made to staff by trainees, and the facilitation and participation by some staff in his sexual offending. Many victims recount that staff were well aware that both physical and sexual abuse was taking place.

In relation to sexual abuse, there were widespread rumours, among both trainees and prison officers at Medomsley, which suggest many were aware that Husband posed a risk to trainees placed in the kitchen. Trainees were certainly made aware by other trainees that the kitchens were a place where sexual abuse took place.

“If you were given a kitchen job, your jaw dropped because you knew what was going on. People were aware that Neville Husband was sexually abusing the lads. I knew about it, because the lads would talk about it.”²⁷⁶

“It was common knowledge that the detainees tasked to work in the kitchens could have a downside, as working in the kitchens could lead them to being sexually assaulted.”²⁷⁷

There are 124 documented victim reports which refer to rumours of sexual abuse within the kitchens.

Some trainees were even warned by prison staff not to go into the kitchen or the stores.

²⁷⁴ Operation Halter 1 closed material

²⁷⁵ Operation Deerness investigation material

²⁷⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

²⁷⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

One trainee said he was warned about the kitchens and told not to choose a job there.

“This officer told me that when I saw the governor that I would be given a choice of jobs. He told me, ‘Don’t take the kitchens and don’t take the stores.’”²⁷⁸

A prison officer told a trainee who was moved from the kitchen party, **“I bet you’re glad to be out of that kitchen.”²⁷⁹**

Some prison officers made comments or engaged in practical jokes which had a strong sexual undercurrent in relation to Husband. One trainee said he was selected to work in the kitchens.

“[The prison officer] said, ‘You get all the perks, you get sugar in your tea, and you know you get to have bacon sandwiches,’ and when I was going in the kitchen for the first day one of the guards gave me a jar of Vaseline and said take that to Neville... He just said that, ah give that, you’ll need that, give it to Neville or Mr Husband.”²⁸⁰

The trainee states that he gave the Vaseline to Husband as instructed and he laughed. The trainee was made number two (second in charge) in the kitchen by Husband and went on to be repeatedly sexually abused by him.²⁸¹

Another trainee said, **“[The prison officer] told me that I was to start work in the kitchens the next day and that I would be Mr Husband’s new wife, and he laughed.”²⁸²**

There is evidence that many prison officers shared information about Husband which suggested knowledge or, at the very least, suspicions about his behaviour.

“As soon as I arrived, I was told by two officers that Neville Husband was a domineering character and also that he allegedly sexually abused inmates... Although I never witnessed Husband sexually abusing any inmates in my presence, I was aware from the atmosphere in the kitchen amongst the boys that something was going on.”²⁸³

“At the time I was at Medomsley with Husband, who I believe left before me, I did hear rumours that he was interfering with the boys, that was the usual ‘banter’ in prison, amongst staff... it did occur to me while knowing Husband that he maybe homosexual, however he was a married man, with children, he was always coming out with sexual banter, double meanings.”²⁸⁴

Some of the rumours which circulated related to Husband’s habit of keeping trainees back after their day shift under the guise of helping with cake decoration or other activities.

278 Operation Seabrook closed material

279 Operation Seabrook closed material

280 Operation Seabrook closed material

281 Operation Seabrook closed material

282 Operation Seabrook closed material

283 Operation Seabrook closed material

284 Operation Halter 1 closed material

Other rumours demonstrated some awareness of Husband's abusive activities, such as photographing the trainees in compromising positions or watching them in the showers.

"There were always very strong rumours that Neville Husband was homosexual and that he was sexually abusing boys who were working for him in the kitchen. This was general knowledge amongst staff and boys in the centre. On a nighttime Husband would usually keep one young boy back with him after the others had been dismissed and we all felt sorry for that boy."²⁸⁵

"There were rumours going around that Husband had taken photographs of the boys in compromising positions in the kitchen area."²⁸⁶

"I was aware of rumours circulating within the centre about Husband i.e. the fact that he had his favourite boys and that he would stand and watch the boys whilst they were in the showers. Husband had his own shower block over in the catering department."²⁸⁷

"Husband worked very long hours, sometimes from 7am until 7pm. He would often make ornate cakes and it was known that he would keep one or two boys back until late to help him ice the cakes. There were comments passed by both staff and prisoners that Husband was having sex with some of the boys in the kitchens. This was always rumour and innuendo, no one ever made a formal complaint to me about being abused by Husband, and I never witnessed any inappropriate behaviour."²⁸⁸

There is some evidence that some staff at Medomsley, particularly those civilian members of staff, attempted to protect trainees from Husband's abuse.

One trainee was selected to work with the plumber as his assistant. They were both working in the kitchen and the job was taking a while and the plumber had to go. Husband suggested the plumber leave the trainee with him to which the plumber replied, **"I'm not leaving this lad with you."**²⁸⁹

"We were in the boot room waiting to be allocated work and the painter come in, he said, 'You'd better come with me.' I told him, I said, 'I've got to go in the kitchens.' He was a civilian. He says, 'You don't have to. Come with me, I'll show you how to paint.' He told me, 'I've done you a favour.'"²⁹⁰

"As I ushered past [Neville Husband] he grabbed me by the testicles, I dropped the vegetables on the floor. There was all kinds going through my mind, I jumped back and broke away from his grasp... I rushed back outside took my barrow and went back to the poly tunnels. The civilian... was there waiting. I told him I didn't want to go back round to the kitchens anymore. [The civilian] asked why – I didn't tell him, just said please don't

285 Operation Seabrook closed material

286 Operation Halter closed material

287 Operation Halter 1 closed material

288 Operation Halter 1 closed material

289 Operation Seabrook closed material

290 Operation Deerness investigation material

send me anymore. [The civilian] told me don't worry about it son, I'll put you on the grass cutters tomorrow."²⁹¹

As well as the rumours circulating between staff and trainees, there were a number of incidents involving Husband which suggest that prison staff should have been aware of the risks he posed, or at the very least should have had concerns about his behaviour.

There is no evidence to suggest that prison staff tried to raise concerns or highlight Husband's various behaviour, from watching trainees in the shower to keeping trainees back after the working day ended or removing trainees from recreation. This was despite Rule 90 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules which stated prison staff were obligated to **"communicate to the warden any abuses or impropriety which comes to his knowledge"**.²⁹²

Homosexual pornography being received at Medomsley

It has already been addressed that pornography was being sent to Medomsley for the attention of Husband.

One prison officer who performed the role of gate officer recalled receiving post addressed to Husband.

"For some time, I was employed as a gate officer and was surprised to see that Husband was receiving large quantities of post containing homosexual pornography. Sometime the envelopes were not sealed, and I used to look at the magazines and burn them without telling Husband. One opened package contained a video. I looked at this and found it was hardcore gay porn, again I burned it."²⁹³

This officer said it occurred multiple times. He spoke to other officers, and they decided to burn the material rather than referring the matter to supervisors.²⁹⁴

"So, in those days, in 1978 to 1979 videos were just coming in... He used to get it all sent to Medomsley. He didn't get it sent home, he got it sent there, so I used to burn it a lot. He ain't going to be running around asking, 'Has anyone seen my homosexual video please?'... I discussed it with a few staff but it wasn't kind of the topic of conversation... I must have burned 30 of the bloody things."²⁹⁵

This prison officer said he did not report it to senior officers as Neville Husband was well liked by management, the implication being that no action would be taken.

291 Operation Seabrook closed material

292 Operation Deerness investigation material

293 Operation Seabrook closed material

294 Operation Seabrook closed material and Operation Deerness investigation material

295 Operation Deerness investigation material

Searching of the kitchen

Items which should have raised concerns were located in the kitchen on two separate occasions. On the first occasion, which was around 1978, there is evidence that supervisors including a principal officer were aware of what was found, but they took no action in relation to the items and did not escalate any concerns to the warden.

In 1978, one officer during his probationary period at Medomsley decided to search the kitchens as part of his daily search duty.

“I was six months into my probation and the first time I’d been put on searching duty and there was a book where you logged where you’d searched and nobody had logged the kitchen. And I thought, ‘there’s a good place to search, it hasn’t been done in ages, I’ll pop along to the kitchen and turn it over’ and found all this stuff.”²⁹⁶

The officer found a dildo and homosexual pornography in an office above the kitchen which he noted in the search record.

“I was walking along the corridor, and I turned – and I literally walked into Husband, and he grabbed me, banged me up against the wall and said, ‘You ever... search my kitchen again and interfere with my property, I will punch your head in.’ And he was emphasising every word with a punch in the stomach. And he just left me in bits on the floor... I was summoned by the principal officer, and he said, ‘You don’t go near the kitchen again, it’s come from ‘up’ that you are not under any circumstances to search the kitchen ever again’... As I was on probation at the time, I decided to keep my mouth shut because I did not want to jeopardise my job.”²⁹⁷

Husband’s departure from Medomsley

Husband’s personnel records show that he first passed the promotion exam to senior officer in 1970 and was invited to attend promotion interviews in September 1977, February 1979, February 1981 and November 1984. He was invited to attend the senior officer’s development course in July 1978, February 1985 and March 1985.²⁹⁸

It is documented that he turned down promotion postings in 1974, 1979 and 1982. This indicates a pattern that Husband was repeatedly offered promotion but declined to pursue it.

In 1978, he wrote a six-page submission to the Prison Service arguing that the singleton role of catering officer at Medomsley should be a senior officer’s post. However, by 1981 it was clear in a memo sent to him from the warden that the post at Medomsley was not going to be upgraded to a senior officer role. This raises questions as to why he did not pursue promotion elsewhere.

²⁹⁶ Operation Deerness investigation material

²⁹⁷ Operation Deerness investigation material

²⁹⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

The governor's journal is silent on Husband's departure from Medomsley. There are many other references by the warden in the same period to other staff leaving and to handovers or presentations being completed, but there is no reference whatsoever to Husband leaving. This appears strange given Husband worked at Medomsley for over 16 years and had received consistent praise from senior leaders about his catering abilities.

There is evidence that Husband's abuse of a trainee which occurred in the summer of 1985 was well known among staff and trainees, and it is likely that this triggered his departure from Medomsley.

The evidence relating to this is provided by Witness A who gave evidence during the first trial of Husband in 2003. Witness A was sentenced to four months at Medomsley on 17 June 1985. He was sexually abused first by Husband and then by Johnston during his time there.

During his evidence, Witness A described that during the period he was being sexually abused, he was accused of having a consensual sexual relationship with Husband by trainees and staff.

"Everybody thought I was 'having it away' with the chef, that was the expression the inmates and the staff used."²⁹⁹

Witness A described how he was targeted by other trainees due to this perception and was assaulted, deliberately burnt with boiling water and had razor blades put in his shoes. He also recalled an incident involving Perpetrator B.

"I went into the gymnasium and there was about 30 inmates and they had a PE teacher turn round and said, 'Is it true are you having it away with the head chef?'"³⁰⁰

Witness A gave evidence that, **"They moved Norman [Neville Husband] up to Frankland and then I moved into the stores from there."**³⁰¹

He repeated this sequence of events in answer to another question about whether Husband remained at Medomsley during his time there.

"He had moved when I went into the stores, before I went into the stores, he was shipped off to Frankland."³⁰²

Witness A went on to be abused by Johnston, who was later convicted of indecently assaulting him.

Evidence obtained by Operation Halter from Johnston showed that according to him, it was Husband who suggested that Witness A should go and work in the stores with him.

299 Operation Deerness investigation material

300 Operation Deerness investigation material

301 Operation Deerness investigation material

302 Operation Deerness investigation material

“Whilst I worked in the stores I usually had one or two trainees working there as my assistants. Neville worked in the kitchens and had several trainees working with him.

At one stage I think Neville suggested that he had a lad working in the kitchen who he thought would be suitable to assist me in the stores department. This lad was called Witness A. Whilst Witness A was working with me in the stores I developed a sexual relationship with him. This relationship was instigated by Witness A. As a result of this I was convicted at court of indecent assault and subsequently left the Prison Service.

As far as I can remember, Neville did not tell me that he had been sexually abusing Witness A. I was aware of the abuse because Witness A told me.”³⁰³

Witness A was revisited by Operation Seabrook in February 2014 and told them that the reserve chef at Medomsley had reported to the governor that Husband was up to things with him at Medomsley, so Husband had been moved out of the kitchens.³⁰⁴

He added that due to the knowledge that he was being abused by Husband, he suffered a lot of abuse at the hands of other trainees and was singled out to them by Perpetrator B, who referred to him as **“Husband’s plaything”**.³⁰⁵

There is strong evidence that staff were aware for several years of the abuse that Husband was perpetrating in the kitchens. It may be that on this occasion, possibly because the warden was aware, the awareness triggered Husband’s departure from Medomsley and prevented his return.

Less than two months after Husband transferred on promotion to HMP Frankland, he applied to revert to the rank of discipline officer and return to Medomsley, quoting his state of health, wellbeing and nervous position. However, this request was refused. It is unclear why this request was refused or who refused it.³⁰⁶

Once Husband had left Medomsley, a search was done by Witness R, the new catering officer. Witness R found a dildo, pornography, a tub of Vaseline, and various lingerie and garments in a cabinet in the kitchen office.

He did not report this to his supervisors, although there is evidence he discussed it with his colleagues. The following accounts refer to this incident specifically.³⁰⁷

“Later on, the same day that Husband left Medomsley, I went into the kitchen office. In this office was a locked five-drawer steel filing cabinet. On this afternoon when he left, I asked Husband for the key, and he gave me it... I found stuck to the back of the fourth drawer down, three thongs, one lace, one of PVC and one made of nylon. In the bottom drawer was a small quarter-full jar of Vaseline and a white vibrator about four inches

303 Operation Halter closed material

304 Operation Seabrook closed material

305 Operation Seabrook closed material

306 Operation Seabrook closed material

307 Operation Seabrook closed material

long. Shortly after I had found these items [an officer] came into the office and I showed him what I'd found, before throwing them away.”³⁰⁸

“Shortly after Husband left Medomsley the new cook... had to break into a cabinet in the kitchen... I went into the kitchen just after he had done this. Inside the cabinet in one of the bottom drawers was a brown cardboard box. Inside the box was a white dildo. There was also a 12 x 12 x 7 plastic container of Vaseline and magazines. My thoughts at the time were that the rumours about Husband were possibly correct.”

“Once Husband had left the centre on promotion and [an officer] took over from him as catering officer the department was cleared out... items were found and later shown to me... underwear, pornographic magazine and a G-string. I believe that they were found in a drawer in the kitchen desk, that had belonged to Husband. As Husband had already left the centre it was the consensus of opinion between the remaining staff to let things lie.”³⁰⁹

“Husband left Medomsley on promotion... It was within a matter of weeks after he left that I was asked to assist to clean out the upstairs area of the kitchen. It was while cleaning one of these upstairs rooms out, with [another officer] who had taken over from Husband, that I opened up a four-drawer cabinet. In one of the drawers I found a dildo, one or two bras, stockings and different coloured suspender belts. There were also a number of pornographic books such as Parade and Hussler. Books of this nature were not allowed in the detention centre.”³¹⁰

Disclosures from trainees

Shortly after Husband left Medomsley, the new catering officer, Witness R, was asked by some trainees if he had definitely left and was never coming back.

“The three boys then told me that when Husband was working and I was not there, that the lad who was working in the pastry department would never clean up... Husband would take him up to the staff changing room to look at pornography. He would then come back to the kitchen to organise the cleaners and then return to the changing room. These three suggested that this was to have sex with the boy.”³¹¹

“Another prisoner told me that he had been sent up a ladder in the dry store by Husband and that once up the ladder Husband had fondled his privates. This lad had allegedly retaliated and struck Husband.”³¹²

The above disclosures from trainees made in 1985 and the finding of concerning items in the kitchen office were not reported to any senior officers at Medomsley.

308 Operation Seabrook closed material

309 Operation Halter 1 closed material

310 Operation Seabrook closed material

311 Operation Seabrook closed material

312 Operation Seabrook closed material

This was a significant failure by Prison Service staff who were duty bound to report any “abuses or impropriety” which came to their knowledge to the Warden.³¹³

It does not appear that any member of staff at Medomsley considered that Husband was still working in the male prison estate and would therefore pose an ongoing risk to other males. The failure to report these occurrences meant there was no opportunity for the Prison Service or police to conduct any kind of investigation into Husband and resulted in the loss of potential evidence against him.

It allowed Husband to continue to commit sexual abuse at two more prisons and meant there was no impediment to him becoming a priest in the United Reformed Church, where he also continued to offend.

What did the Prison Service know about the offending of Leslie Johnston?

There is evidence that rumours about Johnston also circulated among trainees at Medomsley.

“There was also a storeman who was weird. He would make the lads that worked with him wear underpants only, then make them climb the big white laundry bags so he could watch them, and I actually saw this happening... he wore a brown overcoat.”³¹⁴

“I had to go in the stores for something, I can’t remember, I can’t remember what it was for and when I went in there was a couple of lads there who worked in the stores and they said to me... when he ties you up, he ties your hands behind your back, he’s going to rub his cock against your hands so just clench your fist. So, anyway, this storeman come out of his office, and he said right lads, I suppose we’ll have to strip [trainee] and give him the... see if he can get out of the tie up.”³¹⁵

Prison staff were aware Johnston and Husband were friends.³¹⁶ One prison officer stated that Husband used to call Johnston the “Queen Mother.”³¹⁷ Several other prison officers referred to the fact that Husband didn’t seem to have many friends who were prison officers at Medomsley but that he was friendly and did socialise with Johnston.³¹⁸

Rumours that circulated among staff about Johnston related more to the fact they thought he was stealing from the stores rather than that they suspected him of committing acts of abuse.

“I dealt mainly with the stores – Les Johnston was a dapper individual, we called him Swagger Mctoo as we thought he was taking stock from the stores. People used to say

313 Operation Deerness investigation material, 1952 Detention Centre Rules Rule 90

314 Operation Seabrook closed material

315 Operation Seabrook closed material

316 Operation Deerness investigation material, Operation Halter 1 closed material

317 Operation Seabrook closed material

318 Operation Halter closed material

he would take a bag out at night... [when Medomsley closed] he chose to go to Deerbolt, rather than Durham, even though it was further away.”³¹⁹

“I had a feeling that grew that something was not right, Les accepted the foodstuffs, I was never really sure that was above board. I tried to audit, I thought there was some sort of fiddle going on where food was disappearing out of the back door, I had no proof of that.”³²⁰

There is limited evidence of staff being aware of the risks Johnston posed.

“Although I didn’t see anything myself there were always rumours going about regarding Neville Husband and another officer Leslie Johnston being homosexual and their relationship with the inmates, the rumours were always light hearted and never really taken seriously by me.”³²¹

During Johnston’s police interview in July 1989 after his offending was brought to an end, he admitted offending for the previous four to five years at Medomsley and described that this offending involved **“mutual masturbation and oral sex”**.³²²

Documentation shows that the professional standards branch and the regional director were aware in July 1989 that Leslie Johnston’s offending did not just relate to one offence at Kirklevington YOI, but extended to several years of offending at Medomsley. Despite this knowledge, there was no internal inquiry.

Disclosures of sexual abuse to prison staff

There were at least 78 incidents where trainees reported or tried to report their sexual abuse to a member of Medomsley staff. This includes discipline staff, civilian works staff or the warden. Of those, 47 said they had been abused sexually, but when they reported their abuse to staff only 30 of the 47 trainees disclosed the sexual abuse. The remaining 17 did not, only disclosing the full extent of their abuse during subsequent police investigations.

“At some point during my detention I confided in a prison officer about what Husband was doing to me... [the officer] was not at all shocked when I told him and he told me to keep out of Husband’s way and that I would not be in for very long.”³²³

“I trusted [the gardener] and told him about my fight with Husband and that he had tried to touch me up he listened to me and said, ‘Say nothing they will make your life hell’, he took me out of the camp in his tractor that day to his mother’s house, she lived near the centre, his mother who was elderly made me a sandwich and a cup of tea.”³²⁴

319 Operation Deerness investigation material

320 Operation Deerness investigation material

321 Operation Halter 1 closed material

322 Operation Halter closed material

323 Operation Seabrook closed material

324 Operation Seabrook closed material

“That night I was told by the screw I had ran into that I was finished working in the kitchens and would start work on the gardens on the Monday. The screw asked me what had happened, and I told him what Husband had done, he called him a dirty bastard, there was another screw with him the next day that just laughed and asked if Husband had tried to get me.”³²⁵

Of the 30 trainees who told staff or tried to tell staff about their abuse, five of them reported abuse to the warden. While some trainees did not always disclose the extent of the abuse for fear of not being believed, others did report sexual abuse and were not believed.

“I recall seeing the governor and telling him that I didn’t want to work in the kitchens because Husband was ‘slapping’ me about. This was right as he used to do this with me and other lads in the kitchen, as well as get you in a headlock. I just couldn’t bring myself to tell him what he was actually doing because I was scared that I wouldn’t be believed, he just said I was making up stories and was trying to make trouble.”³²⁶

“I went to tell the governor, I can’t even remember the governor’s name. He just turned around and says absolutely nonsense he says that any member of staff would do that, he says just get on with your work, do your time and get out. So, I knew straight away it wasn’t worth saying anything to anybody no more.”³²⁷

“After the incident at the farm, I managed to get the courage to tell somebody about what had been happening to me. I decided to complain to [prison officer] because he was the highest officer in the centre except the governor. I tried to tell him what had been happening, and I can still remember the exact words that he used in response, ‘Fuck off, you are taking the fucking piss, none of my officers would ever do that.’”³²⁸

One trainee disclosed sexual abuse to Subject E, who was a warden, which resulted in him being sent to the kitchens where he was sexually abused again, this time by Husband.

“I was back at Medomsley standing in the queue for the kitchens. As I was stood waiting, I saw the governor walking to the chef’s office. I left the line and made my way to the office... I knocked on the door and I walked in. I asked to speak to the governor... I told him that the first night I was beaten up and the second night I was raped by two of his officers. He said that he would make sure this did not go any further. I felt relief that something was going to be done. He looked over at the chef, who I knew as Husband and asked him if it could be contained. Husband responded to the governor, agreeing it could be contained. I wondered what the chef could possibly do. I was confused as to how the chef could protect me from being beat up or raped. Husband told me that I

³²⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

³²⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

³²⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

³²⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

now had a job in the kitchens. I now had what was a privileged job in Medomsley. I was confused, I had told the Governor what had happened, but he did not seem shocked.”³²⁹

None of the complaints made to prison staff including the wardens resulted in any positive action being taken, with the exception of one trainee, who believed as a result of his complaint to the warden he was moved to another prison.

