

P-05-954 Petition for a public inquiry by the Welsh Government into the historic child abuse on Caldey Island, Correspondence – Petition Coordinator to Committee, 22.10.21

Update from the Caldey Island Survivors Campaign (Caldey Island Victims Campaign) 20 October 2021.

Recent concerns and issues are as follows:

1. Lack of accountability of the Cistercian Order of Caldey Abbey.

Caldey Abbey, like other monasteries in the Cistercian Order in the UK and internationally, has autonomy in how they run their affairs. Although Caldey Abbey is identified as being within the remit of Roman Catholic structures - the Pembroke Deanery and the Diocese of Menevia - Caldey Abbey in its constitution and practice is independent of the Roman Catholic Church.

The hierarchy of the Cistercian Order hold only light touch guidance, rather than authority, over the concerns and administration of the Abbeys, other houses and establishments, and over the behaviour of monks, nuns and lay members.

Caldey Abbey did not respond to a request by Catholic Organisations for Renewal (COR) to submit a form to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). Caldey Abbey and other Cistercian establishments in the UK have not participated in IICSA, and the findings of the IICSA report into the Roman Catholic Church show that they did not inquire into any Cistercian establishments in the UK. It may be the autonomy of the Cistercian Order that influenced their lack of inclusion in IICSA.

Since the abuse on Caldey Island came to light the Abbey has entered into a safeguarding arrangement with the Diocese of Menevia, however this relationship is a voluntary one and, as stated in earlier submissions to the Petitions Committee, the Abbey have insisted on retaining oversight of past, present and future safeguarding.

Caldey Abbey have appointed a parish safeguarding representative, Reverend Kevin Simpson, who is an ex-South Wales police officer. He is also a Director of Caldey Island Estate Company Limited. We feel that there is a conflict of interest here in terms of Rev. Simpson's relationship with a Welsh police force, and in his company directorship of Caldey Island. Good safeguarding practice requires independence from any direct interest in the organisation, as does any police investigation of wrongdoing.

2. Police investigation – victims have lost faith, local police have a conflict of interest, police have failed to conduct a full investigation.

There are further concerns over a conflict of interest in the role of Father Liam Bradley, the Roman Catholic Dean of Pembroke whose parish contains Caldey Island, as he is also the Lead Chaplain for Dyfed-Powys Police. Fr Bradley's connection to Caldey, via his parish and his role of Dean, is strong and ongoing and is enthusiastically promoted on

social media. He regularly takes children and young people of his parish to visit and to stay on Caldey Island as guests of the Abbey. Again, we feel that connections between the local police and the island represent a conflict of interest, and that if investigations into abuse on Caldey were ever to be reopened then an external police force, without connections to the Abbey and with experience of investigating large scale historic child sex abuse, should carry out any such investigation.

Victims have lost trust in Dyfed-Powys Police. Dyfed-Powys Police have carried out minimal investigations into the historic child sex abuse on the Island, citing Fr. Thaddeus Kotik's death as a reason for their lack of interest in pursuing any deeper level of investigations.

Kevin O'Connell's abuse was verbally minimised by the Dyfed-Powys officer responsible for investigating the abuse that Kevin experienced.

Kevin's sister Rebecca O'Connell, who is deceased, was also abused by Fr Thaddeus Kotik. Dyfed-Powys Police said they would investigate the abuse Rebecca experienced but failed to provide any action in this regard.

We are not aware of any attempt by Dyfed-Powys Police to look into Kotik's career of sexual abuse prior to the abuse documented on Caldey in the 1970s and 1980s. There cannot be any doubt that Kotik was a serial abuser, and potential abuses prior to this date should also be considered.

3. Savile/Kotik

Operation Yewtree, the police inquiry into the abuse perpetrated by Jimmy Savile, was initiated after Savile's death following 8 of his victims coming forward to report his abuse of them. The inquiry then extended into an inquiry into the responses of statutory agencies. We would like this pathway to be followed for the a police or public inquiry into abuse experienced on Caldey Island.

26 victims of abuse on Caldey Island have now come forward and reported abuse from Fr Thaddeus Kotik. Rebecca O'Connell is a further victim. Yet despite the number of victims Dyfed-Powys Police have consistently failed to take any investigation beyond a superficial point, citing that as the abuser/abusers are dead, they cannot pursue a police inquiry. We need a public inquiry to ascertain not just the scale of the abuse, but also why Dyfed-Powys Police have delayed or failed to investigate some of allegations of abuse, and consistently refused to commit to a fuller and wider investigation.

