

Swift recovery of head spared sex trial

Video shows a former teacher ruled unable to face child abuse charges apparently fit and well, writes **Andrew Norfolk**

A former headmaster accused of sexually abusing five boys at an independent school enjoyed a remarkable return to health within months of a judge ruling that he was too ill to stand trial.

Alleged victims of offences by Colin Cope were stunned when a court ruled in 2009, when he was 78, that he could not receive a fair trial because physical and mental health problems meant that he did not know "what was going on" and would be unable to defend himself.

Eight months later, covertly filmed video footage obtained by *The Times* shows him telling jokes and reciting poetry while giving a public talk at his local church. He is also seen driving his car, carrying a table and climbing steep stairs while giving paying visitors a guided tour of his 18th-century National Trust home.

The boarding school where Mr Cope taught for 14 years subsequently paid £129,000 to settle a civil action by the five former pupils, now in their fifties. Three, waiving their right to anonymity, voiced outrage that no jury was allowed to hear evidence of the sexual crimes they claim to have suffered in the early 1970s at the junior school of Tettenhall College, Wolverhampton.

Court papers reveal that police officers who first arrested Mr Cope in 2006, during a criminal inquiry that led to him being charged with 11 sexual offences against children aged from 11 to 13, were said to be "deeply concerned" about Judge Robin Onions' decision to block the prosecution.

In addition to evidence from the five alleged victims, there were witness statements from another four ex-pupils and a former teacher at the school, each claiming to have witnessed inappropriate conduct by Mr Cope towards young boys. He denied any wrongdoing.

There was a striking contrast between Mr Cope's apparent physical and intellectual prowess, as displayed in the April 2010 video footage, and the evidence of the desperate state of his health presented in court by defence medical experts a few months earlier.

Mr Cope did not attend the hearing held at Shrewsbury crown court in July 2009 to determine whether it would be fair to put him on trial. By then, three years had passed since his initial arrest during a West Midlands police inquiry that led to charges of indecent assault and gross indecency.

His alleged victims came forward independently in 2006 and 2007 to say that they had been abused by him as



Andrew Wood, circled, accused Colin Cope of sexually abusing him in the early 1970s when he was the headmaster of the junior school at Tettenhall College. There is no suggestion that any of the other boys in the picture were sexually abused



Exclusive to members
Video Cope addresses audience in church

On tablet and at thetimes.co.uk/uknews

children. They gave detectives detailed statements of crimes allegedly committed in Mr Cope's private rooms at the boarding school, on camping trips, in his car and in a boy's bedroom.

They also spoke of lasting emotional and psychological damage. Mark Shelton, 57, described feelings of anger, resentment and confusion. He told police that the charismatic Mr Cope, who always charmed the boys' parents, "took a huge part of my childhood from me".

"I've lived my life in shame. His actions took away any love, any faith and

trust I had. Those events changed me from a loving, caring, outgoing little chap to someone who was very introverted and very suspicious of people who came close to me. I've spent my entire life pushing people away," he said.

A three-week trial was scheduled to begin in October 2009. The complainants believed that they would finally have the chance to tell their story to a jury. Such hopes were dashed when Judge Onions terminated the prosecution. He made his decision after considering reports and evidence from five defence medical experts, including a GP who was a friend of Mr Cope.

In addition to clinical depression and multiple "anxiety-related symptoms", Mr Cope was said to be taking 12 medications for numerous physical ailments. He had heart disease, prostate cancer and type 2 diabetes. One defence expert concluded that he was "unlikely to make a full recovery while the spectre of prosecution looms".

The judge noted that another defence expert "felt the defendant would have been unable to give evidence in his own defence" and would be unable to concentrate as the trial progressed. "In short, she

Mark Shelton, left, Paul Barrington and Andrew Wood, right, waived anonymity

did not think that the defendant knew what was going on."

The prosecution could offer little to counter such evidence. Its medical expert who had examined Mr Cope a year earlier, finding him fit for trial, was on maternity leave by July 2009. Owing to a mistake by the Crown Prosecution Service, no replacement expert was found. The prosecution thus had no recent assessment with which to challenge the defence's assertion of a significant deterioration in Mr Cope's health over the preceding year.

The judge also gave considerable weight to the long passage of time — more than 35 years — since the offences were said to have taken place. This, he felt, created difficulties for the former headmaster in challenging the prosecution case.