“About six weeks into my sentence I was in the shower by myself. Husband came into the shower and grabbed hold of my penis. I wasn’t having any of this so I pushed him off and against a wall. I was shouting at Husband telling him to back off me. All of a sudden two officers rushed in and separated us... I told the Governor what had happened to me and he listened and said I had to think about things and leave any paperwork until the following morning. I thought nothing would be done. About 6am the day after the incident I was woken up by four officers who got all my stuff together and I was ‘shipped out’ of Medomsley to Buckley Hall.”³³⁰

While the above examples show that many of the staff within the prison were aware of abuse taking place at Medomsley, there were other occasions where staff either watched, facilitated or took part in sexual abuse.

“I remember one particular officer... He kept staring at me. On my third or fourth morning he told me I was assigned to his duty which was painting the corridors. There was me and another two lads... He began to talk to me. He was saying things like, ‘So have you got a boyfriend?’, ‘You’re a puff aren’t you?’... I just wanted to get my head down, do my time and get out. [The officer] said, ‘I know an officer who may be interested in you’... I felt as if he was hounding me to go and work in the kitchens, like it was the best place for me. I would see him sometimes standing talking to the chef. About two days later I was told I had to report to the chef after breakfast. I went into his office and we had a chat. He was asking if I wanted to work in the kitchens.”³³¹

One trainee described how he was working near the fence when he was told by a civilian officer who wore blue overalls to go to the potting shed area. He went there alone and Husband, Johnston and another officer came into the potting shed. He was then raped by Husband while the two other others present held him down.³³²

Another trainee described being taken to the kitchen by an officer with another trainee and being sexually abused while that officer watched.

“[The officer] was still there, and he took me and another lad over to the kitchen... There was another man in the kitchens when we arrived. [They] took me up the stairs... I was taken into the storeroom by them. [The officer] locked the door and stood next to it inside the storeroom.”³³³

329 Operation Seabrook closed material

330 Operation Seabrook closed material

331 Operation Seabrook closed material

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333 Operation Seabrook closed material

Summary of the Prison Service's opportunities to end the sexual abuse

There is strong evidence to indicate that many prison officers knew or suspected that sexual abuse by Husband was taking place at Medomsley. A small minority of officers appear to have facilitated the abuse by taking trainees to Husband, by keeping watch or by physically restraining victims.

Rumours surrounding the sexual abuse of boys who worked in the kitchen by Husband persisted over a prolonged period at Medomsley. Although some staff dismissed the rumours as banter, these rumours were often accompanied by overt sexualised jokes between officers about Husband's sexual offending. Some of the rumours contained specific information, such as the fact that Husband was taking photos of the boys in the kitchen or was watching them in the shower. There is no evidence that these rumours were addressed or challenged by supervisors or the leadership of Medomsley.

Some staff describe the **"atmosphere"** in the kitchen and were aware that **"something was going on"**.³³⁴ They refer to the repeated practice of trainees being kept behind at the end of the working day by Husband, which ought to have raised concerns.

There is some evidence that individual staff members, especially civilian officers, sought to protect trainees by diverting them from the kitchen to work in other areas. This suggests an implicit knowledge of the risk that Husband posed.

Other staff directly witnessed concerning behaviour by Husband or the aftermath of sexual abuse on trainees.

Some victims reported to police that they told staff about the sexual abuse. None of the disclosures of sexual abuse made by victims exist as documented complaints. The sheer number of trainees who say they disclosed their abuse amounts to strong evidence of knowledge by members of staff that widespread sexual abuse was taking place.

Some of the officers' responses to the disclosures by trainees also suggest that they were aware that sexual abuse was taking place, but they did nothing to stop it or to report their concerns to the warden.

The delivery of pornographic material to Medomsley addressed to Neville Husband was known by prison officers working at Medomsley, and, in some cases, relief catering staff who filled in when Husband took leave or was away at conferences. Receiving indecent material breached both the 1952 and 1983 Detention Centre Rules and Code of Discipline. Officers failed to report this and simply disposed of the material.

There is some evidence to suggest that Husband's departure from Medomsley on promotion was expedited in August 1985 by the leadership of Medomsley due to the knowledge that he had been sexually abusing a trainee. This is supported by witness evidence and the timeline and circumstances of his departure.

³³⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

The finding of concerning items in the kitchen combined with the disclosures from trainees regarding Neville Husband's abuse of trainees once he left Medomsley in August 1985 should have been reported to the warden. This would have presented evidence of a wider concern rather than just one incident which had arguably led to Husband being encouraged to move from Medomsley.

The failure to report what was found in 1985 and to conduct an investigation into trainees' allegations represents a significant missed opportunity by the Prison Service and led directly to further offending by him at two other prisons. Any allegations of sexual abuse would have required a police investigation and it is reasonable to believe that a wide-ranging police investigation would have uncovered the offending of Johnston as well.

The reasons why opportunities were not taken by the Prison Service to intervene and stop the offending of Husband and Johnston will be explored in the next part of the report.

The Home Office

The Home Office was first made aware of complaints about physical abuse and ill treatment at Medomsley in October 1965. This is documented in newspaper reports at the time.

In October 1965, James Clarkson, the father of a trainee, wrote to the Home Office to demand an inquiry into conditions at Medomsley. His son had escaped from Medomsley four months previously which he alleged was due to ill treatment. A friend of his son who had also spent three months at the detention centre still had bruises on his body on leaving Medomsley which he showed to him. This former trainee told the Newcastle Evening Chronicle:

"The men in charge used to hit us. There was never any reason for this. But it happened all the same. Sometimes they hit us with their fists, and other times with anything they had in their hands, including sticks."³³⁵

Following the publication of this article, the Home Office apparently confirmed to Mr Clarkson and the press that allegations made about Medomsley were being investigated.

In another article, the mother of another former trainee told the Newcastle Evening Chronicle that she had also written to the Home Office outlining complaints about the treatment of her son and other boys at the centre. She described how her son was limping for over a week on leaving the centre and that he disclosed to her he had been punched in the stomach by staff and that all the other boys were also ill-treated.³³⁶

335 Newcastle Evening Chronicle (5 October 1965). Detention centre probe demanded, page 1

336 Newcastle Evening Chronicle (13 October 1965). Home Office to hold detention centre probe, page 7. Available online at: <https://thesourceresearch.wordpress.com/tag/hebburn/>

At the end of October, it was reported that Mr Clarkson had received a response from the Home Office promising that complaints about the centre would be investigated. His son was still missing at that time.³³⁷

In January 1966, it was reported that Mr Clarkson wrote to the Home Office again having received a response which stated that the complaints about ill treatment should have been made while the boys were at the centre.³³⁸

Following this it is unclear what, if any, further action took place due to the absence of any official records.

In August 1967, two former trainees, one 17 years old, provided statements to the Northern Echo detailing physical abuse and medical neglect. These statements were forwarded to the Home Secretary at the time, Roy Jenkins. Several other youths contacted the newspaper to corroborate the allegations.³³⁹ It is not clear what investigation took place into these allegations. However, the Northern Echo reported that nine days after these complaints were sent to the Home Office, David Watkins MP received a letter from Home Office minister Lord Stonham saying that **“careful inquiries had been made”** and there was **“nothing to substantiate”** the claims from the youths concerned.³⁴⁰ It added that the hospital examination of the 17-year-old **“revealed nothing to support the complaint that he had been assaulted”**.

In 2025 the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office conducted a search for documentation relating to the complaints from 1965 and 1967. Neither were able to trace any records or correspondence relating to them. The Northern Echo does not hold the statements provided to them in 1967.

The deaths of trainees Shackleton and Caldwell which occurred within the space of four months at Medomsley did not prompt any official review of policies and practices or the provision of emergency healthcare in detention centres by the Home Office.

Knowledge regarding the use of physical violence in detention centres

In June 1967, the director of borstal administration wrote to all wardens regarding the growing number of complaints of assaults on trainees by staff which were receiving increasing attention from **“outside bodies and interested individuals”**. The letter acknowledged that some officers were giving out their own punishments in the form of **“bunny jumps”** and assaults in the form of a **“box on the ear”** and that this had to stop. The letter made clear that it was the duty of the warden, deputy warden and principal officers to ensure these practices stopped.

³³⁷ Newcastle Evening Chronicle (30 October 1965). Probe into detention centre

³³⁸ Newcastle Evening Chronicle (14 January 1966). Man’s detention centre protest is rejected

³³⁹ The Northern Echo (12 April 2014). Medomsley Detention Centre: the “unpleasant experience” which grew into brutality and sexual abuse. Available online at: www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11144673.medomsley-detention-centre-unpleasant-experience-grew-brutality-sexual-abuse/

³⁴⁰ The Northern Echo (12 April 2014). Medomsley Detention Centre: the “unpleasant experience” which grew into brutality and sexual abuse. Available online at: www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11144673.medomsley-detention-centre-unpleasant-experience-grew-brutality-sexual-abuse/

The relevant extract is reproduced below.³⁴¹ This memo was also circulated to the Advisory Council on Penal Reform on 10 June 1968 to the subcommittee under the heading of 'discipline in detention centres'.

There has recently been an increasing number of complaints by inmates and ex-inmates of Detention Centres accusing members of staff of assault. This has also led to outside bodies and interested individuals becoming critical and apprehensive of what is going on in Detention Centres.

Although I am quite satisfied that in general Detention Centres are well run and that there is little to criticize, enquiry and investigation has shown that a minority of members of staffs are taking the law into their own hands by assault on inmates. This may take the form of a box on the ear meant to be playful rather than punishing or some other form of physical contact like a shove to get somebody into line. They are nevertheless assaults which can easily be exaggerated by inmates. Investigation has also shown that some officers are still continuing to give their own private on the spot punishments for minor offences such as press-ups and bunny jumps. There are also occasions when the discipline goes beyond the legitimate boundaries and becomes harsh rather than strict, and where officers shout unnecessarily and their manner becomes hostile and unpleasant.

All this must stop immediately and it is the duty of Wardens to exercise the necessary supervision, together with his Deputy Warden and P.Os. and to see that these malpractices cease. It is also important for him to make known to his staff that the developing philosophy of Detention Centres is now one of treatment, as well as strict discipline and deterrence, and to train his staff so that they may be able to achieve this without at the same time allowing the discipline to weaken. This is perfectly possible and at certain Detention Centres has already been achieved.

The best method of bringing this about is by regular staff meetings, and the contents of this letter should be brought to the attention of the staff at the earliest possible moment by such a meeting.

Official reviews of detention centres

Penal Affairs Committee of the Religious Society of Friends report

In November 1966, a sub-committee was formed to conduct an enquiry on behalf of the Penal Affairs Committee of the Religious Society of Friends into the working of detention centres. The introduction to the report, published in 1968, states that this "arose from the concern of a member of the Society of Friends who had reported on alleged cruelty at two detention centres", and referred to the fact that this and subsequent news reports

³⁴¹ The National Archives: BN 29/1078. Review of detention centres. Images reproduced by permission of TNA

received publicity in the press with some “disquiet” around detention centres and some supporting views.³⁴²

From the timing of this subcommittee being formed and what is known regarding Mr Clarkson’s complaint to the Home Office, it is very likely that Medomsley was one of the detention centres being referred to.

The report commented on the recent publicity that detention centres were “harsh and brutalising” and stated they had no direct evidence of harshness or violence but accepted that, **“As in every other institution, there is likely to be the odd member of staff with personality problems of his own who will misuse the authoritarian regime and who will interpret sadistically the strict discipline and fast tempo.”**³⁴³

The committee found that the selection of boys for detention centres was an area where greatest change was needed. The report noted that there were boys in detention centres who were **“mentally and physically unsuited for its tempo, strict discipline and vigorous athletics and that inadequate information was given to the courts before sentencing”**.³⁴⁴ In July 1967, the Home Secretary Roy Jenkins announced a review of detention centres in the House of Commons which was completed by the Advisory Council on the Penal System. The council comprised of politicians, lawyers, criminologists and religious leaders. The remit was to review the operation of detention centres and the categories of young offenders who were most suitable.³⁴⁵

The report of the Advisory Council on the Penal System (often referred to as the Younger report) was published in 1970. The council noted that detention centres could afford to be less rigid and more productive. They observed that the deprivation of liberty was punitive enough, and that the discipline administered was not productive.

In relation to reception procedures, the report found that:

“A feature of the routine about which we are not entirely happy is the reception procedure. We recognise that by its nature the procedure is bound to occur at a time of maximum shock and to be, to some extent, a chilling, impersonal, and humiliating experience, but we consider it important that it should, so far as possible, strike a note that is not out of tune with what is to follow. The unpredictable timing of receptions makes it impracticable to insist that a senior officer should always be present, but it is a part of the regime that merits particular attention by the warden, who can do much by attending on suitable occasions and by providing appropriate training for the staff concerned.”³⁴⁶

³⁴² Operation Seabrook closed material

³⁴³ Operation Seabrook closed material

³⁴⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

³⁴⁵ Mr Roy Jenkins (28 July 1967). House of Commons debate. Available online at: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1967-07-28/debates/c5b2e0ce-6611-44c2-acc9-b8da3695654f/DetentionCentres\(Review\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1967-07-28/debates/c5b2e0ce-6611-44c2-acc9-b8da3695654f/DetentionCentres(Review))

³⁴⁶ Home Office (1970). Detention centres: Report of the Advisory Council on the Penal System

Allegations of abuse at other institutions

Buckley Hall Detention Centre

Allegations of brutality by staff made by boys who had served sentences at Buckley Hall Senior Youth Detention Centre were publicised in the Guardian and Mirror newspapers in 1967 and were investigated by the Board of Visitors. The board concluded that the allegations were unfounded.³⁴⁷

In the same year, allegations of assault against members of staff were made by boys who had served sentences at Reading Corrective and Recall Centre were published in the People newspaper. The Home Secretary invited the chairman and three members of the Board of Visitors to inquire into these. The board found grounds to believe there had been malpractice but stated that this had stopped some time before. They recommended that the corrective and recall functions of the centre be separated, which was accepted by the Home Secretary.³⁴⁸

In September 1968, a trainee called George Smith died at Buckley Hall Senior Youth Detention Centre. George, who suffered from heart trouble, had arrived at the centre the previous day. On examination by the medical officer and doctor, George denied being unwell despite the medical staff having his medical history.

The centre medical staff diagnosed George's heart condition and correctly entered his name into the medical exemption register, recording that George was exempt from PEI.

The following day George was one of 17 trainees who were told to do PEI circuits in the evening as a punishment for an earlier incident where a trainee had made a noise, and no one had owned up to this. The 17 trainees were asked by the PEI if any of them were excused from physical education. Two trainees responded, but George remained silent. The officer did not know George as he was a new trainee, and the officer did not consult the exemption register. After a couple of rounds of physical education, George collapsed and died. George's mother told the inquest into his death that George was embarrassed about his condition and would never admit it.³⁴⁹

Following this incident there was an inquiry by the assistant director of the Prison Service which revealed **“errors due to the failure of management, for which the warden must be held primarily responsible”**, and that disciplinary proceedings were to be taken against one officer under the Code of Discipline.³⁵⁰

Formal action was not taken against the warden who had been due to take early retirement. However, the department considered that the weaknesses in his management

³⁴⁷ Home Office (1968). Report on the work of the Prison Department 1967

³⁴⁸ Home Office (1968). Report on the work of the Prison Department 1967

³⁴⁹ Liverpool Echo (8 October 1968). City youth had weak heart, coroner told, page 1

³⁵⁰ The National Archives: HO 391/154 (1968). Parliamentary Debate on Report of the Estimates Committee: prisons, borstals and detention centres, notes on debate

“would have warranted a thorough-going examination of the whole management of the centre”.³⁵¹

New Hall Detention Centre

In May 1971, two brothers who served sentences at New Hall Detention Centre gave BBC Radio Teesside a recorded interview about their treatment at the centre. They made allegations of brutality by staff, including being assaulted during the reception process, and being kicked and slapped during PEI.

In response to these public allegations, the Home Office told the deputy regional director to carry out a preliminary investigation which was declared inconclusive. Following this, the Home Office commissioned a full inquiry conducted by two members of New Hall’s Board of Visitors and one member of another detention centre’s board. All three members were magistrates.

The inquiry involved reviewing the completed BBC interviews and interviews from the preliminary inquiry, and conducting new interviews with the two complainants, their mothers, and the relevant New Hall staff. It concluded that **“none of the allegations of ill-treatment is justified, that neither of the young men has any justifiable grounds for complaint, and that none of the officers at New Hall Detention Centre has behaved in any manner which calls for reproof”**.³⁵²

This investigation is discussed further on page 172.

Ashford Remand Centre

Ashford Remand Centre opened in 1961 and was used to hold boys and young men aged between 14 and 21 years old who had been remanded in custody by the court.

On 13 June 1971, the Sunday Times published an article about the centre, including allegations of mistreatment by three young men who had been detained there between February and May 1971. Their allegations included being physically assaulted by several prison officers, as well as being made to work long hours in poor conditions and with inadequate food. They all complained that supervision was minimal, and one of the young men alleged that he had been sexually assaulted by his cellmate but did not alert staff because in his experience, they would not respond anyway.

As a result of these allegations, the Home Secretary commissioned an inquiry into Ashford Remand Centre. The inquiry was carried out by two members of Ashford’s Board of Visitors, and one member of Wormwood Scrubs’ Board of Visitors. The inclusion of the Wormwood Scrubs member was intended to make the inquiry more impartial.

351 The National Archives: HO 391/154 (1968). Parliamentary Debate on Report of the Estimates Committee: prisons, borstals and detention centres, notes on debate

352 The National Archives: HO 391/83 (1971). Inquiry: allegations of ill treatment at New Hall Detention Centre, Wakefield, West Yorkshire by two former inmates, made to BBC Radio Teesside. Board of Visitors concluded that complaints not justifiable

The inquiry unanimously found that there was no substance to any of the allegations made by the three former trainees. The Home Secretary said he regretted the anxiety and distress that these “**unjustified**” allegations caused the accused staff.³⁵³

Whatton Detention Centre

Whatton Detention Centre in Nottinghamshire operated from 1966 until it was re-designated as an adult prison in 1990.

Operation Equinox, set up by Nottinghamshire police, investigated non-recent allegations of child sexual abuse by people of public prominence, or offences which took place within institutional settings. Operation Equinox was the single point of contact for Operation Hydrant to refer allegations to for Nottinghamshire, and at the same time, Operation Equinox began to receive and investigate a number of allegations relating to Whatton Detention Centre.

The Government Legal Department has received 42 compensation claims from former Whatton trainees.

Aldington Detention Centre

In 1985, on the same day that Home Secretary Leon Brittan visited Medomsley, allegations of physical abuse on trainees at Aldington Senior Youth Detention Centre were aired on Newsnight. Media reports claimed that trainees had been slapped and punched on arrival for not calling officers ‘Sir’ and that concerns had been raised by probation officers who regularly dealt with trainees there.

The Kentish Express newspaper reported on 3 May 1985 that police had launched a major investigation into allegations of brutality by three officers at Aldington Detention Centre after trainees claimed to have been punched and slapped during circuit training.

The governor called for an inquiry at Aldington and the Home Office said the three officers were not suspended from duty and were working normally. The same newspaper reported in August 1985 that the director of public prosecutions had decided no proceedings were necessary against four officers investigated by police.

The local secretary of the POA challenged probation officers to provide clear evidence of alleged brutality at Aldington Detention Centre, accusing them of using the prison officers as political pawns against the government’s ‘short, sharp shock’ policy.

Eastwood Park Detention Centre

It is now known that physical abuse of victims at Eastwood Park Junior Detention Centre was taking place between 1970 and 1983. One former prison officer was convicted in 2023 of misconduct in a public office.

353 Mr Reginald Maudling (2 March 1972). House of Commons debate. Available online at: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1972/mar/02/ashford-remand-centre>

Avon and Somerset police have received over 140 complaints alleging abuse at Eastwood Park while it was a detention centre. Most allegations related to physical abuse, but several alleged sexual abuse. These included indecent assaults such as being made to masturbate staff and buggery, and actions which were intended to intimidate and humiliate the victims, including squeezing testicles or inserting a finger into the victim's anus.

The allegations bear striking resemblance to those at Medomsley, with trainees being made to run naked, perform bunny hops or hold stress positions, being hit with implements, playing murder ball and the inciting of violence by trainees on other trainees.

The Government Legal Department received 239 claims for compensation regarding Eastwood Park, with indications of a further 190 to be submitted.

Kirklevington Detention Centre

There is a significant ongoing Cleveland police investigation called Operation Magnolia which is investigating allegations of physical and sexual abuse at the former junior youth detention centre, Kirklevington. Over 800 victims have reported abuse.

Due to the ongoing police investigation, we cannot give further detail, but the types of alleged abuse are very similar to those from former Medomsley trainees.

The Government Legal Department received 878 compensation claims from former Kirklevington victims. None have these have been settled due to the ongoing police investigation.

Foston Hall Detention Centre

Derbyshire police received at least three complaints in relation to Foston Hall (a former junior detention centre), about physical abuse on trainees in the early 1980s. These complaints did not result in any prosecutions as police were unable to gather sufficient evidence to take action. A former prison officer was convicted in 2015 of 4 counts of historic sexual abuse on children under 18 committed on trainees at Foston Hall detention centre during the course of his employment there. He was sentenced to 7 years 9 months in custody in 2017. His offences were committed between 1968 and 1973. The new allegations under investigation by Derbyshire police are unrelated to the former prison officer.

The Government Legal Department said that they had received six compensation claims from former Foston Hall trainees.

Send Detention Centre

Surrey Police is continuing to work through multiple reports of offences involving former detainees at Send Detention Centre. Send was a junior youth detention centre from 1964 to 1970 and 1974 to 1986.

Summary

Many trainees who reported abuse in different detention centres across the country have given accounts that have strikingly similar themes. There were patterns to their experiences in reception, where staff appeared to be setting the tone for their time in detention, and also in the use of similar forms of punishment and physical excess.

The types of abuse described appear to be systematic and were repeated across the years the detention centres were in operation. The alleged perpetrators were not one or two outliers but multiple staff, suggesting that behaviour was learned and became embedded into the culture at the centres.

Across decades, there was a steady flow of similar complaints from detainees alleging that violence was endemic to cultures in the custodial estate, which the Home Office was aware of. There were also similar issues being raised by relatives, professionals and prison reform bodies.

The evidence is patchy as to whether the Home Office took action taken at various stages to establish the extent or seriousness of the issue. There is no existing evidence to suggest that the Home Office was aware of sexual abuse taking place at Medomsley during the relevant period.

