

**MURDER
VICTIM:**
Sarah
Everard



'Trust' in police was damaged months ago

THE murder of Sarah Everard in London by a serving police officer has "shaken" trust in the Metropolitan Police, commissioner Cressida Dick admitted last week.

Ms Everard's killer was sentenced to a whole-life prison term for the 33-year-old's kidnap, rape and murder. Wayne Couzens (48) will now spend the rest of his life in jail.

Ms Everard's murder in March was supposed to have been a watershed. Women marched to demand better public safety. Many more spoke out about the basic precautions that women have to take on a daily basis – only walking in well-lit streets, keeping your house keys in your fist, telling a friend where you are going and when you will be home.

But on the same day as Couzens was sentenced, a man appeared in court charged with the "predatory" murder of primary school teacher Sabina Nessa in a park in south-east London last month.

The Metropolitan Police was also severely criticised by judges for grossly violating the human rights of Kate Wilson, an activist who campaigned on social justice and environmental issues. Ms Wilson had been in a long-term relationship with Mark Kennedy, a man she later discovered was an undercover officer who had infiltrated left wing groups.

In truth, faith in the Met was badly damaged months ago when the same force handcuffed and removed several women from crowds holding a vigil for Ms Everard in London.

Revelations that Couzens kidnapped Ms Everard by using his warrant card and handcuffs to falsely arrest her under Covid protocols were highly disturbing.

But the force – branded "institutionally racist" in the landmark Macpherson report more than 20 years ago – long ago lost the trust of many minority groups.

Former Met chief superintendent Parm Sandhu has said the force remains institutionally racist. She also described

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it as "very sexist and misogynistic", saying female officers were afraid to challenge the bad behaviour of male colleagues because they worried they would be abandoned while dealing with street violence on duty.

In an overwhelmingly male environment, appalling behaviour was dismissed as "banter".

Couzens's misogynistic attitudes to women were so obvious that his colleagues called him 'the rapist'.

The Met has said it will "publish a new strategy for tackling violence against women and girls" following last week's sentencing. It could start by tackling serious issues within its own ranks. More than 750 Met employees have faced sexual misconduct allegations since 2010.

Following the murders of sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman in a country park in London in June, two Met officers appeared in court accused of taking and sharing pictures of the double murder scene.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct

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(IOPC) is still investigating the potential failure of the Met and Kent Police to properly investigate three separate allegations of indecent exposure against Couzens.

The police watchdog is also investigating the conduct of 15 officers and a former officer linked to the Everard case.

These include three probationary Met Police officers who allegedly shared "an inappropriate graphic, depicting violence against women, with colleagues via WhatsApp". One of the officers later manned a cordon during the search for Ms Everard's body.

In policing terms, trust is earned, not automatically given. Reviews and investigations are all very well but real change needs to come from the top down – in the north we know that only too well.

Between the deaths of Ms Everard and Ms Nessa, 80 women were killed in the UK. Karen Ingala Smith of the Counting Dead Women project said so far 109 women have been killed in 2021 – a figure which she believes is an underestimate.

There hasn't been an outpouring of grief for all 109 women. Most women aren't killed by a stranger, they are killed by someone they know. Somehow, we have accepted these deaths as just something that happens.

While sentencing Couzens, Lord Justice Fulford had called Sarah Everard "a wholly blameless victim". But no woman is to blame for her own killing.

Unfortunately our society still views misogyny as a minor problem. Women are encouraged to dismiss the aggressions we face in public and online, often on a daily basis, as nothing particularly important.

But these aggressions are at the root of the most serious crimes.

The old Suffragette slogan demanded 'Deeds Not Words'.

The problem is we will not know if the deeds needed to stamp out misogyny have worked until women are no longer murdered.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 4 1971

Bombers condemned

BOTH wings of the IRA have emphatically denied being responsible for the explosion at the Four Step Inn on Belfast's Shankill Road. The Prime Minister, Mr Brian Faulkner said that he joined with the entire population in expressing his revulsion at the horrifying bomb attack on the Four Step Inn which resulted in the cold-blooded killing of two men and injury to a large number of innocent civilians.

Mr John Hume, SDLP MP, said: 'It was clearly a callous, murderous and inhuman attempt to stir up sectarian strife'.

'Hatred' charge divides

A BELFAST jury yesterday failed to reach a verdict on the first prosecution under the Prevention of Incitement to Hatred Act [1970]. Before the City Commission were 41-year-old printer, John McKeague, Hugh Close and Hugh Johnston. They were accused of publishing a song, 'I Was Born Under the Union Jack' in a book called, 'Orange Loyalist Songs, 1971' and that 'the song was intended to stir up hatred or arouse fear of a section of the public'. The three men pleaded not guilty and the jury said they could not agree.

Mother and children critical

A DERRY woman and her two young children were rushed to Altnagelvin Hospital late last night with gunshot wounds following an incident in Bishop Street when troops fired on a car from which a bomb was thrown. Three shots hit another vehicle in which Mrs Beryl Jefferson and her two children aged six and ten were travelling. The condition of the girl is 'critical'.

Stormont 'precarious'

WHEN Stormont resumes tomorrow after the summer recess it will be in a more precarious position than it has been since the state was set up fifty years ago. The assembly will not only be greatly depleted by the withdrawal of all but one member of the Opposition, but the government will find itself under increased pressure both from within and outside its ranks. But the Prime Minister Mr Brian Faulkner's worries go much further. The most immediate danger to his position is likely to come from his own side. The new United Loyalist Party under the Rev Ian Paisley has already gained significant support. They are determined to bring down the present administration. Some observers feel that the Faulkner government will not last till Christmas.

WHAT proved to be the final session of the old Stormont Parliament opened 50 years ago this week with Paisley launching the DUP. The intensification of violence following internment brought fresh horrors every day. The first attempt to outlaw incitement of hatred failed its first test.

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