On those two grounds, he decided

that "the defendant cannot now receive a fair trial". When the news was broken to the five complainants, its impact was shattering. One, Paul Barrington, 54, described "an overwhelming feeling of shock, anger and disbelief".

Andrew Wood, 56, first told a clinical psychologist in 2005 of being sexually abused as a child by his headmaster. He believes that all possibility of resolving the shame and insecurity that he has carried throughout his adult life was ended by the judge's ruling. "One of the police officers who'd dealt with our case phoned and said he wanted to come and speak with me. When he told me, it felt like the end of the world. The officer seemed as shocked as I was by the decision," he said.

The men's dismay turned to outrage when they later viewed the video footage of Mr Cope. In addition to his bravura performance at a concert in a Dorset parish church, he was seen showing visitors around his home, a water mill owned by the National Trust.

He was, he remarked, "far too busy to be ill". To the men still haunted by memories of the childhood abuse they claim to have suffered, this seemed a sudden and spectacular return to physical and intellectual fitness.

In July 2012, they received payments ranging from £5,000 to £60,000 when they accepted an offer to settle a civil claim against the school, which did not admit liability.

Tettenhall College stressed yesterday that Mr Cope's alleged crimes happened more than 40 years ago. It said the safeguarding of its pupils in 2014 was "a priority". A recent school inspection found that its child protection procedures were good.

There remains little prospect of its former headmaster facing trial by jury. Mr Cope, a married father of two, is now 83 and said to be in poor health, but a CPS spokesman said last night that it would give "very careful consideration" to the April 2010 video footage "should the police wish to investigate the matter and refer the results to us".

Court papers reveal that within minutes of police arriving at his house in August 2006 to inform him that he was under arrest on suspicion of sexually abusing a child, Mr Cope held his head in his hands and told officers: "I just know that I've done things that I shouldn't have done in the past." He also spoke of living "with the burden of guilt". Though he has always denied committing any of the alleged offences, Mr Cope seems likely to be allowed to go to his grave without being asked to explain those words.

His solicitor, Julian Hardy, said yesterday that anyone in possession of evidence they believed would justify a re-opening of the criminal proceedings against Mr Cope should "seek permission from a High Court judge".



Help me, I'm attracted to children, says man in TV show

Alex Spence Media Editor

A man will admit on television tonight that he is sexually attracted to children, in a plea for medical treatment to help others like him before they commit abuse.

The 39-year-old, who is referred to only as "Eddie" but whose face is not obscured, admits to being aroused by girls as young as four but says that he has never committed any sex offences. He says he agreed to speak publicly to appeal for help for paedophiles before they become criminals. *The Paedophile Next*

Door, which will be broadcast on Channel 4 tonight, argues that child sex abuse in Britain has reached epidemic levels and that allowing paedophiles to seek medical help without fear of being vilified would reduce the number of cases.

Channel 4 said it hoped that the programme would give viewers "pause for thought". Ian McFadyen, an abuse survivor who appears in the documentary, said many victims would be angered by calls for a more open attitude to those sexually attracted to children but that a change of approach was needed. "There are many Eddies

out there. They're a ticking time bomb," he said. "I don't want to sit with paedophiles, I don't advocate for paedophiles, I feel wholly uncomfortable with them, but... the damage is done to me and my generation. What I don't want is that to keep occurring because we won't look at new ways and sit down with the offenders before they offend."

Eddie, who is taking part in a treatment programme abroad, says on camera that he realised when he was in his 20s that he was attracted to young girls as well as to adult women. He told the programme makers that because of

the "hysteria" around paedophiles he had struggled to find anyone to talk to about his condition and that it had driven him to contemplate suicide.

He said that he had never acted on his attraction to young girls. "Going around abusing children is not acceptable, viewing images of child pornography is not acceptable, but people are just waiting for you to offend before they help you," he said. "If you don't have that option to come forward and say, 'Look, I have got a problem, I need help,' what are we changing?"

The documentary's producers said

that a scheme in Germany offered men like Eddie access to counselling and medication to stop them offending.

Jon Brown, head of strategy and development at the NSPCC, said that Britain should introduce a similar system. "There are going to be men out there... who have some degree of sexual interest in children but are going to be able to manage it. There are sufficient inhibitors in place for them to know what they have got to lose, that it is not that strong and they can maintain a consenting adult relationship. They will probably be OK and not go on and offend."