The mechanisms that might reasonably have been deployed to provide more effective reassurance on the quality and effectiveness of oversight mechanisms are discussed in the next part of this report.

The police

The role of the police at Medomsley

Medomsley was within the policing area of Durham Constabulary. However, trainees were sent to the detention centre from other police areas and police officers were often responsible for transporting trainees from court following sentence when court transport was not available.

The police had no role in the running of the centre. Police officers did visit the detention centre on a monthly basis in the early 1970s as part of an education programme. They were involved in a discussion group aimed at social education.³⁵⁴

Rule 63 in the Detention Centre Rules 1952 stated that an ‘officer of police’ could visit any trainee who was willing to see them on a production order issued by or on behalf of the appropriate chief of police. Production orders were used to investigate allegations of crime.³⁵⁵

There is some evidence of police attending Medomsley during the relevant period to see trainees in this way, and there were two occasions where the police attended to

354 The National Archives. Medomsley Detention Centre warden’s reports from 1972, 1973 and 1974

355 Operation Deerness investigation material

investigate the deaths of Shackleton and Caldwell. These deaths are discussed in part 2 of this report.

Police were regularly responsible for transporting trainees from the courts following sentence. Some witnesses have said that these officers were present during the reception process when they were assaulted.

When trainees were released from Medomsley, many tried to report what had happened to them at their local police station.

Since the relevant period, some police force boundaries have changed, and new forces have been created. Northumbria police was formed in 1974 by merging Northumberland Constabulary with part of Durham Constabulary.³⁵⁶

There is a lack of any original police documentation regarding allegations made by trainees such as crime reports, interview notes or written statements.

Crime recording

Crime reporting processes were very different during the relevant period and varied across different police forces. Although the police had a duty to record and investigate crime, some offences such as an assault without any visible injury (common assault) only became a notifiable offence in 1998. Notifiable offences are those that the police are required to report to the Home Office for statistical analysis. Therefore, up until 1998, a minor assault with no evidence of visible injury would not be recorded by the police.³⁵⁷

Offences alleged by trainees at Medomsley range from minor assault, to more serious wounding and grievous bodily harm, to sexual assaults and rapes. Indecent assault, gross indecency between males and buggery were all notifiable offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956. Serious violent offences, grievous bodily harm and wounding were also both recordable offences, as well as actual bodily harm.

One former police officer who joined Durham Constabulary in 1978 described crime recording practices during that time.

“Crime recording and investigation was very parochial. Arson and robbery were invariably never recorded as such unless a culprit had been found, locks were tampered with rather than there being an attempted burglary, damage was frequently under £20 (perhaps £10 earlier) which was the limit at which it was recorded as criminal damage, assaults could be classed as common assault which were not recorded and negated any police action as it was the responsibility of such victims to take their own action. If a crime had been committed in a neighbouring locality, complainants would often be advised that it was best to report it directly to the locality that would deal with it rather than the locality they were now in. Enquiries were not usually conducted into offences that occurred beyond the relevant area.”³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Operation Deerness investigation material

³⁵⁷ Operation Deerness investigation material

³⁵⁸ Operation Deerness investigation material

Police transport of trainees to Medomsley

There is evidence that some police officers who were involved in transporting trainees to Medomsley were aware that prison staff were using physical violence towards trainees and did nothing to address this.

Between 1979 and 1980, one police officer who was assigned to prisoner escorts from a local magistrates' court to prisons visited a prison he believes was Medomsley. He took the prisoner into the reception area where a prison officer told them to finish every sentence with the word **"Sir"** when addressing officers. The prison officer asked if the prisoner had understood to which he replied, **"Yes"**. The police officer witnessed the prison officer strike the prisoner across the side of the face for not saying **"Sir"**. The police officer was junior in service and because the prison officer behaved as if this was normal behaviour, he too thought this was accepted.³⁵⁹

"The incident that I saw appeared to be unnecessary but, as it was no more than a common assault and done so openly, I was satisfied that it was obviously an authorised part of the disciplinarian regime."³⁶⁰

Between 1985 and 1987 another police officer said he took the trainees to the reception area where they were asked to empty their pockets. One of the trainees told the prison officer to **"fuck off, it's my property"**. The police officer said the prison officer struck the trainee across the head. He said he challenged the prison officer and was told, **"Once they are through the gates, they are our responsibility."** The police officer decided not to take the matter further, believing no one would have listened to him.³⁶¹

Disclosures of abuse

There is some evidence of police visiting trainees at Medomsley to investigate other crimes and of trainees disclosing physical abuse and poor treatment.

In 1965, a 17-year-old trainee at Medomsley was assaulted by officers and asked to see the warden. He told the warden that he wanted to confess a crime and was subsequently visited by two police officers who asked him about his visible bruising. He told the officers that prison staff **"had nearly killed him"**. The following day this trainee was taken to Middlesbrough court where he agreed to be held responsible for a number of burglaries so that he would receive a larger sentence and be sent to a borstal.³⁶²

In 1973, one trainee injured his foot at Medomsley while moving a pulpit in the church. He went to the hospital officer who said there was nothing wrong with him and gave him two aspirin. Later that day the trainee saw an axe that had been left in an unlocked shed. He took the axe and used it to cut the fence and escape from the detention centre. He was located the following day by two detectives he knew. He showed them his foot and said

³⁵⁹ Operation Deerness investigation material

³⁶⁰ Operation Deerness investigation material

³⁶¹ Operation Deerness investigation material

³⁶² Operation Seabrook closed material

he had not been offered any medical treatment for his injury. The officers said they would complain to the prison, but he heard nothing further.³⁶³

Official documentation shows that on 12 April 1973, a civilian officer received a reprimand for leaving his tools which included an axe in an unauthorised area, leading to the escape of this trainee.³⁶⁴

Reporting of abuse

Some of the trainees reporting abuse at a police station were reporting what would have amounted to a common assault during the relevant period. This would not have required a formal record to be made unless they had a visible injury. However, there was also evidence of trainees reporting more serious physical and sexual assaults.

There are 22 documented occasions where trainees state they either reported abuse at a police station immediately following their release, or sometime after when they had contact with police for other reasons.

There were also occasions where trainees knew a police officer and disclosed abuse unofficially. In the majority of these cases trainees were not taken seriously, with officers dismissing the violence as an acceptable part of the regime and therefore deserved by the victims. Some victims were threatened with being sent back to Medomsley if they persisted with their allegations. Other victims were told that unless there was some form of corroboration there was nothing they could do. This may have been the case for a minor assault, but the absence of corroboration would not be applicable for a serious physical or sexual assault.

The nearest police station to Medomsley was located in Consett which was approximately two miles away.

From the number of trainees who made serious allegations to the police and from the consistency of their accounts, it is evident that Durham Constabulary was aware that physical abuse was taking place at Medomsley. However, when victims tried to report allegations at police stations they were ignored, dismissed or threatened with being sent back to Medomsley.

In 1978, a trainee was released from Medomsley and attended Consett police station to report the abuse they had suffered.

“I said I wanted to make a complaint about being assaulted in Medomsley. The man said ‘fuck off, get the bus, think yourself lucky, bye’ so I left to go for the bus. As soon as I had done it I regretted it, I thought I would get recalled to finish my time.”³⁶⁵

In 1979, a trainee was released from Medomsley having suffered physical abuse during his detention. He went with others to Consett police station where he tried to report the

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abuse. He was told, **“We’ve heard it all before, just go home or you’ll find yourself back inside there.”**³⁶⁶

In 1979 a victim was sentenced to three months’ detention at Medomsley where he was physically abused by officers. Following his release, his father spoke to a police officer from their local village. He said the officer laughed and said, **“He had not gone there for a holiday.”**³⁶⁷

In 1970, a victim was released from Medomsley having been sentenced to three months’ detention. He was physically and sexually abused while there. Following his release, he saw the police officer who dealt with his case in a local pub. He complained to the officer about his treatment at Medomsley. The officer told him, **“Shut up or he would get more time.”**³⁶⁸ The officer named in this allegation has now died.

In 1965, one victim was subjected to physical and sexual abuse while at Medomsley. He said that when he was released, his mother asked what had happened to him and took him to a police station in Cleveland to report the abuse. The police told them that nothing could be done as the offence had occurred inside a prison.³⁶⁹ Operation Seabrook made enquiries to retrieve any documentation held by Cleveland or Durham Constabulary linked to this victim, but no records were traced.

In 1977, another victim served three months at Medomsley where he was physically abused by officers and subjected to a sexual assault.³⁷⁰ After his release, the victim was arrested for a further offence. He told the officer in this case about the abuse he had suffered at Medomsley and the officer laughed at him.³⁷¹

Some trainees disclosed abuse to relatives, who tried to report it to the police. In some cases victims described making written statements at a police station about the abuse.

In 1970, a victim was sentenced to six months’ detention at Medomsley where he was repeatedly assaulted by one officer. During his sentence he was visited by his grandfather who saw injuries to his face. The victim told his grandfather he had been beaten by an officer and his grandfather visited a police station in Durham and reported the abuse while the victim was still detained at Medomsley. His grandfather later told him that the police officer had telephoned Medomsley and asked if officers were beating trainees which was denied. The victim reported that the abuse increased after this and he was subjected to a sexual assault as well as continued physical abuse. When he was released, his grandfather took him back to the same police station to complain again. The victim stated that he made a statement which he remembers signing, but after this he heard

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371 Operation Deerness investigation material

nothing more.³⁷² Operation Seabrook made enquiries to retrieve any documentation held by Durham Constabulary linked to this victim, but no records could be traced.

In 1972, a victim was sentenced to six months' detention and halfway through his sentence he was transferred to Medomsley, where he was subjected to sexual abuse in the kitchen. On his release he went with his father to Consett police station where he reported the abuse and gave a statement to police.³⁷³ Operation Seabrook made enquiries to retrieve any documentation held by Durham Constabulary linked to this victim, but no records were traced.

There were many examples of trainees being released and attending their local police station in a different locality and therefore a different police area to Medomsley. There is evidence from a former police officer that there was little enthusiasm to investigate crimes that had occurred outside of the policing area it was being reported to.

“If a person reported a crime in one force area that had occurred in another force area there was little appetite to investigate on behalf of another police force. There was a culture of not creating more work than was absolutely necessary.”³⁷⁴

There is evidence that trainees rarely reported sexual abuse following their release due to embarrassment and shame about what had happened to them. Where they did report it, they were not believed or were made to feel that the local community would get to know about it. Victims were also dissuaded from reporting abuse after release as they were released on licence and would have been at risk of being recalled to Medomsley if they were seen or believed to have stepped out of line. Some victims have said that they were expressly told they would be recalled if they followed through with their allegations.

In 1981, one victim was sentenced to three months at Medomsley where he was physically abused by officers and sexually abused by Husband. About six months after his release, he went to a police station in Cleveland and reported what had happened to him. He was told to stop making false accusations or he would find himself locked back up.³⁷⁵

Abuse committed by a police officer

There is one example of a police officer who was an associate of Husband being a perpetrator of abuse. This is Subject A, who has previously been referred to in part 2 of the report.

In 1972, a victim was sentenced to three months at Medomsley. After his release he was sentenced to a further period of detention for breaching his licence conditions. He was placed in the kitchens where he said he was sexually abused by Husband. After his release, he said that Husband took him fishing where he was introduced to another

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male. He was also sexually abused by this male. The male who was fishing with Neville Husband was later identified by police as a former police officer, Subject A.

Operation Seabrook investigated Subject A regarding the offences against the victim and was in the process of obtaining charging advice from the Crown Prosecution Service when he died in March 2018. At the time of the offences being committed, Subject A was a serving local police officer.³⁷⁶

Incidents investigated by police at Medomsley

Durham Constabulary investigated two deaths at Medomsley, one in 1981 and one in 1982. These are discussed in part 2.

When allegations of abuse were recorded by police, there is evidence that these complaints were not properly investigated.

We found one documented example of police attending Medomsley to investigate an allegation of assault within the governor's journal.

In March 1986, a trainee was physically assaulted by a prison officer the day before his release from Medomsley. The day after his release he reported the assault to police and an officer visited him at his home address and took photographs of his injuries.³⁷⁷

A police detective visited Medomsley to speak with the warden about the allegation. The following day the warden met with the POA chairman to advise him of the allegation. On 26 March 1986 the police attended Medomsley to interview trainees about the allegation.³⁷⁸

The governor's journal records that on 8 May 1986 the warden interviewed three members of staff regarding the police investigation of alleged assault.³⁷⁹ It is unclear whether any of the prison staff were interviewed by the police. The police had a duty to investigate themselves and should not have discharged this duty to a third party.

This trainee was told that no action was taken about his complaint as no one had admitted to the assault.³⁸⁰

Missed opportunities to investigate offending by Husband and Johnston

The trauma for victims did not end when Medomsley closed in 1987. It is important to highlight some opportunities that were missed after the relevant period to investigate offending by Husband and Johnston that might have lessened the ongoing trauma felt by the victims.

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377 Operation Seabrook closed material

378 Operation Seabrook closed material

379 Medomsley governor's journal 26 August 1983 to 30 June 1987

380 Operation Seabrook closed material

When he was arrested in 1989, Johnston admitted engaging in sexual activity with other young men at Kirklevington YOI and Medomsley where he had served for several years.

Despite this, there is no evidence of any wider investigation by Cleveland police at that time to identify further victims either at Kirklevington YOI or Medomsley. There is no evidence of any contact between Cleveland police and Durham Constabulary regarding the offending at Medomsley, which was a missed opportunity to share information and investigate that offending.³⁸¹

Documentation from Operation Halter and the trial transcript from 2003 show that police officers did trace one former trainee, Witness A, who had been named by Johnston as a victim. They interviewed Witness A on tape about his abuse and he disclosed sexual abuse by Johnston but also stated he told police about Husband.³⁸² It is not clear which force the officers interviewing Witness A were from, but it appears likely that Cleveland police first investigated Johnston in 1989.

There is no evidence of any investigation by Cleveland police at that time into possible offending by Husband.

The limited police investigation into Husband in 1998 followed a disclosure in February 1998 made by Witness B during a Northumbria police investigation into institutional abuse.

Witness B stated to Northumbria police that it was **“common knowledge within the establishment [Medomsley] that the chef had committed buggery on many young offenders, and that these offences were committed within a large food store adjacent to the kitchen”**.³⁸³

The above information was forwarded to Durham Constabulary by Northumbria police and Durham Constabulary visited Witness B in April 1998 and again in June 1998.

Notes recorded by the interviewing officer suggest that Witness B was alleging an indecent assault by Husband but that he did not want to make a formal complaint. In the officer’s notes, it is recorded that Witness B will give evidence if **“anyone else wants to make a complaint”**.³⁸⁴

Witness B gave police the name of another former trainee. This second witness, Witness C, was spoken to by Cambridgeshire police and recalled that the chef at Medomsley often touched up trainees and tried to incite other trainees to perform sexual acts on each other. He also told police about witnessing an incident where the chef engaged in oral sex with a trainee.³⁸⁵

381 Operation Deerness investigation material

382 Operation Deerness investigation material

383 Operation Halter 1 closed material

384 Operation Halter closed material

385 Operation Halter 1 closed material

On 8 June 1998, Husband was interviewed at his home address by a detective from Durham Constabulary regarding the allegations from these victims. During the interview, Husband confirmed he had been the catering officer at Medomsley for 18 years from 1968 and had retired from the Prison Service on medical grounds.

The allegations of indecent assault and oral sex were put to him and he denied them. He stated that the kitchens were so narrow it was impossible to pass anyone without coming into contact, but that there had been no indecency at all.

The report notes that because there was no formal complaint from either Witness B or Witness C and a lack of corroborative evidence, no further action could be taken against Husband.³⁸⁶

There were obvious difficulties for the police at that time due to a lack of substantive evidence against Husband and the investigation was limited. Durham Constabulary confirmed that there are no records to suggest that intelligence checks were carried out on Husband or that his home address was searched.³⁸⁷

There is no documentation to suggest that any police enquiries were made about Husband with the Prison Service.

There were missed opportunities to investigate the offending of Johnston during Operation Halter.

By August 2001, Durham Constabulary, who were investigating allegations against Husband, were aware that Johnston was involved in the sexual abuse of Witness A and had been convicted of that abuse.³⁸⁸

However in January 2002, they took a witness statement from Johnston rather than considering him as a potential suspect or person of interest in their investigation. No documented rationale for this decision has been traced by Durham Constabulary. However, they have indicated that the decision may be based on the fact that the allegation involving Witness A had already been investigated and at that time, no victims had come forward to make allegations against Johnston.

After a statement was taken from Johnston, Operation Halter obtained further witness statements from former staff members at Medomsley, many of whom commented on the close relationship of Husband and Johnston.

The information surrounding Johnston's admissions about offending at Medomsley during his 1989 police interview should have pointed to the distinct possibility of further victims of abuse being found. However, the decision to treat Johnston as a witness was not reviewed until 2014, during Operation Seabrook.

386 Operation Halter 1 closed material

387 Operation Deerness investigation material

388 Operation Halter 1 closed material

Missed opportunities to investigate physical abuse during Operation Halter

Durham Constabulary were not able to identify a document which recorded the terms of reference for Operation Halter 1 and 2. However, it appears that the remit was limited to the sexual offending of Husband.

Some victims such as Witness D disclosed serious physical abuse in 2003 to police during the Operation Halter 1 investigation.

“The PT instructor who was also a violent man assaulted me and I was as a result treated at Shotley Bridge Hospital for a fractured skull. I was threatened to say I’d fallen. I know the name of my attacker and some possible witnesses and would be willing to have an investigation made into this. The matter will be on record, and I feel that this should also be brought into the open as the violence was out of control and applied without restraint on what were defenceless people who were in terror of their lives.”³⁸⁹

Witness D was told by Durham Constabulary in 2003 that his assault would not be investigated.³⁹⁰

Summary

Police officers transporting trainees to Medomsley frequently witnessed violent behaviour towards trainees at Medomsley during the reception procedures, but it appears that a lot of this behaviour was accepted as normal and went unchallenged.

It is evident that police officers from both Durham and Cleveland police were aware that physical and sexual abuse was taking place at Medomsley from as early as 1965 due to complaints of abuse made at police stations.

The police officers who ignored, dismissed or took no action on receiving allegations from trainees failed in their duty to report and investigate crime.

This includes not only those incidents where trainees attended police stations, but also those instances where they disclosed abuse to police officers they knew. This failure to act not only had a direct and lasting impact on victims who were already distrustful of authorities, but had a direct impact on the abuse at Medomsley continuing.

Even where third parties such as family members supported victims in making complaints at police stations and were tenacious in pursuing these complaints, no action appears to have been taken beyond the witness statement.

The police investigation into the 1986 allegation of physical assault by a trainee was recorded as a crime, and injuries were documented. But the investigation was limited and it appears that part of the investigation which involved interviewing the three suspects

³⁸⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

³⁹⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

was discharged to the prison to complete. The obvious implication here is that the prison was effectively investigating itself.

This equally applies to the investigations into the deaths of Caldwell and Shackleton, where there is little evidence that the police conducted extensive witness enquiries into trainees' allegations about Medomsley. Rather, they relied on the Prison Service to provide information.

The Probation Service

Between the 1960s and 1980s, when Medomsley was operating, there was no unified national Probation Service as exists today. Instead, probation services were divided into defined geographical areas and administered by local authorities. There was also no specific professional qualification for probation officers at that time. Probation officers held social work qualifications and provided a service that was based on the ethos of 'advise, befriend, assist'.

Probation officers were responsible for managing individuals sentenced to community-based sentences, as well as managing the after-care of individuals released from imprisonment or detention. Their role was to provide practical support with housing and employment, and general guidance to help people on probation live happy and crime-free lives. Prisons and detention centres also had in-house probation officers who looked after trainees' welfare during their sentences.

The role of probation within Medomsley

Medomsley had up to two in-house probation officers who performed the role of welfare officer. Probation officers working within detention centres would be considered civilian staff and would report to probation line managers outside of the Prison Service. They would not wear uniforms and would not hold any disciplinary responsibilities within the detention centre. Originally, they would have been referred to as social workers or welfare officers. However, in 1969 a Circular Instruction announced that all professionals working in this welfare role would be considered probation officers and would fall under the oversight of the Probation Service.³⁹¹ The Probation and After-Care Inspectorate was responsible for providing oversight by regularly inspecting probation work and publishing reports.

We spoke to one former probation officer who described that when trainees first arrived at Medomsley, they would be seen by the probation officer as part of their induction. The probation officer would usually be accompanied by the educational officer and the purpose of the meeting would be to identify any immediate issues – for example, if the trainee had literacy issues and needed to be assigned to a remedial education schedule. After this first meeting the probation officer would not usually be involved again until the trainee was due for release. At this stage the in-house probation officer would liaise with the 'outside' probation officer from the trainee's home area to co-ordinate any release plans. These plans would include arranging accommodation for trainees who

³⁹¹ Home Office Circular Instructions 247/68

could not return home and contacting former and prospective employers to help trainees secure paid employment immediately on release. The in-house probation officer would occasionally meet with trainees during their sentence if any welfare issues arose.

The probation officer would also sit on the centre's management board where senior civilian and prison staff would meet to discuss the running of the centre. They would have regular contact with the warden and chief officer, as well as with the education department.

The probation officer at Medomsley was responsible for writing an annual report which summed up the work of the welfare department over the previous year. The report usually included information such as changes in staffing, developments in trainee welfare, population statistics and notable visitors to the centre.

Trainee after-care following release

After being released from Medomsley, a trainee's supervision would be handed over to a probation officer based in their home area. Trainees would be supervised on a licence of one year, during which their probation officer would support them in rebuilding their lives and avoiding further offending. If trainees failed to co-operate with the requirements of their licence, the probation officer could submit an application to the Home Office to have the trainee recalled and returned to detention.³⁹²

Disclosures of abuse to probation staff

The question of what the Probation Service knew about abuse at Medomsley at the time extends to both probation staff working directly within the centre and those working with trainees who had left Medomsley and returned to their home areas.

At least 26 individuals reported physical and/or sexual abuse to probation staff either at Medomsley, immediately following release, or some years later while on probation for further offences (though no later than the 1990s). Only two of these disclosures were made to the probation officer based at Medomsley, the remainder being to probation officers based across the Northeast.

Of the 26 disclosures of abuse made to probation staff, there is only evidence that two were formally escalated to senior staff.

