

Model English prep school that

Old boys were scarred for life by experience at a school where abusive head's word was law, Andrew Norfolk writes

Immaculate playing fields, impeccably dressed boys. It seemed the very model of a traditional English prep school, but its heart was rotten to the core. For two decades,

parents eager for their sons to win entry to a top public school paid handsomely to the care of Caldicott, whose pupils won scholarships to Harrow and Eton.

Many Old Caldicottians look back on those days with affection. Others, less so. Some — far too many — have been haunted for most of their adult life by memories of a childhood betrayed, of innocence stolen by men whose gift to the boys they so routinely used for sex was an unresolvable legacy of guilt, shame and confusion.

An English boarding school 50 years

ago was a world unto itself. Its rules dictated a child's life; its culture seeped into young souls. A master's word was law. When diseased concepts of right and wrong entered the system, infection spread rapidly.

At Caldicott, if a teacher woke you in your dormitory bed late at night and called you to his room, you obeyed. When he pulled back his bed sheets, you climbed in. If he performed a sex act on you, simulated sex or penetrated you, you did not complain. And you most certainly knew not to tell anyone.

For the past month at Aylesbury

Crown Court, a jury has been invited to wind back time. They were asked to look at a succession of witnesses, balding and grey-haired men in their 50s and early 60s, and imagine them as the vulnerable schoolboys they once were.

They were also challenged to see in the defendant, Peter Wright, not a stooped man of 83 fiddling with his hearing aid but the handsome, dashing young man who in 1952 strode into a rundown postwar prep school and changed its fortunes for ever.

Wright taught French, introduced rugby to the Buckinghamshire school and coached the 1st XV. He had a private income, impeccable contacts and a passion for shooting and fishing. By the 1960s, he was driving an E-type Jaguar. Boys hero-worshipped him; their mothers swooned. In 1968, he was appointed headmaster.

As Caldicott's reputation soared, so did his vice-like grip on the school and the pupils under his command. Wright liked boys to do as he wanted: in lessons, on a rugby field and in his bed. He was rarely disappointed.

One former pupil, who was not abused, told the jury last month that the impact of walking into the courtroom and seeing his former headmaster for the first time in more than 45 years was "quite extraordinary".

"I was once again an 11-year-old boy who just wanted his approval," he said. "None of you can feel that because all you see is an old man, but he's lost none of his power and I'm going to be 60 at my next birthday."

The 12 offences for which Wright was convicted yesterday were against five boys between 1959 and 1971. A further five ex-pupils gave evidence of being sexually abused by him during the same period. The jury also heard of more victims, some of them named in court, who have not come forward.

At least two of those ten witnesses were also serially abused by Wright's close friend Hugh Henry, who taught at the school in the early 60s and is awaiting sentence for 13 offences that he has admitted against nine boys — six of them Caldicott pupils and three boys from another prep school.

The death of George Hill, Wright's deputy in the 1970s, has almost certainly saved him from facing trial for serious sexual offences against pupils at Caldicott but in recent years a further three teachers, all given jobs at the school by Wright, have been charged with abusing boys between 1972 and 1979.

In 2003, Martin Carson admitted the buggery and indecent assault of two Caldicott pupils; John Addison, 54, pleaded guilty last year to 13 charges of sexually abusing two boys at the school and four at another prep school. Keith Geddes, 71, charged with five sexual offences against four Caldicott boys, was acquitted this year after a retrial.

That, with seeming impunity, five of those six men abused so many boys over so many years at such a prestigious school is explained only in part by the way that boys, staff and parents alike fell under the sway of Wright.

The reality is that at least two teachers were exposed during their time at Caldicott. On each occasion the affair was hushed up, with tacit assistance from the education authorities. In 1963, Henry was found in a dormitory at 2.30am on the bed of a 12-year-old. He left the school and was later questioned by education officials but police were not informed and he was not prosecuted. Fifty years later, aged 82, he will soon be sentenced for sex crimes against that boy and eight others.

Carson, a 26-year-old science teacher, was dismissed in 1973 after the whistle was blown by a matron concerned by the lengthy periods of time spent by

a 12-year-old in his room. She told another teacher. Carson was confronted by that teacher and admitted to being a serial abuser of children.

The education authorities were informed. The teacher later showed Wright a letter that he intended to send, at the request of officials, confirming Carson's confession to the anal rape of two boys aged 11 and 12. The head was outraged. Fearing for his own job, the teacher wrote a statement in November 1973 giving details of what Wright said to him. *The Times* has seen a copy of the statement, which was signed and witnessed.

The teacher wrote: "The Ministry had asked me to confirm that several offences of buggery had taken place. The headmaster, clearly disturbed and annoyed, told me that I had 'got to get out of it — I don't care how you do it; you will have to deny your previous statement and tell lies if necessary. I am not having the school involved.'"