Dyfed-Powys Police have not put out a call for victims, witnesses or those with information about abuse on Caldey Island to come forward, although this was requested by Kevin O'Connell in 2018.

As a result of Operation Yewtree, investigations into historic child sexual abuse will now inform potential victims if others have also complained. Dyfed-Powys Police have not done this.

Also as a result of Operation Yewtree, it is now standard practice for investigations of historic child sexual abuse to consider the reports as a one whole, rather than treating them as a series of individual complaints. As far as we are aware Dyfed-Powys Police have not done this.

As the victims have lost faith in Dyfed-Powys Police as a result of the failings outlined here and the conflict of interest that we believe exists, we consider that if a full police investigation is to happen it must be enacted by an outside force with experience of investigating historic child sexual abuse on a large scale.

4. Was Caldey Island a paedophile hub?

Solicitors Michael Imperato and David Greenwood, acting on behalf of Caldey Island victims, both consider that from the scale of abuse reported by victims that it was perpetrated on an industrial scale, and that it is likely that Caldey was a hub for paedophiles.

As well as sending their victims postcards and letters, home visits appear to have been a feature of both Kotik and Jesuit priest Fr Charles Jeffries' pattern of abuse. Fr Thaddeus Kotik and Fr Charles Jeffries knew each other, and Fr Charles met Kevin O'Connell on Caldey Island. Both Kotik and Jeffries were regular visitors to the O'Connell family home, staying overnight and abusing Kevin and possibly his sister Rebecca in the home. Kevin's younger brother confirms the abuse in the family home in connection with Kevin, in a letter which we have attached. Another victim has previously stated that Kotik abused her in her own home.

Fr Charles Jeffries took Kevin to Sussex for a period of time, and with others abused him in Sussex. Kevin states that in this house there was another young boy, who he thinks was also being abused.

We know that from the 1970s onwards 5 perpetrators of child sexual abuse were living as monks or as guests of the Cistercian Order on Caldey Island – convicted paedophiles Fr John Shannon from 2008 to 2009, John Cronin in 2009, Paul Ashton from 2004 to 2011 as well as the Fr Charles Jeffries, and of course Fr Thaddeus Kotik. We have very recently been provided with information, by an ex-neighbour of recently convicted historic child sex offender Anthony Preece, that Preece had stayed on Caldey Island. We are in the process of verifying this information.

Kevin O'Connell has very recently started cross-referencing the electoral roll for Caldey Island with names of priests convicted for child sexual abuse. This painstaking and time-consuming search has only just started but has so far 3 names have emerged. However, it is work that should be carried out through the means of a public inquiry, or by a police investigation, rather than by campaigners and volunteers.

It is our opinion that it is likely that Caldey Island is known within paedophile networks as a safe place to be shielded, with the opportunity to perpetrate active or online abuse whilst on the island.

The scale of abuse on Caldey could potentially be on a very significant scale. Over the decades there have been: children who came on holiday with their families; referrals from RC churches in Wales and across the UK who came without their parents; a primary school on the island and a reform school on the island.

Two schools in South Wales contacted Kevin after the TV documentaries and said that as a result they would stop their children going to Caldey. Evidently children were still being sent up to that time, and visits to the island for school and parish children continue. The visits, holidays and retreats are encouraged by Caldey Abbey and by local Roman Catholic structures and churches.

In summary, the key messages from the campaign to the Petitions Committee are:

That we are currently occupied with attempting to discover, on a voluntary and part-time basis, the scale of abuse by known and by other potential perpetrators. This is a huge job, it exceeds our capacity, and properly falls within the remit of the police or a public inquiry.

We would urge the Senedd to hold a public inquiry into the abuse, and institutional facilitation/cover up of abuse by the Abbey, on Caldey Island. This inquiry, in our opinion, would need to consider any failings by statutory authorities to protect children who stayed on or visited the island, and any failings in investigations into the abuse. It would also need to consider the structural issues of the autonomy and lack of accountability of the Cistercian Order as it operates within Wales.

If a public inquiry is unlikely to fall within Senedd powers or remit, or the Senedd considers that there is not enough evidence for a public inquiry to be warranted, then we would like to request that Welsh Government recommend a full and thorough investigation, by an external police force with expertise in large scale historic child sexual abuse, takes place. That may reveal the new information that would be required for a public inquiry.

Dinah Mulholland 20/10/21

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