Witness E first tried to disclose the sexual abuse he suffered at Medomsley to the police at North Shields police station. However, he was turned away by the sergeant who recommended he tell his probation officer instead. Witness E then went to his probation officer, who reported what he had told her to a manager. Witness E says that a week later he was called in to speak to this manager, who warned him that if he continued to make **"false accusations"** he could end up with an additional three to six months on his licence. Witness E did not bring it up again.³⁹³

Witness F also told a probation officer outside of Medomsley.

392 Operation Seabrook closed material

393 Operation Seabrook closed material

Case study 3 – Witness F

When Witness F was 17 years old, he found himself in Bradford magistrates' court for a crime he says he did not commit. He was sentenced to three months' detention and was promptly escorted to Medomsley in a police car.

When he arrived at the centre, Witness F was told to stand behind a line marked on the floor. He did as he was told. Suddenly, he felt a punch land squarely on his nose. His toe had been touching the line, and the reception officer did not hesitate to punish him for this.

He recalls being assaulted another two times during the reception process, before being forced to strip down in view of others for a degrading strip search.

Soon after his arrival, Witness F was allocated to the kitchen for work. He recalls doing some washing up on his first day when another trainee, who became a close friend, warned him to never go anywhere alone with the chef, Husband.

Witness F soon found that it was impossible to avoid Husband, who sent him on errands into the upstairs storeroom and followed him there. The first time this happened, Husband instructed him to climb up a ladder to fetch items from the higher shelves. Once up the ladder, Husband reached upward under his trousers and began to fondle him. His immediate reaction was to push Husband away, but he froze after Husband warned him that he could easily make him disappear, and nobody would know or care what happened to him.

“So I let him do what he wanted. I couldn't do with another beating, I'd already had four or five since I'd come in.”³⁹⁴

Husband's abuse escalated. He began to call Witness F out of evening association, saying he needed help sorting out the storeroom. Witness F had no choice but to go along. In the storeroom, Husband would rape him. On some occasions Husband would also photograph him naked.

“Husband called me out of association and said he needed some help sorting the storeroom out and when I went to the storeroom he raped me, he made me strip off, he inserted himself inside me, even now I can still feel the weight on me.”³⁹⁵

Any time Witness F protested, Husband would remind him that he could easily be found hanged.

“If I didn't do what he wanted he said you can disappear if you don't do what we want, he says in this place we are like god you know, you're just scum and nobody gives a shit so just, you have to go along with it or we're just going to do you in.”³⁹⁶

394 Operation Seabrook closed material

395 Operation Seabrook closed material

396 Operation Seabrook closed material

Husband was not the only person sexually abusing Witness F, though he did not know the identities of the other perpetrators as he was forced to wear a hood over his face whenever they were involved. Husband would always be present, facilitating the gathering in which Witness F would be repeatedly raped by several men. This abuse continued throughout his sentence.

When he was released from Medomsley, Witness F attended his local probation office where he disclosed everything to his probation officer. The probation officer considered his allegations before advising him that he would be sent back inside if he continued to make 'false' allegations.

A few years later, Witness F found himself in trouble again, this time sentenced to residence in a probation hostel. At the hostel, he developed a trusting relationship with the assistant warden Witness G, and after about five months there, he decided to share with Witness G everything that had happened to him at Medomsley.

The investigation has spoken to Witness G, who told us he was shocked by the level of sexual and physical violence Witness F described.

"When he said like when he punched you, big heavy solid, exceptionally violent, it hurt him so much, he said, and I just thought, you know, 'crikey, what the hell has these young boys been going through?' It broke my heart, you know."³⁹⁷

Witness G immediately asked the former trainee to write everything down in a statement so it could be escalated to his line manager. Witness F wrote his statement and Witness G was struck by how powerfully the former trainee had written about the abuse and said he had no doubt that what he was saying was true.

The next day, when the warden came on shift, Witness G presented him with the written statement. The warden said he would deal with it, and Witness G trusted that the police would be called and the matter would be swiftly dealt with. There is no evidence that the police were ever contacted. Witness G did not hear any more about the former trainee's disclosure after this.

A few months later, Witness F escaped from the probation hostel and could not be located. He has since told police that he changed his name and went into hiding from then on. He never returned to his family, for fear that he would bring shame on them because of what had been done to him. All the while, he remained fearful that Husband would track him down: **"I disappeared so that he couldn't catch me, he couldn't find me."**³⁹⁸

The warden who was handed Witness F's statement transferred from the probation hostel and became the senior probation officer at Medomsley. They died before the start of Operation Seabrook.

³⁹⁷ Operation Deerness investigation material

³⁹⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

This case study highlights that a small fraction of victims were believed. In this case, the professional involved took appropriate action to document the disclosure and to escalate it to a senior manager. This represents a clear opportunity for abuse to have been reported to police and investigated.

There is no evidence that any of the other 24 disclosures resulted in any further action.

Several victims have said that their probation officer responded along the lines of, **“Well, what did you expect?”** Others were advised to just forget about it and move on with their lives. Others were threatened that they would be returned to Medomsley if they continued to make allegations.

“Whilst I was in Medomsley my probation officer from South Shields visited me once. I don’t recall his name. I do remember telling him I was getting beat up every day and that I was the ‘doctor’s best friend’, from which I know he understood that I was telling him I was being abused, but all he said was, ‘It was your call to come back in.’”³⁹⁹

“When I got out I was on probation... at the time. I told my probation officers... what had happened to me. They said it’s just the way it is.”⁴⁰⁰

“When I was released from Medomsley I went to probation to make an appointment. I tried to explain to my probation officer... what had happened, but she said that’s what I was there for, and I should just accept what happened. I couldn’t believe that she just accepted what I said and ignored the facts. She did nothing regarding my allegation.”⁴⁰¹

“I did tell the probation officers when I got out. They just said that’s how it is, that’s your punishment.”⁴⁰²

Witnessing abuse and poor behaviour by staff

There is evidence that some physical abuse on trainees was witnessed by welfare officers at Medomsley and that physical violence was joked about by prison staff.

One trainee described an occasion where residential social workers were present when another trainee was being assaulted in the corridor.

“Another time I once saw a [prison officer] booting a lad in the back down the corridor when I was out of the kitchen delivering biscuits. He was making him do ‘bunny hops’ and each time he hopped he would boot him forward making him fall. I don’t know the name of the lad but he was from Tyneside. What did shock me though was there were two like residential social workers who were like there meant to be looking after you stood laughing at this. They stood and doing nothing was a real shock for me and I was amazed at this as they laughed like big roars of laughter.”⁴⁰³

399 Operation Seabrook closed material

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One female who performed the role of welfare officer at Medomsley experienced concerning and abusive behaviour by a prison officer towards her while working there in the early 1970s.

Documentation included in the personnel file of Subject C, the prison officer concerned, shows that he had been involved in exposing himself and masturbating in front of her at Medomsley on three separate occasions and that she had previously complained to the warden about him exposing himself. On the third occasion, he was caught in the act by two colleagues and reported to the warden. A disciplinary hearing took place and Subject C was found guilty of acting in a disorderly manner and would have been sacked if he had not first resigned.⁴⁰⁴

Witness M recalled how in the early 1980s, she completed a work placement with the Probation Service at Consett office and was attached to the resident probation officer at Medomsley. While being escorted at the centre, the prison officer assigned to her made a comment about the initiation ceremony officers gave to each new trainee, which was a punch to both the detainee's ears with the intention of bursting their eardrums. Witness M described this comment as not a fleeting remark but a serious comment which the officer found very funny. She was shocked by this comment.⁴⁰⁵

Witness M reported that during her time in Medomsley, she spoke to a number of the detainees and none of them complained about either being physically or sexually abused. The main complaint they disclosed to her was that a family visit they were due to have was cancelled for no apparent reason.⁴⁰⁶

Summary

The lack of any archival probation files is a significant barrier in accurately reflecting the extent to which the Probation Service knew that abuse was taking place at Medomsley. However, the volume of accounts that exist, and the consistency of their content, strongly suggests that some individual probation officers were aware of sexual and physical abuse taking place at Medomsley during the relevant period. In many cases, no action was taken in response to these disclosures. Probation staff responses generally demonstrated that they found the use of violence in detention centres to be normal and unremarkable, or else that they did not believe the allegations.

There is strong evidence that members of the Probation Service failed to take allegations of abuse seriously and respond appropriately. Probation staff demonstrated a distinct lack of professional curiosity by failing to follow up allegations of abuse. This not only prevented a timely investigation into allegations of abuse at Medomsley, but also further reduced victims' trust in authority.

⁴⁰⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁰⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁰⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

Social services

The role of social services within Medomsley

Up until 1969, one dedicated social worker based at Medomsley performed the role of welfare officer and this was expanded to two social workers in the 1970s. The welfare officer was responsible for interviewing trainees, providing an ongoing case history and follow-up support, being involved in the social education programme at Medomsley, and ensuring that all trainees left the centre at the end of their sentence with accommodation and the support of a local probation officer.

As mentioned on page 139, a Circular Instruction stipulated that all professionals working in this welfare role would be considered probation officers and would fall under the oversight of the Probation Service.⁴⁰⁷

Welfare staff were involved in interviewing the previous day's new trainees received through reception and they attended the employment board to allocate trainees to the appropriate working party.⁴⁰⁸ The dedicated social worker was also available on a Saturday afternoon for visiting parents on request.⁴⁰⁹

Some external childcare social workers who were not permanently based at Medomsley visited trainees on occasion.⁴¹⁰ Many trainees had been in care from a young age and therefore had a long history of involvement with social services.

Disclosures of abuse

As well as the resident welfare staff, there is evidence of the trainees' own social workers visiting them in Medomsley. Evidence reveals that some trainees disclosed physical abuse to their social workers.

One victim described being visited by a social worker and disclosing that he was being hit by an officer and that other trainees' bones had been broken. The response from the social worker was that he could not do anything and the victim was told to keep his head down.⁴¹¹

Another victim reported that his social worker may have been present during a visit with his mother where he had a visible injury and disclosed physical abuse.

⁴⁰⁷ Home Office Circular Instructions 247/68

⁴⁰⁸ The National Archives: Durham Probation Area (1969, 1971, 1973). Inspections of Medomsley Detention Centre Welfare Department

⁴⁰⁹ The National Archives: Durham Probation Area (1969). Inspections of Medomsley Detention Centre Welfare Department

⁴¹⁰ The National Archives. Medomsley Detention Centre Social Worker annual report for 1974

⁴¹¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

“I remember she (Mum) came and visited me at Medomsley only on a few days after I was taken in. She saw my black eye, the one I received whilst in reception and I believe I told her what happened. She may have been in company with my social worker.”⁴¹²

Other victims did not feel able to disclose sexual abuse to social workers due to fear and conditioning. This victim was subjected to frequent sexual abuse by Johnston while at Medomsley.

“I was due a visit with my social worker after about a month and he [Leslie Johnston] spoke to me warning me not to say anything. I had no intention of saying anything, I wouldn’t have dared. I accepted what was happening and was conditioned very quickly to the regime and abuse.”⁴¹³

Documentation from Operation Seabrook highlighted the involvement of numerous local authorities with victims, both while they were trainees at Medomsley and later in life when they required support due to poor mental and physical health or other vulnerabilities.

Many of the local authorities included in our call for evidence had contact with victims after Medomsley or had provided third party records, where available, to Operation Seabrook.

Durham council held records relating to two former trainees. They had both reported mental health issues which they felt were related to the time they spent at Medomsley.

Hartlepool council had records of a former trainee who mentioned to a social worker in 1980 that he been picked on by the wardens. Those records contained no further detail.

Newcastle and Sunderland councils both hold records relating to former Medomsley trainees, some of which were from the relevant period and included the period of their detention at Medomsley or before it.

Some of these records demonstrate that the individuals concerned were already extremely vulnerable before going to Medomsley and had often been in care and sent to approved schools. Some individuals were described as having significant behavioural issues and being emotionally disturbed. The suitability or otherwise of some of the trainees for detention centre life is discussed further in part 4.

Summary

There is some evidence that social workers were told by trainees about physical abuse, but no existing evidence that social workers were aware of sexual abuse at Medomsley.

⁴¹² Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴¹³ Operation Seabrook closed material

Health services

Identification of medical staff

Trainees with medical issues at Medomsley were cared for either by prison staff in the form of the hospital officer, or by the medical officer who was a visiting GP.

In more serious cases, trainees were taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital where they were seen by a nurse or doctor. In many victim accounts, it is difficult to determine which of the above individuals is being referred to, as the term 'doctor' is used generically for both the medical and hospital officers. This leads to a strong possibility of misidentification between prison staff and other external medical staff who would fall into the category of external health bodies for the purposes of this review.

Care has been taken to differentiate where possible between internal medical staff at Medomsley and external medical staff when reviewing victim accounts.

The role of health authorities at Medomsley

Trainees at Medomsley were usually treated by a single prison officer appointed as the hospital officer, who had completed rudimentary medical training and could attend to basic medical needs and dispense simple medication.

The hospital officer was supported by a local GP from Consett, who was known as the medical officer. Medical officers were responsible for reporting to the prison authorities each year.⁴¹⁴

The majority of hospital officers who worked at Medomsley had performed the role at other establishments before working at Medomsley.

These medical services were overseen by the senior medical officer at HMP Durham and the regional principal medical officers.⁴¹⁵

The medical officer attended the centre daily to examine newly arrived trainees and any trainee as determined by the hospital officer of needing further examination or treatment.

Facilities at Medomsley

The hospital facilities at Medomsley are described in the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons inspection report 1977.

The hospital accommodation was on the first floor and had three wards with a total of nine beds. There was also one isolation unit which had a single bed and its own bathroom and toilet. Trainees requiring medical attention waited in a large room to the right of the treatment room.

414 The National Archives. Medomsley Detention Centre medical officer annual medical reports for 1967, 1975 and 1976

415 Home Office Circular Instruction 46/1970

Shotley Bridge Hospital

The nearest hospital to Medomsley was located at Shotley Bridge, two miles away. This provided accident and emergency services and was therefore the main hospital that trainees were taken to.

HMP Durham

Cases involving self-harm or serious mental health concerns were transferred to the prison hospital at HMP Durham where they could be monitored or undergo psychiatric assessments. The 1952 Detention Centre Rules stipulated that inmates suspected to have suicidal intentions would be observed at frequent intervals and that the medical officer shall take the steps, if necessary, to certify individuals deemed mentally ill.

Challenges in determining whether external health bodies could have intervened

There is no doubt that a number of trainees at Medomsley sustained serious injuries that required treatment at either the hospital wing at Medomsley, at Shotley Bridge Hospital or at HMP Durham.

However, there were challenges in determining whether members of external health authorities could have known about physical and sexual abuse at Medomsley for a number of reasons.

The lack of hospital and patient records

The lack of records from Medomsley, the Prison Service, local hospitals and the trainees' own health records is a significant obstacle in establishing whether the Detention Centre Rules were followed and to what extent external health authorities knew physical and sexual abuse was occurring at Medomsley.

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust possessed acute medical records for those witnesses who attended court. None of the records contained disclosures regarding abuse or treatment while at Medomsley.

Accident and emergency departments held no records for Medomsley trainees.⁴¹⁶

There are over 4,000 statements, reports and interviews that exist under Operation Halter and Operation Seabrook. Within this body of material, it was identified that 248 trainees from Medomsley either reported suffering an injury while in the care of Medomsley that required attendance at either a local hospital or the hospital within HMP Durham. This figure also included trainees who reported being treated at the hospital wing for an injury that was more than merely short-term or required repeated treatment.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴¹⁷ Operation Deerness investigation material

Of those 248 victim accounts, Operation Seabrook sought medical records in 33 cases. This means that in 84% of cases reviewed, medical evidence was not sought.⁴¹⁸

Operation Seabrook obtained medical evidence in those cases that would support criminal charges of physical abuse against several prison officers. Numerous allegations of physical abuse were made by victims during or after the conclusion of the Operation Seabrook trials and therefore were not actioned beyond initial reporting.

Of the cases where Operation Seabrook sought medical evidence, records were obtained in relation to 27 victims. For the remaining six cases, no records were traced.

Numbers of admissions

The relatively low number of hospital admissions during the relevant period means that it may be unreasonable to suggest that external medical staff could have identified a pattern of abuse among trainees. They were also reliant on trainees disclosing abuse which, would have been unlikely in many cases as trainees were escorted to hospital by prison staff.

Disclosures of physical abuse

Of the 248 accounts of trainees whose abuse led to medical treatment, 15 victims disclosed physical abuse to prison staff, to the medical staff at Medomsley or to medical staff at Shotley Bridge Hospital.

In five cases, victims disclosed to staff at hospital that they had been assaulted by prison officers.

One victim reported that he had been badly beaten by three officers and was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital.

“The following day I was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital. The hospital staff confirmed my nose was broken. By this time, I also had a very badly bruised left eye. I remember I was also complaining of a sore chest and I believe the staff at the hospital also X-rayed my chest. The hospital staff asked how I had come about my injuries and the escorting officers informed them I had been involved in a disturbance. I told the hospital staff that was incorrect and it was the officers who had assaulted me, but I don’t know if they did anything about what I had said.”⁴¹⁹

In 1975, a trainee fell from the top of a climbing frame after being hit with rocks thrown at him by prison officers and sustained serious injuries.

“I was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital, I’m not sure if this was by ambulance or a prison van. Once there I was X-rayed, examined and told I had three crushed vertebrae. I was kept in hospital for between 10 and 14 days where a guard stayed with me. I had a full body cast on which went from my neck to my waist excluding my arms... I told the

⁴¹⁸ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴¹⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

hospital exactly what had happened at the time of my examination and I told my parents when I got out.”⁴²⁰

Medical evidence obtained by Operation Seabrook confirmed the above injury.

Another victim reported that he was sent to hospital after being assaulted but the medical staff at hospital were told he had appendicitis.

‘I went down the hospital, they said you’ve got appendicitis, I said there is nothing [wrong] with me appendix, I told the hospital staff I can still remember, there was two nurses there. I says I got punched off one of the officers, the kitchen staff and I think he’s bruised me insides, I says it’s nothing to do with me appendix.’⁴²¹

One victim suffered a knee injury after being assaulted by a PEI. He attended Shotley Bridge Hospital for treatment and recalled he told the nurses how he had got the injury when the officers weren’t there.⁴²²

One victim was assaulted by Perpetrator B during the fence run and taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital with an ankle injury which was found on X-ray to be a cracked bone. The victim told staff how his injuries were caused, and he recalled that the doctor mentioned he was going to report what he had been told to the prison authorities. It is unclear whether anything happened as a result, but this appears to be a clear opportunity for an external authority to have intervened.⁴²³

Corroboration of injuries

In almost all allegations by trainees relating to serious injuries, it is not possible to corroborate the cause of the injury through medical evidence.

In many cases, medical evidence relating to injuries that may have been sustained by victims while at Medomsley was not available and this clearly impacted on the police ability to prosecute former members of staff in relation to physical abuse.

Even where medical evidence was available, medical professionals were not able to determine whether an injury was caused intentionally or accidentally. A medical expert for Operation Seabrook completed a medical review of four cases and was not able to determine whether the injuries were non-accidental.⁴²⁴

There are some examples where the medical records obtained by Operation Seabrook did not correspond with the injury described by the victim.

420 Operation Seabrook closed material

421 Operation Seabrook closed material

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For example, one former trainee alleged he suffered a fractured skull and cracked ribs during his time at Medomsley in 1973. His medical history did not refer to a head injury but showed that he was admitted to hospital with suspected tuberculosis.⁴²⁵

There is some evidence that official internal records relating to medical injuries at Medomsley may not have been accurate, as some victims report that what was recorded as their diagnosis did not reflect the injuries they received as a result of physical abuse.

One victim described being assaulted by a PEI who grabbed him around the neck and used his body weight and knee to apply pressure to his neck. This caused excruciating pain and the trainee blacked out.

“The next I knew I wasn’t in the gym anymore. I was being dragged along the corridor by the hospital wing. The officer dragging me was the PEI. I was taken into the hospital area. I was put into a bed. A medic came and examined me, and my neck. He said I had tonsillitis. My neck was stiff and I was unable to move it. Bruising developed around my neck over the next day or so and I also felt significant pain. The medical officer kept coming in and examining me. He would ask me to ‘open wide’, then looked down my throat. He always said ‘tonsillitis’ as though this was my diagnosis. After about three weeks I felt improvement. Once I had improved the governor offered me a job in the boiler room.”⁴²⁶

Barriers to disclosing abuse

In almost all the cases reviewed, it was noted that trainees were prevented from disclosing abuse to hospital staff due to either being threatened by prison staff before attending hospital, or by the mere presence of prison staff. This meant that medical staff were reliant on the information they received from trainees. In some cases the accounts given by trainees were questioned by medical staff.

One trainee described being deliberately assaulted by prison staff during a football match.

“Then two officers came at me together... kicked me from the side and deliberately stamped on my foot, I heard the bone break. I was screaming and taken off the field.”

This trainee was told there was no medical officer available until the following day.

“On the Sunday the medic saw me, he said I had sprained my ankle and put a bandage on it. Later in the day... I was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital... I was warned before I went to keep my mouth shut. The nurse was asking me questions, but I didn’t dare answer her and told her I couldn’t speak, he [the officer] told her it had been done while playing football. I was X-rayed and put in plaster the same day, they wanted to keep me in but the medic told them that I would go into the hospital at the centre. I think the nurses knew something wasn’t right.”⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴²⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴²⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

“I was participating in a game of football and it was so cold I could hardly move. All of a sudden [one of the officers] ran up to me shouting and at the same time he knocked me to the floor... [he] stamped on my ankle. I started screaming because I immediately realised I had been seriously hurt.”

He was carried into the building and officer looked at his foot.

“An officer said he thought my foot was broken and that I needed to go to hospital. I was told that I was going for an X-ray, and I was warned about what I told the hospital staff. I was told to tell the hospital that another inmate had tackled me whilst playing football and I fallen the wrong way causing the injury. I was warned what would happen to me if I didn’t do what I was told. I was taken to Consett hospital and had an X-ray. An officer was by my side all the time at the hospital.”⁴²⁸

“It wasn’t till the following day I was handcuffed to two prison officers... and I was taken to Shotley Bridge Hospital. Before I got into the taxi [the prison officer] said to me, ‘When asked how it happened you say it was a simple accident in the gym.’”⁴²⁹

One victim attended Shotley Bridge Hospital for a routine X-ray. At the time he was covered in bruises from being assaulted by several officers.

“I can’t recall which officers assaulted me as there were so many of them kicking and punching at me. I can recall at some point whilst at the centre that I was taken to a local hospital to have some X-rays, there were a few of us from the centre that were taken and it may have been to check for TB (tuberculosis). Whilst at the hospital I was asked what the bruises over my body were from, but I felt that I couldn’t say that they were from being assaulted by the prison officers.”⁴³⁰

As we have already mentioned, one victim attended hospital after being hit in the head with a breadbasket thrown by one of the prison officers, causing an injury to his head which required stitches.

“The hospital staff asked what me what had happened, and I said what the officers had threatened me to say. I said I had fallen and hit my head on a door handle. I don’t think the medical staff treating me believed what I was telling them as they said the injury did not match the account I was giving them. I would like to add that when I was asked by the medical staff to give an account for my head injury the officers were standing behind the hospital staff and they were making gestures towards me to keep my mouth shut. I knew I had no option but tell the lies I had been warned to say.”⁴³¹

Concerns regarding information sharing on medical issues

As evident from the two deaths that occurred at Medomsley in 1981 and 1982, there was poor practice regarding the sharing of medical information within Medomsley and

⁴²⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴²⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴³⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴³¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

between the centre and other establishments and organisations responsible for the medical care of the trainees.

Abuse by medical staff at Medomsley

A significant number of allegations were made by victims against one former medical officer, Subject C, who was commonly referred to as ‘**Doctor Death**’ or ‘**the Vet**’.

These allegations ranged from complaints regarding his general care and attitude towards trainees, including the common theme that he would tape an aspirin to some of their foreheads and make them run around, to physical assault and several allegations of sexual abuse.

Subject C was not investigated by Operation Seabrook as he died before the investigation began.⁴³²

Concerns by external medical staff

There is some evidence that external medical staff expressed concerns about trainees’ injuries.

“I was warned by [prison officers] not to talk about what had happened to me or what went on in the centre. They said they would trust me not to run away so would not leave a guard with me on bed watch. I agreed to everything as I needed medical help but also the thought of being away from that hell hole was great. I wouldn’t have been able to run away if I wanted as I spent the next three weeks in the hospital bed at Shotley Bridge Hospital. The doctor that treated me there was a nice guy but he kept asking questions about what had happened, what was going on at the centre as they had a lot of boys with injuries in but I didn’t dare tell him anything... I was told that my kidneys had ruptured. I was on tablets, loads of blood tests and was only semi-conscious for the first few days.”⁴³³

The Operation Seabrook investigation spoke to this victim’s parents. They said they were told that their son was in hospital because he had fallen off the wooden horse in the gym. When they went to see him in the hospital, and they asked him to explain how his injury had been caused but he refused to tell them. His mum told police that at the time she had suspicions that a prison officer had been responsible. The Operation Seabrook investigation then reviewed this victim’s medical records, which stated he was treated at Shotley Bridge Hospital for post-streptococcal glomerulonephritis, which is a type of kidney infection.

An experienced nurse who was employed at Shotley Bridge Hospital in the 1980s reported to Operation Seabrook that while working there, she became concerned after three trainees from Medomsley were admitted to the same ward with nephritis in a short space of time. Nephritis is inflammation of the kidney which is usually caused by infection.

⁴³² Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴³³ Operation Seabrook closed material

She described the condition as “rare to see in the UK after the 1970s, especially in young men, who would have received effective treatment had they contracted a haemolytic streptococcus infection”.⁴³⁴

She stated by the time the third male was admitted to the same ward from Medomsley, she was “**very perturbed by the incidence**”. She stated that a common feature of all the young men who were admitted was their “**quiet demeanour**”. She discussed her concerns with a student nurse who explained it was not nephritis, but a result of the trainees being given rabbit punches to the kidneys. The student nurse said that it was “**common knowledge, and everyone knew that**”.⁴³⁵

She also said that the hospital staff, including the student nurse, were local to the area unlike herself, which she felt would explain why she was unaware of this. She went on to say that the same nurse told her that before she took up post, there had been a young man admitted from Medomsley with nephritis, who had jumped off his locker and fractured his ankle in order to stay in hospital because he did not want to go back.

No further action was taken by any medical professional at that time.⁴³⁶

Official documentation shows that an outbreak of nephritis at Medomsley in early 1983 was recorded. Both trainees and staff tested positive. To contain the spread of infection Medomsley was closed, and a national testing system was introduced across the detention centre estates as a result.

Operation Seabrook asked a medical expert to comment on whether nephritis could occur due to being punched in the back. In reply, he said the symptoms are variable but that one common symptom can be blood in the urine, either visible to the naked eye or detected only on urine testing. Trauma to the kidneys could also cause visible blood in the urine or urine positive for blood on testing. He noted that there was an overlap between the effects of nephritis and of trauma to the kidneys.⁴³⁷

Summary

The evidence of what health authorities knew about physical and sexual abuse at Medomsley is inconclusive. Some staff had concerns regarding the presentation of trainees and their accounts of how injuries were sustained, and about the disproportionate occurrences of nephritis. However, these appear to be isolated incidents which would not amount to knowledge of widespread abuse.

In many cases, it would not have been possible to determine whether serious injuries were caused intentionally. Added to this, some victims lied about how their injuries were sustained or did not disclose through fear or because prison staff were present at the time they attended hospital.

⁴³⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴³⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴³⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴³⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

The general absence of medical records means that some allegations of physical abuse cannot be supported by medical evidence.

Education

The role of education at Medomsley

Education was a mandated part of the regime at Medomsley. As a senior detention centre, the trainees at Medomsley were not of compulsory school age. The majority of them were sentenced at age 16 or over, but a small number were even younger. They were required to have part-time education classes. Education was provided by teachers who were employed by Durham Local Education Authority, supervised by an education officer employed by Medomsley. Prison officers remained outside the classroom while the lesson took place.⁴³⁸

Education classes were held four evenings each week and in the 1970s there was provision for a small number of trainees who were already attending the local technical college before Medomsley to continue their studies within the centre.⁴³⁹

Allegations of abuse against education staff

There are no recorded allegations made against education staff at Medomsley within the available documentation.

There is some evidence that complaints made by trainees about education staff were dealt with appropriately.

Witness H was a teacher at Medomsley from the late 1970s through to its closure in 1987. Witness H recalled an incident where they gave a trainee a ‘clip’ for being insolent. They were subsequently warned by a prison officer.

“The lad reported it and the next day I was called in front of one of the head officers and I had to explain to him. He said, ‘You don’t touch any of the lads’ and I said, ‘Fair enough.’ I was wrong, it was just temper at the time... [I got] a warning. I think it was fair enough. I shouldn’t have done it.”⁴⁴⁰

It should be noted that during the relevant period, corporal punishment was still legal in schools under specific regulatory conditions. Many schools appear to have tolerated some irregular, low-level uses of violence by staff (such as ‘a clip round the ear’ or a push) to enforce discipline, despite the lack of a clear legal sanction for this violence. This context may have influenced how education staff initially understood the boundaries of acceptable conduct. One teacher said it was acceptable to give a ‘clip round the ear’ or

⁴³⁸ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴³⁹ Medomsley Detention Centre governor’s report (1971 and 1974)

⁴⁴⁰ Operation Deerness investigation material

push a pupil who misbehaved, so if they saw a clip or a punch at Medomsley, it wouldn't have bothered them.⁴⁴¹

Education staff's knowledge of physical abuse

The classrooms were next to the gym and there was an awareness among the teaching staff that Medomsley was strict and tough.⁴⁴² There is evidence that teaching staff heard trainees being regularly shouted at by officers and that some staff disapproved at the way trainees were spoken to by prison staff.⁴⁴³

"I could hear what was going on in the gym from my classroom and I wasn't happy about that. And I did complain once about the language that I'd heard and the way the lads were being yelled at and treated. I told [education manager] about it and he said, 'Right, I'll see what I can do about it' and the PE man used to sometimes come in at breaktime and his (inaudible) was I shouldn't be working there if I couldn't take it. I said, 'I don't think anybody should have to listen to the sort of language you are using.' I said, 'If it was your wife that was in here, she wouldn't want it either.'"⁴⁴⁴

This teacher did not see anyone getting hurt or assaulted and did not see any trainees with unexplained injuries.

One teacher saw trainees with bruises but believed this to be normal wear and tear from the gym classes. They never saw violence being used against the trainees but witnessed them being shouted at and made to do bunny hops.

One commented, **"There was nothing wrong with this. They were treated firmly but not violently."**⁴⁴⁵

The same witness described how as a teacher he was classed as a civilian worker and the prison officers did not trust the civilian staff. He recalled they were kept separate and did not get told what was going on as the officers were a group and it was very much a 'them and us' situation. He believed that violence was not used in front of him because the officers would not be able to guarantee he would not go to the warden.⁴⁴⁶

Disclosures of abuse made to education staff

There are no recorded incidents where trainees have reported disclosing abuse to teachers at Medomsley within the existing records.

Some of the accounts from former teachers at Medomsley hint that the reasons why trainees would not have disclosed abuse to them would have been due to fear.

⁴⁴¹ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁴² Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁴³ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁴⁴ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁴⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁴⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

“Nothing looked or seemed extreme. I often said to my wife, wouldn’t you think of all the years I’d been there some lad would have just whispered in my ear, had a bit of confidence in me to say things aren’t right here. There was never any – whether they were so totally scared I don’t know but the lads were always, for me anyway, well behaved.”⁴⁴⁷

Summary

There is some evidence that education staff were concerned with the way trainees were treated within the gym environment. However, these concerns appear to centre around verbal abuse directed at trainees, which was overheard due to the proximity of the gym to the education classrooms. There is no evidence that physical abuse was witnessed by staff and although injuries were seen on trainees, they were not believed suspicious.

There is no evidence to indicate that education staff were aware of the sexual abuse of trainees.

Faith groups

The role of the church

Rule 48 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules dictated that the religious denomination of every trainee should be ascertained and recorded at the time of reception. That was regarded as the trainee’s denomination unless he satisfied the Board of Visitors that it should be changed.

Where a trainee was recorded as belonging to a religious denomination other than the Church of England, it was for the warden to arrange as far as possible visits by a minister of that denomination. Methodist and Roman Catholic faiths were represented at Medomsley, as well as the Church of England.

Church of England services were held at least once on every Sunday, Christmas Day and Good Friday. For other denominations, there was flexibility as to their arrangement.

The chaplain was required to interview every trainee as soon as possible after their reception, a short time before discharge and from time to time throughout their detention.⁴⁴⁸ The chaplain ran a Monday evening Padre’s hour where he saw receptions and discharges. He also introduced a visit on a Wednesday to supervise a small party of boys in cleaning the chapel and preparing for Sunday service, **“making it possible to form personal relationships with some of the boys”**.⁴⁴⁹

If trainees wanted to speak to the chaplain independently, they were advised to make an application.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁴⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁴⁹ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁵⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

Challenges

There were no records made by any of the churches at the time. There was some documentation during safeguarding meetings held after Husband's arrest in 2001, but any concerns noted were anecdotal.

Allegations of sexual abuse against clergy working at Medomsley

There is evidence that some of the clergy who were either working at Medomsley or had links to it were involved in sexually abusing trainees.

In 1977, Perpetrator C was an Anglican priest and the vicar of St Clare's Church in Newton Aycliffe. Although Perpetrator C did not have an official role at Medomsley, there is evidence that he attended and abused a victim there.

In 1977, Witness I was sentenced to a community order to be served at St Clare's Church. He was supervised there by Perpetrator C. About halfway into his sentence, Perpetrator C started engaging in grooming behaviours by play fighting with Witness I. Witness I reported that Perpetrator C went on to repeatedly sexual abuse him in the church.⁴⁵¹

On 21 December 1977, Witness I was sentenced to three months at Medomsley. He was 18 years old at the time. On his second day, Perpetrator C visited him at the detention centre and sexually touched him under the table in the visiting hall. Witness I did not disclose this abuse while at Medomsley. He disclosed the abuse to his mother on release, but she did not believe him.⁴⁵²

Durham Constabulary subsequently investigated Perpetrator C and convicted him of sexual offences against Witness I and another victim.⁴⁵³ Perpetrator C was later convicted in 2019 and again in 2022 of further historic sexual abuse while at St Clare's Church.⁴⁵⁴

On 21 April 1977, Witness J was sentenced to three months at Medomsley. He was 19 years old at the time. A week into his sentence, he was told to attend the church to see the Methodist vicar, Subject F, in whom he confided that he had previously been sexually abused.

"I had never spoken to a vicar before. I told him that my behaviour had turned to rebellion due to my past, which was why I had ended up in Medomsley. I said that I had been abused... I had never told anyone this fact. The reason I was telling him was because I thought that he was a person that I could trust and that I could confide in him as he was a vicar."

⁴⁵¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁵² Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁵³ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁵⁴ Operation Deerness investigation material

Subject F went on to sexually abuse Witness J on several occasions.⁴⁵⁵ Subject F was identified by Operation Seabrook but had died by the time of investigation.⁴⁵⁶

There is some evidence that clergy at Medomsley were aware that physical punishment was being used, but that this was accepted as part of the regime and no different to what took place in many schools.

In 1978 Witness L was appointed chaplain at Medomsley. He took the compulsory Sunday services and was asked to speak to new trainees on Monday evenings. He accepted that there was a different attitude to violence at that time and referred to being shouted at by his teachers and pushed around while at school.

“That physical punishment, that cruelty was there in those days.”⁴⁵⁷

“I never saw any boy physically – apart from pushing – hit, kicked or anything like that. Although most of what went on, went on in the secluded area which I didn’t – well I could have charged in, but felt no reason to. Don’t forget I was much younger then, much more idealistic than I am now – well probably the same.”⁴⁵⁸

Witness L accepts that with hindsight, what he witnessed was wrong. He did not believe the officers were told to behave in this way, it was something they “inherited”.

“I would definitely think it was wrong. Because, as I say, I didn’t think corporal punishment was right at school and these days I don’t think any pushing, shoving, shouting – shouting is an awful thing if you think about it.”⁴⁵⁹

Summary

There is no evidence that members of faith groups working at Medomsley had knowledge of widespread physical abuse taking place there. Societal attitudes and the continued use of corporal punishment influenced members of the clergy, who witnessed some lower-level violence taking place, to not regard this violence as abuse.

There is evidence of sexual offending by members of faith groups who were either working at Medomsley or had links to it. Some suspected perpetrators of sexual abuse linked to the clergy remain unidentified.

455 Operation Seabrook closed material

456 Operation Seabrook closed material

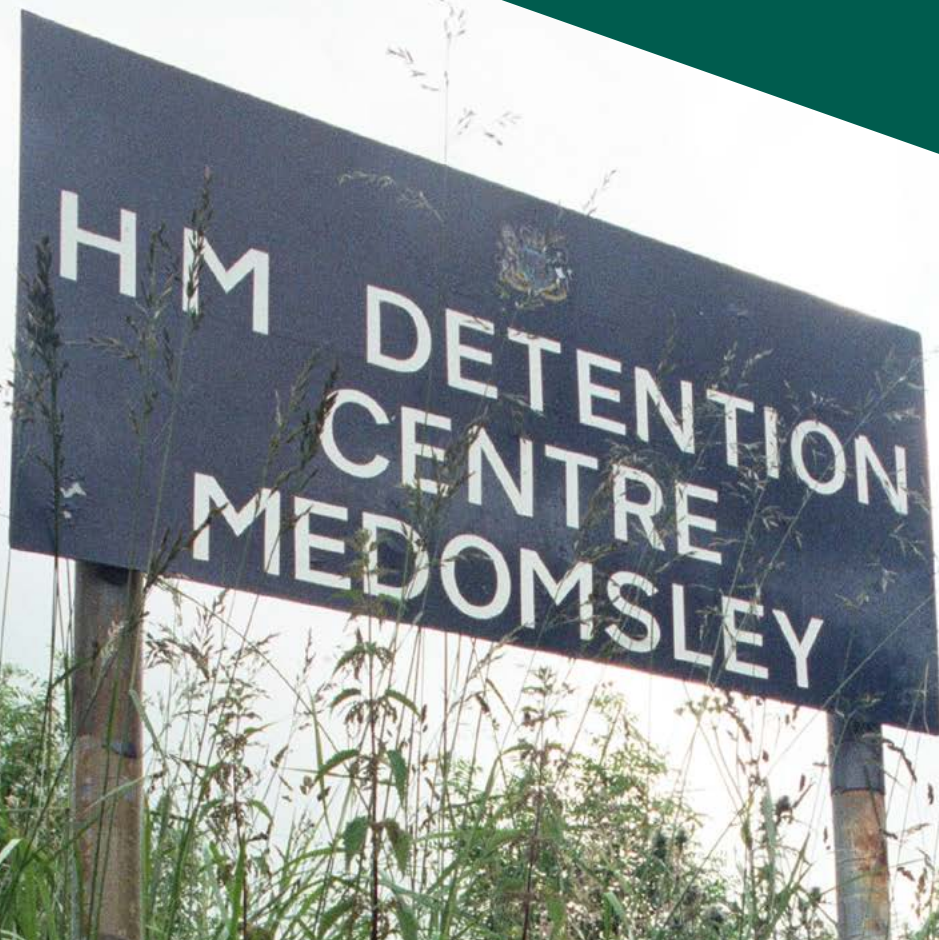
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Part 4: Failings

Why did the abuse go on for so long?



This part explores how and why the sexual and physical abuse of trainees at Medomsley went on for so long without successful intervention from someone with the authority to stop it.

The reasons are understandably complex but can be separated into key areas that had an impact on why the abuse was allowed to continue.

Objectives, aims and ethos of detention centres

The punitive regime of Medomsley

Detention centres were created in law by the Criminal Justice Act 1948. However, the legislation and associated 1952 and 1983 Detention Centre Rules did not define the detention centre regime or provide guidance on how officers should perform their duties.

The ethos of detention centres was largely punitive as they were intended to act as a deterrent. This impacted on the way the regime was perceived and implemented by staff.

Some of the uncertainty around the initial aims and objectives of detention centres reflects a wider debate which continues today regarding the overall aims of youth custody.

During the relevant period, courts had two main options for custodial disposals for young offenders: borstal training and detention centres. Borstals were rehabilitative, less militaristic than detention centres and placed an emphasis on counselling, vocational training, education and team sports.⁴⁶⁰ Detention centres had a much stricter emphasis on drill, cleaning, inspections and physical training, as well unquestioning obedience to staff.⁴⁶¹

Former staff said that from the outset they were told to deliver a short, sharp shock to trainees, explaining how some of the abuse came to take place and why it was widely accepted. The aim was to make sure they didn't reoffend – hence the 'distress-style' culture. Some noted that the regime itself was not supposed to be punitive as the punishment for trainees was their loss of liberty.⁴⁶² However, the punitive design of detention centres sent mixed messages to staff.

It is clear that the ethos of detention centres including Medomsley lacked a rehabilitative culture – instead they focused on punishment as an attempt to reduce reoffending by shocking the young men into reforming. The lack of clarity about how these establishments should operate enabled punitive regimes to become standard.

⁴⁶⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁶¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁶² Operation Seabrook closed material

The inability to build strong relationships

Detention centre sentences were short, which did not allow for trusting and safe relationships to develop between staff and trainees. This meant that trainees were less likely to disclose abuse to staff.

Added to this was a distinct cultural divide between the civilian and prison staff, which meant that civilian staff were kept away from areas of the centre and only saw trainees in a controlled environment, where they would have been less likely to report abuse. This would have impacted on whether they could have witnessed abuse taking place.

Lack of defined regime, aims and purpose

The lack of defined aims and purpose of detention centres effectively allowed each establishment to interpret the regime as it saw fit, often according to the personalities of leaders or other staff. This allowed a subjective interpretation of the regime which in turn created space for the abuse of power.⁴⁶³

Several official reviews of detention centres completed during the relevant period questioned the purpose and acknowledged the lack of definition of the regime.

In 1967, when Home Secretary Roy Jenkins asked the Advisory Council to conduct a review into the effectiveness of detention centres and to **“reassess the purposes”** which they were designed to serve, he acknowledged that the original concept of the **“short, sharp shock”** had been gradually modified by introducing **“training”** but that the **“objects and methods of this form of treatment have not been redefined”**.⁴⁶⁴

In 1968, the Penal Affairs Committee of the Religious Society of Friends report asked whether the **“judiciary”** and **“administrators”** were clear about the purpose and function of detention centres and whether they were solely for punishment or rehabilitation. They questioned the methods used and whether the **“semi military discipline”** was relevant to the trainees’ needs in their lives outside, and how trainees were selected for the regime.⁴⁶⁵

In 1967, the Advisory Council on the Penal System was asked by the government to review detention centres. In their report published in 1970, they too commented on the lack of defined aims of detention centres, stating that the phrase **“short, sharp shock”** was inappropriate given its punitive implications.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ The University of Cambridge research study was commissioned by HM Prison and Probation Service following initial discussions with Professors Lucy Delap and Louise Jackson. It was led by Dr Caroline Lanskey. See Ben Jarman, Lucy Delap, Louise Jackson, Caroline Lanskey, Hannah Marshall and Loraine Gelsthorpe (2018). *Safeguarding Children in the Secure Estate, 1960-2016*. Available online at: <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.34871>

⁴⁶⁴ The National Archives: BN 291 / 078 (1967). Review of detention centres

⁴⁶⁵ The National Archives. Detention centres – A report by a sub-committee of the Friends Penal Affairs Committee

⁴⁶⁶ Home Office (1970). Detention centres: Report of the Advisory Council on the Penal System

This acknowledgement from the government and other bodies that the regime was punitive simply highlighted the point, rather than clarify what an alternative approach should be. An establishment running a particularly punitive regime would not have felt compelled to change as it was open to subjective interpretation.

Lack of training

There was a lack of specific training for officers working at detention centres, and Medomsley in particular. There is strong evidence that the lack of specific instruction in these areas empowered staff to shape detention centres based on their own background and outlook. In the case of Medomsley, the military experience of many staff members spilled directly into their treatment of trainees.

Prison officer training was generic, meaning that all new prison officers underwent the same training regardless of what type of establishment they were posted to. The training syllabus did not include any modules on working with children and young people, or involve any special training on enforcing the detention centre regime.⁴⁶⁷

One former principal officer from Medomsley was asked about whether he was given any information in relation to the prison rules when he first joined. He stated he was not. When asked in an interview if he knew what the prison rules were at Medomsley, he said he learned on the job with no formal instructions.⁴⁶⁸

Significantly, it was not until 1983, a few years before detention centres closed, that the aims and objectives of both senior and junior detention centres were set out in a Circular Instruction.⁴⁶⁹ It also set out more specific aims around the core aspects of regime, including reception, physical education and work allocation. It described the way in which prison staff should carry out their duties, with particular focus on motivating and rehabilitating trainees and maintaining control by setting a good example, rather than by using intimidation. This came too late for those who had been subjected to a much harsher and abusive regime.

Summary of objectives, aims and ethos of detention centre findings

The lack of clearly defined aims and objectives of detention centres and the absence of direction on what the actual regime should include left both aspects open to wide interpretation. This vacuum was filled by institutions individually interpreting words such as 'sharp', 'robust', and 'tough'. Those interpretations implied permission to use physical violence as a legitimate method of training and discipline.

By the time the Home Office 1983 Circular Instruction was implemented, the detention centre regime was well entrenched and the lack of clear guidance and training from the outset meant that in practice, staff conducted themselves in accordance with their own values rather than following a clearly defined lead set by the policies of their organisation.

⁴⁶⁷ Home Office Circular Instructions 47/1964

⁴⁶⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁶⁹ Operation Deerness investigation material

The introduction of the Circular Instruction should have been an opportunity to change the culture and practice at Medomsley, but it was too late.

The lack of specific training and instruction for staff working in detention centres encouraged staff to shape the regime based on their own background and outlooks.

Societal attitudes

The accepted use of corporal punishment

Post-war societal attitudes towards young offenders affected the nature of the regime at detention centres, how trainees were treated and whether they were believed when they made allegations.

In the early 1950s when detention centres were created, most adult men had military experience and were used to strict discipline and unquestioning obedience. Many staff and wardens of detention centres had military backgrounds and some staff at Medomsley were replicating their own treatment during military training. This strong, military emphasis impacted on the relationship between staff and trainees at Medomsley, with relationships between them being antagonistic and described by one staff member as **“them against us”**.⁴⁷⁰

Not all staff who worked at Medomsley had military backgrounds. However, accounts from former officers suggest that because their training was largely on the job, less experienced officers deferred to the approach of more established staff who had been in the services, leading to them likely incorporating others’ accepted use of corporal punishment.

While corporal punishment remained legal in state schools until 1987, the Criminal Justice Act 1948 had effectively banned its use in Prison Service establishments, including detention centres, except in narrow circumstances with the approval of a magistrate. Some staff may have drawn on familiar practices and inferred from the apparent toleration of their irregular violence that their actions were legitimate and justified. But violence at Medomsley nonetheless operated outside the legal framework governing detention centres.

The fact that this use of force was so normalised as part of the regime is evidenced by the prison officer who struck a trainee across the side of the face during the reception procedures, even when people from outside agencies, such as police officers, were present.⁴⁷¹ There was an opportunity to stop this type of abuse in this case. However, we found that junior officers felt powerless to challenge the behaviour of more senior officers. One former officer described being intimidated by a colleague who was assaulting trainees.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷⁰ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁷¹ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁷² Operation Seabrook closed material

Many of the allegations of physical abuse which were reported to police by trainees after leaving Medomsley were dismissed as an acceptable part of the regime. Many former members of staff including teachers, administrative staff, clergy and other civilian workers also said they did not witness any violence, but evidence suggests this means they did not witness any violence which was above their personal threshold for what they believed to be acceptable at the time.

The attitudes towards using casual violence meant that rather than following policy, officers often used summary punishments at Medomsley and other detention centres. If trainees did something wrong at Medomsley by committing “**offences against discipline**”, these offences were supposed to be recorded in writing, reported to the warden and investigated by him or someone acting as his deputy.

Statistics in reports submitted to the Prison Department show that Medomsley had a much lower than average total number of reported offences by trainees compared with other youth detention centres during the period 1963 to 1987.⁴⁷³ The lower level of reported offences by trainees indicates it is likely that rather than reporting trainees, which was a lengthy administrative process, officers resorted to summary punishments in order to discipline trainees. Researchers who conducted early studies on the detention centre regime at Werrington House and Aylesbury Detention Centres in 1960 observed that summary methods were used because using a strictly formal approach would be unworkable.⁴⁷⁴

The continual and accepted use of corporal punishment in society affected attitudes towards acceptable levels of violence at Medomsley and therefore how trainees were treated. There may have been multiple opportunities to end the abuse, but post-war societal attitudes meant that most people were used to strict, military-style behaviours.

Society’s attitude to young offenders

Societal attitudes affected the way trainees were perceived as inherently bad, which affected their treatment at Medomsley.

Following World War II, there was an increase in youth offending and the impact this had on communities received widespread media coverage. This discourse contributed to the image of young people as reckless and undisciplined. The negative impression of young offenders was shared by some staff working in detention centres, which might explain in part why the abuse went undetected or was ignored.

In their 1965 book, ‘Young Men in Detention Centres’, Anne B Dunlop and Sarah McCabe explored the rapid spread of detention centres and whether the new forms of treatment led to desired results. They wrote about their interviews with young men and staff in Aylesbury and Werrington Detention Centres and observed:

⁴⁷³ Home Office (1963–1987). Report on the work of the Prison Department

⁴⁷⁴ Anne Dunlop and Sarah McCabe (1965). *Young Men in Detention Centres*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited

“The staff at the centres of Werrington and Aylesbury seemed to have a clear idea of the kind of offenders they might expect to receive at the centres. The typical detention centre inmate was immature, badly brought up, ill-mannered, self-pitying, stupid, resentful and bumptious – never very tough or aggressive.”⁴⁷⁵

Many of the victim accounts highlight the negative way they and their families were viewed by prison staff. Trainees were often ridiculed, humiliated or insulted about their backgrounds and their families, and were made to feel worthless.

The inherently negative way in which trainees were regarded by staff would also have impacted on whether they were believed when they did speak out about physical or sexual abuse.

Articles published in the POA magazine and circulated to members across the country suggested that trainee allegations of abuse in detention centres were made falsely and maliciously. One article published in the April 1987 edition suggests that prison officers are disadvantaged when trainees make allegations against them because they are presumed guilty from the start. This is inconsistent with material we reviewed, which strongly suggests trainees were very rarely believed when making allegations against prison officers.⁴⁷⁶ Many of the police and probation officers who interacted with trainees during and after their detention at Medomsley reflected negative and uncaring attitudes towards young offenders, which meant they did not believe victims who reported serious physical and sexual abuse.

Masculinity

Societal attitudes towards masculinity also impacted on how trainees were perceived and treated at Medomsley.

Attitudes towards masculinity were very different during the relevant period, which impacted on how trainees were supposed to behave while in detention. They were expected to be tough and unemotional, and any weaknesses such as poor health, physical impairment, low educational level or mental health concerns were usually viewed as a deficiency or flaw in the trainee.⁴⁷⁷

Evidence presented in part 2 illustrates that trainees who were perceived as ‘soft’ were deliberately targeted by some members of staff for physical abuse. These attitudes also meant that staff often dismissed their complaints of injury or physical abuse as weakness, giving the perpetrators the opportunity to target trainees.

⁴⁷⁵ Anne Dunlop and Sarah McCabe (1965). *Young Men in Detention Centres*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited

⁴⁷⁶ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁷⁷ See Ben Jarman, Lucy Delap, Louise Jackson, Caroline Lanskey, Hannah Marshall and Loraine Gelsthorpe (2018). *Safeguarding Children in the Secure Estate, 1960-2016*. Available online at: <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.34871>

Homophobia

Societal attitudes during the relevant period were often homophobic, creating significant barriers to victims disclosing sexual abuse at Medomsley, despite such abuse constituting serious criminal offences.

Trainees who were gay lived in fear of their sexuality being discovered as society did not see this as acceptable. In some cases, this attitude extended to their families.⁴⁷⁸

For the entire duration that Medomsley was operational, homosexual sex involving any male under 21 was illegal. Throughout, there was stigma around any sexual contact between males. Together, these factors created significant barriers for victims to report their abuse, because they feared being wrongly perceived as willing participants in an illegal and stigmatised activity.

Victims also feared disclosing sexual abuse as they did not want to be labelled homosexual because they had been sexually assaulted by another man.⁴⁷⁹

It is likely that during the relevant period, institutionalised homophobia in the Prison Service affected how trainees who worked in the kitchen were viewed and treated. They were referred to as “nancy boys” or “gay fairies”, cementing the use of homophobic labels.⁴⁸⁰

Ignorance, intolerance and the stigma associated with homosexuality prevented sexual abuse being properly recognised at Medomsley. Evidence suggests that even where trainees were aware that their fellow trainees were being sexually abused at Medomsley, they assumed that the victims were homosexual and therefore willing participants.⁴⁸¹

Summary of societal attitudes findings

Post-war societal attitudes towards young offenders impacted both on how trainees were viewed and treated by staff at Medomsley. They also heavily influenced how the regime was interpreted and implemented by staff.

Attitudes towards corporal punishment and young offenders allowed the routine use of casual violence and intimidation to be accepted by many staff. This created a culture in which regular rule breaking by staff went unchallenged. This was evident to all trainees, meaning the likelihood of them reporting more serious violence or sexual abuse was severely diminished, as were the chances of them being believed when they did so.

Attitudes towards masculinity and homosexuality also impacted on how sexual abuse was perceived, and this reduced the ability of victims to be able to disclose abuse.

⁴⁷⁸ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁷⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁸⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁸¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

Lack of governance and oversight

Detention centre policy and guidance did exist to provide some checks and balances, but it is clear that trainees' welfare and entitlements were often ignored or dismissed by those at a high level.

Denied rights

There was explicit welfare provision for trainees in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules that contained a section on physical welfare, setting out their entitlements to medical services, hygiene, food and clothing. There was also a section on religion and welfare which explained trainee entitlements to religious practice, social visits and letters, access to a library, and after-care (probation) support. The presence of these entitlements demonstrates that they were viewed as indispensable rights and that all prison officers were expected to enforce them as a key part of their role.

However, in practice, as victim accounts in part 2 demonstrate, trainee rights were often disregarded. In some instances, we found trainees were given poor medical care which resulted in further medical complications.

Victims were often denied the right to send letters and see their families, showing that staff often dismissed the policies and guidance in place. The Detention Centre Rules should have been important guidance to follow, but it seemed to be culturally ignored.

Barriers to complaining

The obvious flaws in the complaints process at Medomsley created inherent barriers to reporting trainee allegations and allowed prison staff to deliberately fail to escalate complaints.

Trainees firstly received a formal warning before they were able to submit an official complaint. This undoubtedly made them fearful that if their complaint was not upheld, it could result in them losing remission and spending longer in Medomsley. This would have been a significant disincentive for many trainees given the harshness of the regime.

Trainees also needed to be able to read and write to make a complaint, and official figures from the period show that literacy levels were poor. In 1973, psychologists conducted a study at Medomsley and assessed all 391 trainees who were received at Medomsley that year to check their eligibility for inclusion in the study. They excluded 63 individuals who had a reading age below 10, equivalent to approximately 16% of the population.⁴⁸²

Trainees often had no choice but to complain to the very officers they were making allegations about. This meant that many trainees did not complain through fear of the consequences. During the trial of Husband in 2003, the prosecution counsel noted that the system was not designed to encourage people to complain.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸² B. J. McGurk, A. W. McEwan and F. Graham (1981). *Personality Types and Recidivism Among Young Delinquents*

⁴⁸³ Operation Deerness investigation material

As prison staff were the gatekeepers for complaints from trainees, there was an obvious risk that they could obstruct the process by persuading or intimidating trainees not to complain or by losing documentation or stalling complaints. In a detention centre like Medomsley where trainees often served short sentences, stalling complaints would be effective in preventing an investigation taking place. If prison staff did not believe the allegation that the trainee was making, they did not record it as a complaint. This failure to act was particularly significant in terms of the serious allegations of sexual abuse.

The complaints procedure appears to have been viewed as an adversarial process of trainees versus prison officers rather than as a formal way for trainees to raise concerns about their treatment or conditions. This view appears to have extended to other staff at Medomsley who were not prison officers but were part of the regime. One trainee said that when he told a member of staff that he wished to complain, he was told that if he “lost it” then he would spend extra time in Medomsley.⁴⁸⁴

Trainees were denied family visits often to prevent them from complaining. In some cases, they were either threatened not to speak to, or denied access to, the Board of Visitors, cutting off a potential avenue for raising a complaint.

It is clear that there were no opportunities for families to stop the abuse. The only means of communication for trainees with their families was by letter or in-person visits as they were not allowed phone calls. Their letters were censored by prison staff, so when trainees complained of mistreatment in letters written to relatives, these letters were often destroyed before they could be sent, drastically reducing the opportunities for them to report mistreatment.⁴⁸⁵ There was also no mechanism for trainees to submit official complaints via third parties, nor could third parties complain officially on their behalf. There is evidence that families of victims often tried to make complaints about ill treatment either verbally in person or in writing to the warden, but the Medomsley leadership took no action as a result of these complaints.⁴⁸⁶

In situations where trainees tried to raise a complaint with a visiting third party such as a family member or legal advisor, officers were instructed to intervene and state that the proper procedure needed to be followed. If necessary, they could terminate a visit between the trainee and a third party. Trainees were threatened that their visits would be terminated if they spoke out, and their families lied to about why their visits were cancelled.

Some prison officers sought to protect trainees from retribution by persuading them not to make an official complaint. This suggests that staff did not have confidence in the complaints process to address allegations made by trainees.

Practical considerations may have also affected a trainee’s ability to complain. There is evidence from one former staff member that the governor’s applications from trainees

⁴⁸⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁸⁵ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁴⁸⁶ Operation Seabrook closed material

were invited every weekday morning. But as he noted, because the kitchen trainees began their working day earlier than the other trainees, they had already left by this point and therefore would not have been able to submit an application.⁴⁸⁷

Existing documentation indicates that on the rare occasions where complaints were investigated, the outcome was always the same – the allegations were deemed to be unfounded.

The Medomsley annual reports did not reveal any complaints from trainees being recorded or acted on. In the rare occasions where documented complaints were made, these appear to have been withdrawn by trainees. Personnel files for prison officers at Medomsley contained reference to issues between individual members of staff, but nothing which outlined any complaint made against an officer by a trainee. The surviving Medomsley governor's daily journal from 1983 to 1987, contains one entry in September 1984 regarding a trainee who made an application to see the warden and made an allegation against an officer. There is no further detail regarding what the allegation related to. The person completing the entry states that the trainee made a written statement which he later withdrew.⁴⁸⁸

The process for investigating complaints at detention centres was flawed because of the lack of independence of those investigating (Board of Visitors). Added to this, the prevailing attitudes towards young offenders meant that they and their families were not believed when they made allegations.

Wider oversight mechanisms

Wider oversight into the ethical operational running of detention centres should have been provided by the Home Office. By 1967, they had received several complaints regarding ill treatment of trainees at Medomsley and were aware of allegations of brutality at other detention centres such as Buckley Hall.

Concerns raised by official reviews of detention centres that the reception procedures were **“chilling, impersonal and humiliating”**, that boys who were unsuitable were being sent to detention centres, and that the regime could afford to be less punitive were not addressed through changes in policy or legislation.⁴⁸⁹

The police had a duty to uphold and enforce the law while interacting with staff and trainees from Medomsley. Some police officers witnessed assaults while transporting trainees to Medomsley which they did not challenge, likely because of those same prevailing societal attitudes which legitimised casual violence. Those police officers who received disclosures of abuse from trainees failed to discharge their duties to report and investigate crimes, which had a significant impact on serious physical and sexual abuse continuing.

⁴⁸⁷ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁴⁸⁸ Medomsley governor's journal, 26 August 1983 to 30 June 1987

⁴⁸⁹ Operation Seabrook closed material

There was also clearly a lack of robust and independent oversight at Medomsley. Evidence suggests that visits by the deputy regional director to Medomsley were infrequent and this management was not intrusive or focused on trainee welfare. Within the governor's journal 1983 to 1987, there was only one entry found relating to a visit by the deputy regional director, which was in November 1984.⁴⁹⁰

Inspections conducted before the creation of HM Inspectorate of Prisons in 1982 were carried out internally by the Prison Service by paid prison inspectors. Reports from this internal managerial body were not published, and these inspections focused on how efficiently the establishment ran rather than how staff treated trainees. The mis-focus of these inspections meant that staff at Medomsley were able to carry on with the abuse, undetected.⁴⁹¹

Aside from HM Inspectorate of Prisons, the Board of Visitors was the only body providing external oversight of trainees' welfare at Medomsley. However, in practice, their oversight lacked independence and was ineffective for several reasons. The board could not be described as truly independent. In theory, they had free access to the centre at any time and could hear complaints or requests by trainees which were made to them. However, the board was escorted around the centre by prison staff, which would have impacted on trainees' ability to speak without fear of prison staff overhearing their complaints. One witness said that board members were allowed to draw keys, meaning they could walk freely throughout the centre without an escort, but they always chose to walk around with a uniformed prison officer.⁴⁹²

There is also evidence that some members were not active during their visits to the centre. One witness recalled how the board would visit each week and simply eat cake and drink tea in the warden's office without walking around and inspecting the centre.⁴⁹³

The board was comprised largely of local magistrates who would have been responsible for sending trainees to Medomsley in the first place. They often appeared more interested in the punitive side of a custodial sentence, than the welfare of the trainees. In 1986, the warden met with the board because they wanted to share their disapproval that some trainees had been allowed out of Medomsley to camp and hike.⁴⁹⁴ There is evidence that several members socialised with both the warden, Husband and other members of staff, and this would have affected how they were viewed by trainees.⁴⁹⁵

490 Medomsley governor's journal, 26 August 1983 to 30 June 1987

491 See Ben Jarman, Lucy Delap, Louise Jackson, Caroline Lanskey, Hannah Marshall and Loraine Gelsthorpe (2018). *Safeguarding Children in the Secure Estate, 1960-2016*. Available online at: <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.34871>

492 Operation Deerness investigation material

493 Operation Deerness investigation material

494 Medomsley governor's journal, 26 August 1983 to 30 June 1987

495 Operation Seabrook closed material

This lack of independence was not unique to Medomsley. During 1971 an inquiry into physical abuse at New Hall Detention Centre was conducted by two members of the Board of Visitors for New Hall, along with the chairman of another board.

The mother of the two trainees referred to in part 3 wrote to the Home Office questioning how independent this inquiry was, stating that the accused prison officers had appointed solicitors who were allowed to question her sons at length. In her letter she expressed the feeling that the intention of the inquiry was to exonerate the staff at New Hall.⁴⁹⁶ The Home Office maintained that the inquiry was independent on the basis that all three investigating members of the Board of Visitors were also magistrates, and therefore assumed to be impartial. However, there is evidence that the board demonstrated negative attitudes towards the complainants and their families. The inquiry concluded that the allegations made by the two brothers were malicious, and that their mother was responsible for encouraging them to complain due to her own “vindictive attitudes towards those in authority”. The chairman of the inquiry went as far as to say that the boys and their mother, as well as BBC Radio Teesside which first exposed the allegations, were deserving of censure for causing the accused officers at New Hall undue stress.⁴⁹⁷

This characterisation of the mother as vindictive is at odds with the motivation she expressed in her letter to the Home Office. Her letter suggests that she was not seeking any vindication for the treatment of her children but rather hoping to protect future trainees from harm. This indicates that the inquiry board made negative assumptions about mother and used these assumptions to reach their conclusion that the allegations were malicious.

On 31 May 1967, the Daily Mirror reported on complaints of brutality at Buckley Hall. The deputy warden was reported to have refused to conduct an investigation into allegations of abuse against his officers, which is a surprising stance given that the allegations were being reported in the national press. This decision was overturned by the Home Office who reportedly stated they were concerned about the allegations. However, the allegations were investigated by the Board of Visitors who determined that they were unfounded.⁴⁹⁸

The issue of effective and independent oversight of prisons, borstals and detention centres was not addressed adequately by the government until the creation of HM Inspectorate of Prisons in 1981. Boards of Visitors were in existence at that point but were changed in statute in 2007 to become the Independent Monitoring Boards, which are more functionally robust than the Boards of Visitors.

⁴⁹⁶ The National Archives: HO 391/83 (1971). Inquiry: allegations of ill treatment at New Hall Detention Centre, Wakefield, West Yorkshire by two former inmates, made to BBC Radio Teesside. Board of Visitors concluded that complaints not justifiable

⁴⁹⁷ The National Archives: HO 391/83 (1971). Inquiry: allegations of ill treatment at New Hall Detention Centre, Wakefield, West Yorkshire by two former inmates, made to BBC Radio Teesside. Board of Visitors concluded that complaints not justifiable

⁴⁹⁸ Home Office (1968). Report on the work of the prison department 1967

For example, the May report chaired by Mr Justice May, produced in 1978 in response to rising tensions and changes in the Prison Service, acknowledged that no inspectorate which sat within the Home Office could be truly independent from it but nonetheless found this to be the best option for providing regular prison inspections and presenting findings to the government.⁴⁹⁹ They also found that the Board of Visitors was effective and should continue to provide both an oversight mechanism and an adjudication service to prisons, despite the apparent contradiction between the two functions and the related criticism coming from organisations including the Howard League and NACRO.

Response to deaths at Medomsley

There was a lack of response by the Prison Service and Home Office into the deaths of trainees Ian Angus Shackleton and David Caldwell, which occurred within the space of four months at Medomsley between 1981 and 1982 respectively. Their deaths did not lead to any official review of policies and practices regarding the provision of emergency healthcare in detention centres by the Prison Service or Home Office.

Both these young men had treatable conditions that deteriorated to a critical level but arguably their deaths were avoidable. In both cases there was inadequate medical provision at Medomsley to deal with their acute medical conditions and both young men should have been admitted to hospital sooner than they were.

When Shackleton's condition deteriorated, there was inadequate medical testing to establish whether he was hypoglycaemic or hyperglycaemic and assumptions were made by staff. There is evidence from former staff that they were concerned about the unresponsiveness of Shackleton and contacted the local doctor on at least three occasions. However, the local doctor refused to attend the centre.⁵⁰⁰

The family of Caldwell gave evidence during the inquest into his death that he had visible injuries a fortnight before his death which he alleged were caused by staff. Rather than this being investigated independently, these allegations were investigated in a limited way by the warden.

He stated in a report to the regional deputy director that while interviewing trainees and staff, he **“tried to give the impression that both staff and inmates were free to say what they wanted without restraint”**. He went on to say that he did not ask specifically whether Caldwell had been assaulted in any way as he did not feel it **“proper to do so”**, but did ask whether there **was “anything unusual, any fooling about or fighting”**. The warden questioned why the family had not made these allegations at the time of their visit.⁵⁰¹

There is also no evidence that there was any internal review at Medomsley of their procedures to deal with medical emergencies to address any shortfalls in training or reflect on the decisions made at the time. Given the age of the victims and the proximity

⁴⁹⁹ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁵⁰⁰ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁵⁰¹ Operation Seabrook closed material

of their deaths, it would be reasonable to expect some level of scrutiny from the Prison Service and interaction with local health services to prevent future deaths.

Summary of the lack of governance and oversight findings

There was a lack of focus on trainee welfare at Medomsley and other detention centres despite trainee rights and entitlements being set in the 1952 and 1983 Detention Centre Rules.

The complaints system was inherently flawed as it placed too much power in the hands of prison staff and did not function as a safeguard for trainees. Despite complaints about physical abuse being received by the Home Office, this did not prompt an official review into whether the existing independent oversight at detention centres was truly effective at highlighting abuse.

The Board of Visitors was not always impartial when conducting investigations into abuse.

There was no in-depth review by the leadership of Medomsley or any strategic reaction by the Prison Service hierarchy into serious incidents of harm and the deaths of Shackleton and Caldwell. Their deaths did not lead to any official review of policies and practices regarding the provision of emergency healthcare, allowing the opportunity for further deaths to occur.

Lack of leadership

Poor sharing of guidance

There was an absence of intrusive and active leadership at Medomsley which contributed to the perpetration of physical and sexual abuse.

Changes in practice and policy were communicated to detention centres through Circular Instructions and standing orders sent by head office directly to the wardens of each establishment. It was the responsibility of the warden to update staff on any relevant changes. There were numerous Circular Instructions and standing orders in place, so numerous that outside the Home Office it was difficult to establish how many were in effect at any given time.⁵⁰²

There is strong evidence that Circular Instructions were very rarely seen firsthand by operational staff. Rather, their contents were shared verbally during meetings. This casual method for sharing guidance with staff was insufficient to ensure good practice and there were no robust methods of accountability by the warden to ensure that staff were even hearing the updates, or that they were enacting them. One former officer said he couldn't remember anything ever being shared with staff.⁵⁰³

The failure to ensure that changes to policy and practice were communicated effectively to staff meant there was no opportunity to ensure good practice across the estate. If

502 Operation Deerness investigation material

503 Operation Deerness investigation material

this had been done properly and effectively, it might have led to better outcomes for the trainees.

Failure of leadership

It is evident that the leadership at Medomsley consistently failed to set standards for behaviour as set out in the Detention Centre Rules. There is evidence of consistently poor working practices by staff, frequent rule breaking, poor standards of behaviour, and a pervasive culture of violence which ran throughout the detention centre and was passed down to successive generations of staff. Intimidation was routinely used by staff at Medomsley, which partly explains why the abuse was able to go on for so long.

When Perpetrator B was interviewed by police regarding numerous allegations of physical assaults against him, he said no one had told him he was doing anything wrong.⁵⁰⁴

The leadership at Medomsley failed to set and ensure the required standards were met. If the warden had set the appropriate standards to his staff, this might have prevented abuse from occurring.

The unnecessary use of force

Rule 25 in the 1952 Detention Centre Rules prohibited the use of unnecessary force on trainees and stated that no officer should deliberately act in a manner calculated to provoke a trainee. However, over 60% of the accounts we reviewed contained testimonies of trainees being subjected to threats, assaults or both during the reception procedures.

The documented instances of wardens providing any clear leadership, especially in relation to the use of force towards trainees, is limited to only one example from 1965 where a deputy warden gave a member of staff a warning about hitting a trainee. Witness P, a former warden, states he made it clear that force was not to be used unless a member of staff was being assaulted. However, evidence shows that unnecessary force was used consistently against trainees.⁵⁰⁵

The limited evidence of a warden being anti-force created a low-standards environment in which his staff felt that using force was justified and acceptable.

Lack of governance in setting standards

Several reported accounts from victims and at least one former member of staff demonstrate that in several cases, a warden witnessed physical abuse by staff at the centre and did not intervene or take any action to address what was going on.

In the case of at least one former warden, their own behaviour set a poor standard to other officers. Although a warden could legitimately delegate tasks to the chief or the principal officers, anecdotal evidence suggests that much of the daily operational running of the centre was delegated to the chief officer.

⁵⁰⁴ Operation Seabrook closed material

⁵⁰⁵ Operation Deerness investigation material

There is evidence that some supervisors also displayed an unprofessional approach to leadership. Rather than setting clear standards about the use of force, staff would have received mixed messages from one supervisor who said that violence could be used, as long as it was out of his sight.⁵⁰⁶

Other examples of poor working culture encountered at Medomsley which were not challenged by senior leaders included drinking on duty, using trainees for personal gain, abuse of sickness procedures and abuse of overtime payments. Some of these issues did not directly affect the perpetration of abuse at Medomsley, but they often aggravated it and ultimately contributed to a culture of rule breaking where staff demonstrated a lack of professionalism and integrity.

Trainees were removed from Medomsley by Husband, who would take them to serve refreshments at theatrical productions which would often take place on a Saturday evening. No checks were ever done to confirm whether there was a theatrical production at those times.⁵⁰⁷

There was a definitive lack of scrutiny around both checking the reasons for trainees being removed and why they returned smelling of alcohol and cigarettes, which they were not allowed to have. This highlights another example of where a lack of leadership at Medomsley allowed unacceptable behaviour to continue.

These unprofessional behaviours were against the Code of Discipline and the lack of standards created a poor culture among officers with a lack of integrity and respect for trainees. The warden witnessed physical abuse but chose to ignore it. Other staff were content for abuse to happen as long as it took place out of their sight. If the warden, the most senior member of staff, or other senior leaders did not stop the abuse, this explains how the perpetrators had the opportunity to carry on for so long. It set the precedent that it was justified and gave explicit and tacit approval for unacceptable behaviour.

Lack of professionalism

Lunchtime drinking on duty was an accepted behaviour at Medomsley. Staff would call in sick after consuming too much alcohol or would be sent home by senior staff when intoxicated after drinking at lunchtime.⁵⁰⁸

If staff returned to the detention centre intoxicated, they would have been unable to carry out their duties effectively. Senior staff's failure to stop officers drinking on duty explains how staff were able to get away with this for such a long period.

The 1952 and 1983 Detention Centre Rules prohibited the use of trainees for personal gain. There is evidence that trainees were used for gardening, DIY and even babysitting which involved them being taken off-site. In some cases, this use of trainee labour was sanctioned by supervisors and senior officers.

506 Operation Seabrook closed material

507 Operation Seabrook closed material

508 Operation Deerness investigation material

Staff would be absent from the detention centre when they should have been working for other reasons. One former prison officer described how one warden would go to play golf during work hours.⁵⁰⁹

There is also evidence that many wardens delegated tasks or failed to pay close enough attention to areas such as reception and sick trainees. Even where wardens did inspect the centre, that inspection could not be described as intrusive or unannounced and was performed to a superficial level. We found that staff operated an early warning system which at least one former warden, Witness P, was aware of, where prison staff alerted each other to the impending visit by a warden by using the phone to ring three times and then ring off.⁵¹⁰ The warden was supposed to complete unannounced night visit inspections twice a month, but a former warden acknowledged that due to him having to contact staff at the gate to let him in, these unannounced night visits were in effect announced visits.

The lack of professionalism by the warden, senior leaders and his staff created a culture where it was acceptable to openly flout the rules.

Lack of professional curiosity by the warden

The lack of intrusiveness by the wardens extended to visiting and inspecting staff areas such as the flat above the kitchen, used almost exclusively by Husband to sexually abuse trainees.

Witness P, a former warden, told us he never visited the flat during his tenure as warden. He accepted that he should have been more intrusive in inspecting the kitchen area.⁵¹¹ Another former warden acknowledged that it was not common practice to search the kitchen, suggesting that this was a resourcing issue because Medomsley was a small establishment with few staff.⁵¹²

The lack of intrusiveness led to a failure to identify that abusive behaviour was consistently being used against trainees. This is especially evident in relation to the reception procedures, even though it was an area that had been singled out in the 1970 Advisory Council report. The report recommended that it merited **“particular attention by the warden, who can do much by attending on suitable occasions and by providing appropriate training for the staff concerned”**.⁵¹³

There is further evidence that at least one warden had concerns about the behaviour of his staff during the reception procedures, but these concerns did not translate into active management or positive change. Witness P described attending reception to watch the experience of trainees arriving at the centre, reflecting that even though the process appeared to have been **“toned down”** when he went, he asked for a review of

509 Operation Deerness investigation material

510 Operation Deerness investigation material and Operation Seabrook closed material

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513 Operation Seabrook closed material

the process. It is unclear if an internal review of reception procedures took place as there is no evidence of any change in the behaviour of reception staff over the relevant period. The awareness on Witness P's part that what he was witnessing had been **"toned down"** for his benefit should have led him to question further what the less toned-down version of the regime looked like.⁵¹⁴

Some staff, especially those involved in physical training, clearly had a well-known reputation at Medomsley among staff for being strict, but this was not explored further by wardens. One former officer reflected on a former physical training officer and his own lack of professional curiosity about how this officer conducted himself in the gym, acknowledging he should have been more suspicious of his actions.⁵¹⁵

Successive wardens at Medomsley consistently displayed a lack of professional curiosity into several issues, including the low number of complaints being made by trainees, trainees being taken out of Medomsley, serious injuries to trainees and the deaths of two trainees. The consistently low number of complaints being reported by trainees does not appear to have been questioned and it should have raised concerns that trainees had to go to some length to see the warden.

Witness P described two occasions when he heard complaints from trainees because they had given a false reason for wanting to see him. Therefore, staff had been unable to gatekeep the complaints from being heard. Witness P acknowledged that it was rare to receive complaints about staff behaviour but did not appear to have considered at the time that this masked something more sinister.⁵¹⁶

Another former warden, Witness N, acknowledged that senior leaders were not proactively checking that abuse was not taking place.⁵¹⁷

None of the wardens appeared to question how injuries so serious the trainees required hospital could be caused by them doing regular physical education. There was a general acceptance that the accounts provided by prison staff were truthful and wardens did not apparently seek to corroborate accounts by speaking with trainees.

Neither of the deaths of Shackleton and Caldwell resulted in any wider investigation by the warden or the regional director into the way trainees with medical conditions were managed in order to prevent future incidents, and there was no review of working practices.

Professional curiosity seemed to be something wardens at Medomsley lacked, which calls into question how this spanned the tenures of several wardens. They were unmotivated to dig deeper and ask the important questions they seem to have avoided.

⁵¹⁴ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁵¹⁵ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁵¹⁶ Operation Deerness investigation material

⁵¹⁷ Operation Seabrook closed material

Isolated leadership posts

The isolated position of the warden left them without real power over their staff and impacted on their ability to positively influence behaviour and create real change. It meant they were often not prepared to challenge the status quo which would inevitably involve some form of confrontation, and it created a disconnect between them and their staff.

The warden did not have the same knowledge of work-related issues as other officers, who all belonged to the POA. The POA was a strong presence at Medomsley and in the Prison Service generally, and there was a real need to compromise with them to ensure the smooth running of the centre. Operationally, this created a significant barrier between the warden and the rest of his staff.

It also made the warden reliant on officers to intervene in work-related disputes. One former officer described being asked by the warden to intervene in his POA capacity in a dispute between the warden and another officer who was being too rigid.⁵¹⁸

Summary of lack of leadership findings

Supervisors and senior leaders at Medomsley failed to set and communicate clear standards of behaviour to staff, which led to poor working practices becoming embedded among a culture of abuse and rule breaking.

There was a failure to identify abuse at Medomsley due to a lack of active and intrusive leadership and professional curiosity, enabling it to carry on for so long. This failure was amplified by the isolated position of the warden which created a disconnect between them and the rest of the staff for the duration of their time at Medomsley.

The failure of senior leaders to ensure policies were being followed gave sexual predators like Husband a disproportionate amount of space to create power and influence over staff and trainees.

Imbalance of power

Medomsley, by nature, was a closed institution and that meant staff had considerable power over trainees.

There was a further inherent risk with detention centres due to the fact that there was no screening process for boys who were sent to them. Social enquiry reports which provided sentencers with information about a young person were not mandatory during the relevant period. This meant that highly vulnerable boys and young men were sent to detention centres where they would be particularly at risk of abuse, both from trainees and staff.

Young offenders sentenced to borstal training were initially held at borstal allocation centres where they were assessed before being sent to those establishments. There is evidence from a study of 302 boys who were sent to senior detention centres between

⁵¹⁸ Operation Deerness investigation material

1960 and 1962 that almost a fifth were not suitable for the regime due to significant physical or psychological issues.⁵¹⁹

One witness who was previously deemed unsuitable for a detention centre due to their emotional difficulties was sent to Medomsley, where he was subjected to physical and sexual abuse.⁵²⁰

Prison officers abused their power by threatening trainees with loss of remission. This was a significant threat and was used by abusers such as Husband to ensure the compliance of their victims. This gave victims little opportunity to report the abuse as it was their perception that they would likely be punished and kept at Medomsley for longer.

Officers were supposed to report offences by trainees in writing to the warden. Offences against discipline were in effect any behaviour which was deemed to **“offend against good order and discipline of the centre”**. In practice this subjective test meant anything a prison officer perceived as a breach of discipline, no matter how trivial, could render a trainee liable to punishment, potentially meaning loss of their remission and having to stay at Medomsley for a longer period.

The illegitimate power of Husband

Widespread sexual abuse occurred at Medomsley because Husband wielded a significant amount of power over both trainees and junior and senior staff.

Husband was able to combine different types of power which ultimately allowed him to commit abuse and ensure that no one spoke out. He used his position as a prison officer to demand compliance and obedience from trainees. His catering role gave him access to contraband that he could use to groom victims. He was perceived as having high levels of skill and knowledge which made him appear more trustworthy and authoritative. He displayed charisma and charm, fostering feelings of connection with victims and staff. He also threatened and punished both staff and trainees for non-compliance, often using physical violence.⁵²¹

Husband was able to influence and exude power over colleagues and successive wardens which facilitated his actions going unchallenged. He used his power and influence in several ways.

On one hand, he used his power to support colleagues. For example, as branch secretary for the POA, he acted as a voice for Medomsley staff and often supported them in challenging management decisions.⁵²²

519 Charlotte Banks (1966). Boys in Detention Centres. Available online from page 173: <https://gwern.net/doc/psychology/1966-banks-studiesinpsychology.pdf>

520 Operation Deerness investigation material and Operation Seabrook closed material

521 In the 1950s, social psychologists John French and Betram Raven created an academic model called the Bases of Power, which explains how individuals are able to exert power and influence over others. They identified five ‘bases’ or types of power: legitimate power, reward power, expert power, referent power, and coercive power.

522 Operation Seabrook closed material

On the other hand, Husband exerted his power against colleagues by refusing to serve officers food, complaining when rules were broken, trying to influence staff promotion and even writing to one prison officer to deter him from taking up a post at Medomsley as a caterer.⁵²³ During one incident in 1978, Husband complained to the warden that night duty officers were using the kitchen trainees to make food at night which was unsafe. The governor issued an order as a result.⁵²⁴ One former prison officer described how he would hear Husband discussing with the area manager which staff were suitable for promotion and into which posts.⁵²⁵

Husband presented himself as someone with the power to influence staff and coerce them into thinking he was important. This undermined the ability of people to report his abuse and be believed.

Husband's status as the POA branch secretary and national editor of Catering News gave him both credibility and status in the eyes of wardens. A visiting magistrate described how Husband was always stamping his authority. She described that the kitchen was very much his domain, a place where he would shout at the trainees and order them about, and it appeared to her that the warden allowed him to do this.⁵²⁶

This lack of challenge by successive wardens meant that less senior officers perceived that Husband was special and that his actions were sanctioned by the warden. This in turn meant they were less likely to report concerns about him to the warden.

Husband's ability to use different types of power to influence staff from the warden downwards allowed him to bypass or ignore safeguards and security measures. For example, he was allowed to select his own trainees to work in the kitchen.

Anecdotal evidence from former staff, as well as a review of numerous victim accounts, support that Husband chose more vulnerable trainees for the kitchen. This was not challenged by other staff or the warden.

These trainees were more likely to be picked on by bigger, stronger trainees. As they were in effect segregated from the rest of the population, this conflict between stronger and weaker trainees was avoided, which made life easier for prison staff.

Homophobic attitudes also meant that it was preferable for some staff that someone else had responsibility for these trainees, some of whom were described as gay or effeminate.

There is also evidence that Husband had access to trainee records which would have allowed him to target the most vulnerable trainees for abuse, including those who had already been abused in care.⁵²⁷

523 Operation Seabrook closed material and Operation Deerness investigation material

524 Operation Seabrook closed material

525 Operation Deerness investigation material

526 Operation Seabrook closed material

527 Operation Deerness investigation material

Preventing the searching of kitchen areas

There is strong evidence that the kitchen and flat above it were not searched as regularly as they should have been under the policy contained in the Security Manual.⁵²⁸ This stated that all workshop areas should be searched fortnightly and reports of these searches should be countersigned by the chief officer or principal officer and submitted to the warden. Former officers report that they were not allowed to search the kitchens.⁵²⁹

The practice of not searching the kitchen was endorsed by several wardens and this stance did not appear to change over the relevant period.

This led to a perception by staff that both Husband and his kitchen were off-limits, which enabled Husband to create an autonomous and restricted domain where he and Johnston had complete power to abuse freely.

The practice of not searching also extended to the flat above the kitchen. One former member of staff described how this flat became Husband's area which was locked and staff were not instructed to search it.⁵³⁰

This stance was not challenged by any of the wardens. In fact, many of the accounts illustrate that the leadership appeared to support it. This further strengthened the message to staff that Husband, despite being of a lower rank, was effectively self-managing and was not going to be subjected to any form of management or scrutiny by senior leaders.

Removing trainees from the centre without proper authority

There is strong evidence that Husband frequently breached policy by removing trainees from the centre without any authority. Although this was raised on some occasions with the leadership, it was not challenged.

It is apparent that some officers may have spoken to Husband about taking trainees out of the centre without permission, but Husband was able to overcome this with apparent ease.

Other accounts suggest that this issue was raised with the warden but that the warden did not want to be involved. This was a clear failure of leadership which would have significant consequences for victims of abuse by Husband.

Husband physically intimidated trainees and staff so they were less likely to confront him. One former trainee talked of the behaviour of Husband in physically removing a trainee from recreation, something which it appears went unchallenged by staff, and described

528 The Security Manual did not specifically mention the kitchen but given this was a work area it is reasonable to conclude that the guidance applied to the kitchen area.

529 Operation Deerness investigation material

530 Operation Seabrook closed material

him as unstoppable.⁵³¹ One former officer also acknowledged Husband's intimidating character describing him as **"very strong, highly intelligent and articulate"**.⁵³²

In one case, fear of Husband was so great that it prevented one member of staff from speaking out even though this staff member had received information directly from trainees that Husband had been committing sexual acts with other trainees.⁵³³

The illegitimate power of Johnston

Just under a third of the people whose sexual allegations we reviewed were abused by both Johnston and Husband together. Johnston used his hierarchy, status and rank to inflict violent attacks on victims. He had the support and allyship of Husband, and due to his lack of social relationships with other staff, he would have felt empowered and safe in inflicting abuse.

Johnston was able to take advantage of the privileges that came with being a storeman. He had access to all of the centre which meant he could frequent the kitchen and abuse victims there with Husband. He was able to take advantage of trainees who were employed in the storerooms as they were quiet and essentially part of his domain.

He exerted power by making excuses to talk to trainees before subjecting them to assault or by bribing and threatening them.

Summary of the imbalance of power findings

The inherent power imbalance at Medomsley between staff and trainees meant that trainees could be threatened with loss of remission, be reported for minor or false violations and have their complaints disregarded. This removed all opportunity for them to report or stop the abuse from occurring.

The influence and power that Husband commanded over other staff, including wardens, allowed sexual abuse to occur and to continue unchallenged, because policies and safeguards were not followed and staff were not empowered to speak out, through fear or a belief that Husband had the backing of senior leaders.

There can be no dispute that Husband was a devious and highly manipulative offender, capable of employing a variety of techniques to either groom or intimidate both staff and trainees. Husband and Johnston's prolific offending took place against a lack of intrusive leadership and a cultural environment where rule breaking was the norm and an imbalance of power was allowed to develop.

531 Operation Seabrook closed material

532 Operation Seabrook closed material

533 Operation Halter closed material

Closing comments

Many victims have voiced to us and stated in their accounts given to Operation Seabrook that everybody at Medomsley knew about the sexual abuse committed by Husband. Our investigation shows that many staff at Medomsley did either know or suspect that sexual abuse of trainees was taking place. This has understandably left victims angry about why nobody did anything to stop the abuse of young trainees, some of whom were children.

This anger has been compounded due to the fact that victims have been unable to achieve justice by seeing Husband or Johnston held fully accountable or other perpetrators convicted, either due to the public interest issue regarding Husband or because other perpetrators had died or were too ill to be prosecuted.

Sadly, this investigation and its findings cannot overcome those barriers to justice for victims of Medomsley. What it can do is shine a light on the issues which led to physical abuse becoming systemic. It can highlight the power imbalances among staff, lack of intrusive leadership and effective independent oversight which failed, allowing the abuse to occur and continue for so long.

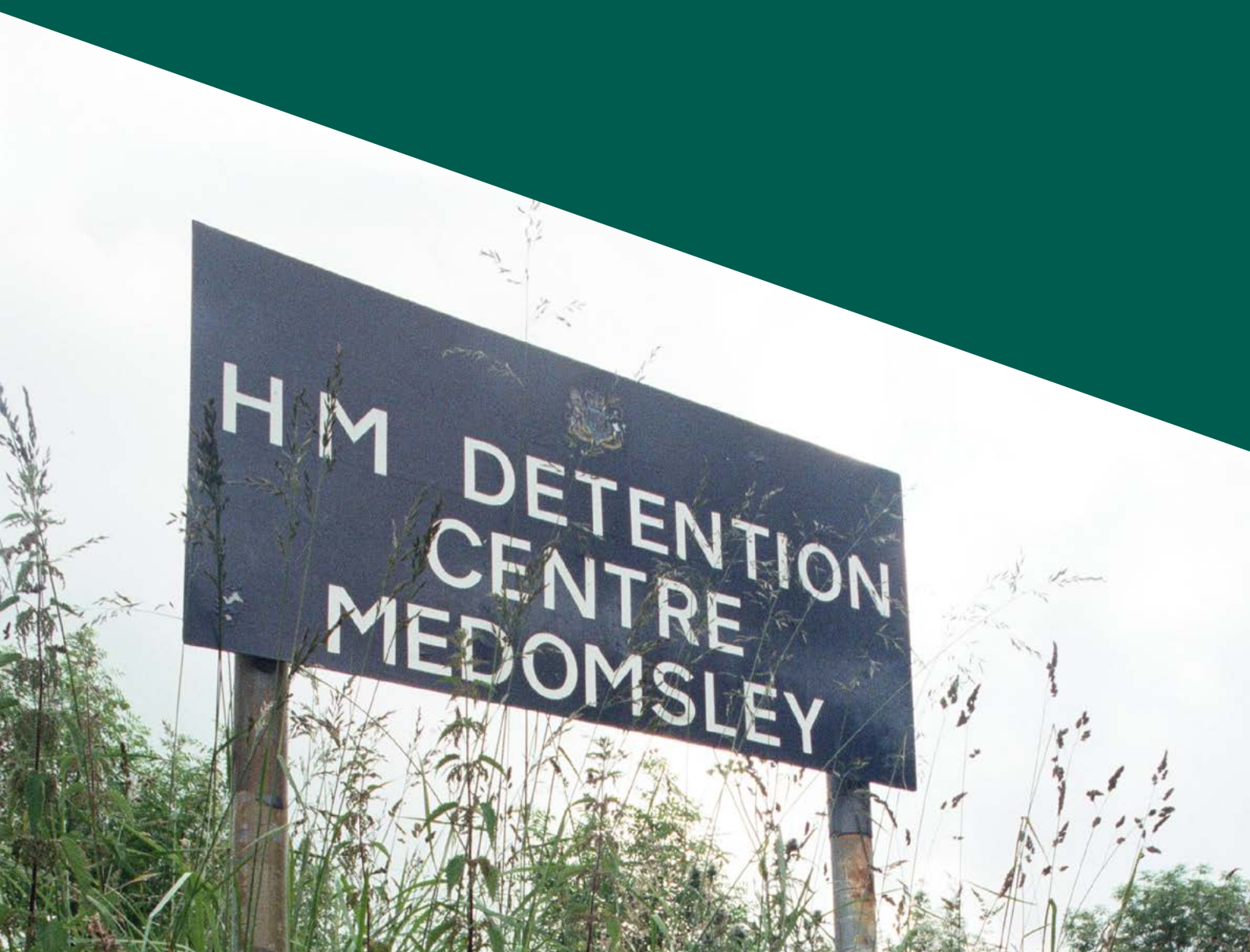
No organisation should be complacent that its policies and procedures are effective at safeguarding young people in custody, especially its complaints processes. It is vital that each organisation with a duty to look after young people ensures that staff and leaders are proactive in searching for the signs of abuse and that young people are routinely given a voice to share any concerns about their treatment in a safe and respectful way.

This report should act as a cautionary tale to all those who have the responsibility of safeguarding young people. It would be easy for this report to be viewed through a historical lens, to say that it all happened a long time ago, and that safeguarding has since moved on.

That would be a mistake. The mistreatment of the vulnerable is still an issue in the youth custody estate.

The public and state place a significant expectation on those who care for the vulnerable. That expectation is only intensified in any custody situation where there is an inherent imbalance of power between prisoner and staff. Those in a position of responsibility are rightly held to a higher standard because of the trust placed in them. This report should be a challenge to them to always act with compassion, integrity and attentiveness towards those in their care.

Appendices



Appendix A: Methodology

This appendix sets out the scope of the investigation, its investigative strategy and the methodology used by the investigation to review and analyse evidence from a number of different sources.

Terms of reference (Appendix C)

The terms of reference for the investigation asked us to report on what the authorities knew about the abuse that took place at Medomsley during the relevant period which was 1961 to 1987, whether there were opportunities for the authorities to have taken action or intervened at that time, and what actions (if any) were taken in such instances.

‘Authorities’ were defined as relevant public bodies and their employees, including the police, probation, the Prison Service, health and social care services, inspectorates, charities, local government and central government.

Additionally included were faith groups and other organisations who, as a result of reviewing material, were deemed relevant to the investigation – for example, the United Reformed Church, the Prison Officer’s Association and charities.

Scope of the investigation

In the terms of reference, the scope of the investigation is defined as follows:

1. To obtain the documentary evidence held by Durham Constabulary (or any other police force) as part of their criminal investigations
2. To gather any evidence held by government departments, including but not limited to the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office
3. To review the evidence available to establish where staff within the establishment were aware of the abuse at Medomsley, when and what action (if any) they took
4. To review the evidence available to establish whether any of the authorities were aware of the abuse at Medomsley, when and what action (if any) they took
5. To establish a timeline of what was known by whom about the abuse at Medomsley at the time and what, if any, action was taken and when it was taken
6. To establish whether government and/or operational policy at the time played a role in the abuse at Medomsley

Investigative strategy

The meaning of the term ‘opportunity’ was not defined in the terms of reference. However, the investigation team determined that this word should be given its widest possible meaning. The interpretation of an opportunity to take action, intervene or end the abuse was to be evidenced in one of the following ways:

- a) Complaint of abuse made by a victim to a staff member or other professionals working at Medomsley during the relevant period
- b) Complaint of abuse made by a victim to a professional outside of Medomsley during the relevant period
- c) The witnessing of abuse by professionals while working at Medomsley during the relevant period
- d) Complaint of abuse made by a family member to an official body or the press during the relevant period
- e) Investigations into abuse at other youth detention centres during the relevant period

The investigation strategy focused on key strands such as: victims of physical and sexual abuse, witnesses including former members of staff from Medomsley, perpetrators of abuse, authorities involved with Medomsley, the operational regime at Medomsley, and government and operational policies which were in place during the relevant period.

Putting Medomsley into context

Additionally, the investigation understood the need to put the abuse that happened at Medomsley into the wider context of attitudes during the relevant period towards violence, safeguarding, sexual abuse and homosexuality.

This need for context inevitably involved completing a scoping exercise in relation to abuse at other youth detention centres during the period, to establish whether Medomsley was unique or part of a wider pattern of abuse in detention centres and to help determine whether government or operational policies played a role in that abuse. It was not the remit of the investigation to investigate any other allegations of abuse at other detention centres. The information regarding abuse at other venues was obtained to gain a wider insight into how other detention centres operated during the period.

Obtaining and reviewing evidence

Durham Constabulary material

Durham Constabulary provided access to investigation material from three previous investigations: Operation Halter 1, Operation Halter 2 and Operation Seabrook. The amount of material contained in these investigations is very significant, especially Operation Seabrook, which is one of the largest enquiries into historic abuse in the UK.

Operation Halter 1 is documented on Holmes, which is a computer-based system that records large investigations such as murders and linked series of investigations. Some records were also paper-based.

Operation Halter 2 is a paper-based investigation and was not catalogued or collated. Therefore, the exact numbers of documents are unknown in some cases. Approximate figures have been used in the table below in relation to the number of statements and documents held. Operation Halter 2 consisted largely of prosecution material used in the second trial of Neville Husband in 2005 and some unused material such as medical and counselling records relating to victims.

Operation Seabrook is documented on Holmes, though some bulky documents are paper-based and had to be reviewed in-person due to their size. Contained in that investigation are over 20,000 documents which include: witness statements, other documents, interviews, officer reports, exhibits, actions and messages.

The table on page 189 indicates the numbers of types of documentation held in each Durham Constabulary investigation and how many of these were reviewed by our investigation. The figures shown in red indicate the number of reviews of documents completed regarding Operation Seabrook material where a full review was not completed due to the volume of material involved. The strategy for deciding which Operation Seabrook material to review is outlined on page 189.

In total, the investigation reviewed over 5,600 documents originating from the three Durham Constabulary investigations.

Document type	Operation Halter 1	Operation Halter 2	Operation Seabrook	Operation Deerness reviews completed
Statements	141	50	1,734	1,925
Officer reports	77	N/A	4,099 (1,973) ⁵³⁴	2,050
Interviews	7	6	149	162
Other documents	205	100	14,175 (371)	676
Exhibits	91	Unknown ⁵³⁵	1,801 (70)	161
Messages	4	Unknown ⁵³⁶	99	103
Actions	244	Unknown ⁵³⁷	4,753 (302)	546
Totals	769	156⁵³⁸	26,810	5,623

Operation Seabrook review strategy

An investigative decision was taken to review all statements, interviews and messages for Operation Seabrook and to identify officer reports that contained details of sexual assaults and any serious physical assaults. This approach was adopted to focus on the most serious abuse as it would not have been possible to review all victims accounts in the time available. The review provided the investigation with a significant body of some 1,459 victim accounts which provided evidence of common patterns and themes in the abuse. Of the 1,459 accounts reviewed, 549 contained accounts of penetrative or non-penetrative sexual offences taking place. Of those 549 sexual abuse accounts, Neville Husband was described as a suspect in 338 instances.

⁵³⁴ Figures in brackets indicate the number of reviews completed regarding Operation Seabrook material where a full review was not completed

⁵³⁵ It is unknown how many exhibits are contained in Operation Halter 2 as the investigation is not catalogued

⁵³⁶ It is unknown how many messages are contained in Operation Halter 2 as the investigation is not catalogued

⁵³⁷ It is unknown how many actions are contained in Operation Halter 2 as the investigation is not catalogued

⁵³⁸ This number is approximate as Operation Halter 2 is not catalogued

Detailed examination of the victim accounts was conducted where victims had reported or attempted to report abuse, where abuse was witnessed by staff or others, and where victims had self-harmed or been hospitalised during their time at Medomsley. This was to try and identify whether external health services could have been aware of physical abuse taking place.

In addition, the review of 'other documents', which are documents that do not fall into the category of statements, interview and reports, was based on the same methodology. But there was an added emphasis in identifying material which would help inform the investigative strands, including identifying:

- key witnesses from authorities who were involved with Medomsley
- documents which would shed light on the rules
- regulations and operational policies in place and the detention centre regime
- original documentation relating to staff at Medomsley

Other material reviewed by the investigation

As well as the police investigation material and our call for evidence, the team sought and obtained relevant information relating to Medomsley and other detention centres from a number of different sources, including: the National Archives at Kew, the British Newspaper Archive, Newcastle library newspaper archive, academic books and papers relating to detention centres, Hansard, the Ministry of Justice, the Radzinowicz library and open source material.

Media and witness engagement

The team liaised with several victims of abuse who had been at Medomsley, as well as solicitors and support agencies who had acted on behalf of numerous victims, to seek advice on witness engagement and to better understand the experiences of those who had been at Medomsley. Local support agencies were also contacted to ensure there was sufficient support available for people who may be affected by the investigation.

A media strategy was developed to encourage anyone with information relating to Medomsley to come forward and speak to the investigation team. The PPO invited local and national media to attend a press conference in Newcastle on 28 February 2024 and offered personal and confidential interviews with Ombudsman Adrian Usher and Senior Investigator Richard Tucker. The initial media appeal also included a YouTube video, where Richard Tucker outlined the reasons for the investigation and the types of witnesses the team wished to speak to.

Both the YouTube video and press conference made clear the various methods to contact the investigation team, via a dedicated email address, telephone or, for those wishing to give information anonymously, a questionnaire on the PPO website.

In response to the initial media coverage in February 2024, around 40 individuals came forward to share information on the abuse, including former trainees or their relatives and former Prison Service staff.

Throughout the investigation, radio advertising was used to help appeal for witnesses to come forward, and Senior Investigator Richard Tucker completed several local radio interviews.

Targeted media appeals were conducted in August 2024, aimed at former members of staff. In October 2024, the team held an outreach event in Consett for local people to share their experiences of Medomsley. The media around this event encouraged further victims to come forward.

In addition, as a result of document reviews and witness interviews, the investigation identified key individuals who the investigation wanted to speak to. Not everyone wished to speak to us and some witnesses were not well enough to be interviewed. In some cases, we spoke to family members of those witnesses where they had information they wished to share with us.

The investigation team had contact from 96 individuals and interviewed 74 witnesses.

Call for evidence

As a result of the extensive document reviews and witness interviews, the investigation team identified authorities who had interactions with Medomsley staff and trainees, either on-site or elsewhere, during the relevant period.

A call for evidence was launched on 15 July 2024 and 51 bodies were contacted. These included police services, health services, local health and social care bodies, local education bodies, probation services, the Prison Service, charities and faith groups.

Representatives from each agency were assigned a single point of contact within the investigative team, who assisted with identifying relevant material and supporting research.

Those bodies contacted were invited to digital roundtable events in July and September 2024. They were given information outlining the context and scope of the investigation, along with the names of possible witnesses and key perpetrators of abuse to help assist with research. They were asked to provide information on any individuals with links to the named perpetrators.

The investigation engaged meaningfully with 48 authorities in total.

Authorities were asked to complete a survey detailing their involvement with Medomsley, along with supporting documentation for review. Agencies unable to locate relevant information were requested to submit a nil return, explaining the searches conducted and any obstacles encountered.

The call for evidence officially closed on 31 October 2024. The team received 44 survey responses, along with 1,705 supporting documents.

Challenges in finding records

The historic nature of the abuse presented considerable difficulties for many authorities who had transferred records from paper to digital formats, resulting in data loss or misplacement. For those authorities who were still reliant on paper records, the absence of keyword search capabilities significantly hampered the research process. Many organisations did not hold information in line with their retention policies.

The search for records was particularly challenging for local councils, many of which had undergone significant restructuring since the end of the relevant period.

Analysis and reporting

Information from the document reviews and witness interviews completed was assessed by the team against the key investigative strands to identify patterns of abuse, the causes of that abuse and any opportunities which could have been taken to stop abuse occurring.

A thorough review of incidents relating to each authority involved with Medomsley took place to determine the extent of their knowledge, alongside a review of relevant interviews with individuals from those authorities.

Some common themes were identified from this in-depth review regarding how societal attitudes impacted on the response of professionals from authorities to allegations of abuse.

Detailed examination of hundreds of victim accounts of sexual abuse allowed the investigation to reach conclusions regarding how key perpetrators were able to commit abuse and remain undetected.

Patterns of abuse in victim accounts were noted, especially in relation to physical violence used during the reception procedures and during physical education instruction.

Finally, this report was drafted using victim testimony to highlight the key patterns of abuse and using the analysis from the documentation reviews and witness interviews to demonstrate what authorities knew and outline the opportunities which were missed to stop the abuse.

Victim accounts were anonymised and information which could indirectly identify subjects was also removed from accounts where necessary. Some individuals who were referred to more frequently throughout the report or who provided information to the investigation were assigned names such as Witness A. Other individuals who were suspected of abuse but not charged are referred to as Subject A and so forth. Individuals who were convicted of abuse at Medomsley or other related abuse are referred to as Perpetrator A and so on.

Appendix B: Commissioning letter from Alex Chalk KC MP



Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman
Third Floor
10 South Colonnade
London
E14 4PU

The Right Honourable
Alex Chalk KC MP
Lord Chancellor & Secretary
of State for Justice

MoJ ref:

24 October 2023

Dear Adrian,

MEDOMSLEY DETENTION CENTRE

I am writing to ask you to undertake an independent special investigation into Medomsley Detention Centre, in accordance with the Terms of Reference annexed to this letter.

I thank you for your prior agreement to undertake this investigation, and for the work you have already conducted to develop the Terms of Reference with my officials, alongside other important preparation. As detailed in the Terms of Reference, I ask that you report what the authorities knew about the abuse that took place at Medomsley, whether there were opportunities for the authorities to have taken action or intervened at that time, and what actions (if any) were taken in such instances. Given the time that has elapsed since Medomsley closed, I would be grateful if this investigation could commence as soon as is practical.

Whilst I recognise that an investigation cannot make up for the horrific abuse experienced at Medomsley, nor its ongoing effect on people's lives, I hope that it will help bring an element of closure to victims and survivors and their families. I look forward to receiving the final report and, once again, would like to thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alex Chalk".

RT HON ALEX CHALK KC MP

LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE

T 020 3334 3555
F 0870 761 7753

E <https://contact-moj.service.justice.gov.uk/>
www.gov.uk/moj

102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Appendix C: Terms of reference

Definitions

For the purposes of these Terms of Reference:

“Abuse” refers to any sexual or physical abuse, but may also refer more broadly to the type of regime employed at MDC.

“Authorities” refers to relevant public bodies and their employees, including the police, probation, the prison service, health and social care services, inspectorates, charities, local government and central government.

Purpose

The Secretary of State for Justice has commissioned the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) to carry out an investigation into what the Authorities knew about the abuse that took place at MDC between 1961 and 1987, whether there were opportunities for the Authorities to have taken action or intervened at that time, and what actions (if any) were taken by the Authorities in such instances.

MDC was a detention facility open between 1961 and 1987 that held men aged 17-21. Former inmates have since reported being subjected to abuse while detained at MDC. Police investigations since the 1990s have led to eight former members of staff being convicted of physical and sexual assault, and misconduct in a public office.

The PPO is not commissioned to re-investigate the facts of the abuse at MDC, nor to re-investigate individual incidents.

Scope of investigation

1. To obtain the documentary evidence held by Durham Police (or any other police force) as part of their criminal investigations.
2. To gather any evidence held by Government departments, including but not limited to, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Home Office.
3. To review the evidence available to establish where staff within the establishment were aware of the abuse at MDC, when and what action (if any) they took.
4. To review the evidence available to establish whether any of the Authorities were aware of the abuse at MDC, when and what action (if any) they took.
5. To establish a timeline of what was known by whom about the abuse at MDC at the time and what if any, action was taken and when it was taken.
6. To establish whether government and/or operational policy at the time played a role in the abuse at MDC.

Investigation

The PPO may defer all or part of the investigation if, or, when the police are conducting a criminal investigation in parallel. The decision to defer will be made in discussion with the police force.

Though it may now be difficult to trace surviving former members of staff and officials, the PPO may need to engage with or interview former staff or officials where this is deemed beneficial to the investigation. Formal statements may be requested from individuals as required. The Secretary of State for Justice will, if requested, aid the PPO in contacting officials and encouraging their participation in the investigation.

The PPO may also request information and/or documents from the Authorities. The Secretary of State for Justice expects all relevant authorities to ensure that the Ombudsman has unfettered access to all relevant material, held both in hard copy and electronically, that is required for the purposes of this investigation. This includes classified material, physical and mental health information, and information originating from or held by other organisations (e.g. contractors or their sub-contractors) providing services to or on behalf of the Authorities. All material will be managed in accordance with PPO policy and the relevant information legislation. Should the PPO not be initially granted access by any authority to any information that the PPO reasonably requires to undertake its investigation, the Secretary of State for Justice will support the PPO in overcoming any issues or barriers.

The Ombudsman will consider representations as to the necessity of particular material being provided, the means by which it is provided and any sensitivity connected with future publication, but the final decision rests with the Ombudsman who will define the material required based on the needs of the investigation.

As part of the investigation, the PPO will set out their victim/family liaison strategy which will explain how the PPO will engage with victims and families during the investigation.

Output of the investigation

The PPO will carry out an investigation covering the areas identified at points 1-6 on page 194. Following the investigation, the PPO will prepare and publish a written report of their findings.

An interim report, and a draft of the final report, will be provided to key stakeholders (including the Secretary of State for Justice) prior to publication. The content of the report is solely at the discretion of the PPO. The PPO will consider responses to factual accuracy checks, but will exercise their own discretion on what, if any, changes to make.

The PPO can only base their report on the evidence available as part of the investigation.

If during the investigation the PPO identify any gaps in the evidence or any missed opportunities, they will highlight them in the written report.

Media engagement

The PPO's press officer will handle media engagement relating to its running of the investigation and publication of the final report. It will be for the PPO to determine the extent of any media engagement, including any press releases or statements. The PPO's press officer will inform the MoJ and Home Office before issuing any press releases or statements.

Timescale

It is expected, on the basis of current information, that the PPO will make its best endeavours to complete the investigation and produce its report within 18 months or fewer from the start of the investigation. However, an extension may be agreed with the MoJ subject to the complexity of the work and the amount of evidence for review.

The PPO will confirm the start date for the investigation with the MoJ based on the PPO's resourcing needs and the timescales required for recruitment.

Resources

Funding for the investigation will be provided by the Ministry of Justice. This will cover all staffing costs reasonably necessary for the PPO to undertake the investigation. Appropriate staff will be appointed by the PPO to carry out and support this work.

The Ministry of Justice will also:

- Reimburse the PPO for any legal advice and representation they obtain as part of this investigation.
- Provide or fund the provision of specialist IT document management software reasonably required for the investigation.
- Fund the provision of any additional/specialist wellbeing support that may be required for staff dealing with distressing material as part of this investigation.

Appendix D: Detention Centre Rules 1952⁵³⁹

Appendix E: Detention Centre Rules 1983⁵⁴⁰

539 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1952/1432/pdfs/uksi_19521432_en.pdf

540 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1983/569/pdfs/uksi_19830569_en.pdf

Appendix F: Acknowledgements

We would like to offer our thanks to the following people and organisations in recognition of their contribution to this investigation:

1. Victims and their families who suffered any form of abuse while at Medomsley
2. Witnesses, former members of staff and other witnesses with specialist knowledge of Medomsley
3. Charities and trade unions including: Samaritans, Scouts, the Howard League for Penal Reform, Prison Reform Trust, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Drinkaware, Victim Support, Barnardo's, the Prison Officer's Association, Together for Children, Toc H, and the Prison Governor's Association
4. Central government and government agencies including: the Cabinet Office, the Government Legal Department, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Independent Monitoring Boards, HM Prison and Probation Service, Parole Board, HM Inspectorate of Probation, the Independent Office for Police Conduct, and the Ministry of Justice
5. Local government and social care including: Gateshead council, Durham County council, Hartlepool Borough council, Northumberland County council, South Tyneside council, Stockton-on-Tees council, Darlington Borough council, Redcar multi-agency children's hub, Middlesbrough council, Sunderland council, North Yorkshire Social Care, and Newcastle council
6. Police including: Cheshire police, Lancashire police, Greater Manchester police, North Yorkshire police, the Metropolitan police, Cambridgeshire police, Durham Constabulary, Cumbria police, Cleveland police, West Yorkshire police, Northumbria police, and Nottinghamshire police
7. Places of faith including: Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, Church of England, Northern Baptist Association, the Methodist Church, and United Reformed Church
8. Healthcare including: Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
9. The Story
10. Support agencies including: the Meadows Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Teesside Sexual Assault Referral Centre (Cleveland), the Angel Centre, Sunderland Counselling Service, National Association for People Abused in Childhood, the Forgotten Boys, and victims services
11. Solicitors including: Switalskis Solicitors, Ben Hoare Bell LLP, Watson Woodhouse Solicitors, McKeag and Co Solicitors, and Jordans Solicitors
12. Ben Jarman (Research Fellow, University of Southampton Law School), and Caroline Lanskey (University Associate Professor in Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology)