Carson, who is now 67, was banned from teaching for five years but there was no police inquiry. He resumed his teaching career in 1980 at a prep school in Eastbourne, where he was appointed head of pastoral care before moving to a school in southwest London from 1993 until his arrest in 2001.

Back at Caldicott, the scandals of 1963 and 1973 were quietly forgotten.

Wright, who married in 1973, has not been accused of any sexual offence against a pupil since the early 1970s but old habits evidently died hard. As recently as 1980 he was still unable to keep his hands off young boys.

In that year, a man now aged 46, was



Witness Tom Perry: "You look back now and know it shouldn't have happened"

joint head boy with Nick Clegg, whom he remembers as "slightly built, good-looking and very bright". The boys were tennis doubles partners and played in the same rugby team. They said Latin grace at lunch on alternate days before sitting at the top table on either side of the headmaster.

The ex-pupil said: "Peter Wright's hand used to go up and down your legs and his fingers would creep under the rim of your shorts, on your thigh. I clearly remember his hand rubbing my thigh, both over the shorts and on my bare skin."

The man, who has given evidence of being sexually abused by another Caldicott teacher when he was 9, recalls Wright often whispering into his ear, "so close that he'd be nuzzling you — his lips would touch your ear".

"Because of the age you are, you don't question anything. I had no reference in terms of an adult doing that sort of thing to me but I remember wanting to be in his favour. I realise now that I fitted the bill. I was head chorister and fly-half for the 1st XV. And I was slim. I was

hid a dark heart of depravity



Reign of terror Peter Wright a few years after joining Caldicott in 1952. He reinvented it, attracting admiration from staff and parents and creating a respected school that educated Nick Clegg and the cricketer Andrew Strauss, far right



Guilty men clockwise from top left: Peter Wright, convicted of 12 offences against five boys; John Addison, admitted abusing six boys; George Hill, died before he could be charged; Martin Carson, two-year sentence for abuse in 2003; Hugh Henry, 13 offences against nine boys

always going to be one of the favoured ones."

His words hint at Wright's tendency to select one or two boys in each year for favouritism. They were often fair-haired, slim, good-looking and good at sport, usually of the 1st XV rugby team. Those chosen were "first among equals", as one victim described it in court. And they were special. A Caldicott team played at Twickenham in the curtain-raiser for a Varsity match. Players including the Lions stars Barry John and Willie John McBride visited the school to take part in an RFU training film. Boys awarded their rugby colours were the school's young Gods.

Some of those children, each given a pet nickname by Wright, were also made to feel that sex secretly shared with an adult was in some unspoken way connected to membership of the school's elite. It was almost a treat.

One ex-pupil who was not part of that club remembers feeling excluded from "a big secret". So powerful was the spell cast by Wright and other abusers that some victims recall feeling be-

trayed when they discovered that the teacher secretly abusing them was also having sexual contact with other boys.

As adults, they struggled to forgive their childhood selves for seeming in some way complicit in the crimes committed against them. One, a fine rugby player, told the jury that he was unable to accept that the abuse was not his fault: "I never, to my shame, did anything to suggest it shouldn't be happening."

Tom Perry, who has waived his right to anonymity, said that as a child he had "no clue" about sex: "You look back and know it shouldn't have happened, but at the time? You were aware that you were in the most secret of places, with an adult. I was a 12-year-old boy in bed with a 36-year-old man. Shocking as it sounds, it was a privilege."

Mr Perry, 60, who was abused by Wright, and Alistair Rolfe, abused by Carson, were interviewed in 2008 for a Bafta award-winning television documentary, *Chosen*. A follow-up film is in production. Mr Rolfe, 53, describes the school of the 1970s as "morally and spiritually a totally corrupt place".

His abuse began on a camping trip and continued during term-time in Carson's room. In addition to having regular sex with the boy, the teacher took many photographs. Camera in hand, he once asked the child to dress in a choirboy's cassock and surplice. On another occasion, the 12-year-old Rolfe entered Carson's room to find a second pupil there. Both were asked to strip to pose for photographs. They complied.

"We played by the school's rules, which were abusers' rules. You're under an authority delegated to the school by your parents," he said. "It's a perverted authority, but logic says that as a child you're not in a position to remove yourself from that situation. I was an angelic choirboy, so it must have been my fault. I struggled with that guilt for years."

When Mr Rolfe finally spoke to police in 2001 and Carson was arrested, officers found indecent photographs of children at his home. For offences carrying a maximum term of life imprisonment, he was jailed in 2003 for a mere two years.

Sentence was passed by the same judge who a few months later blocked Wright's prosecution and by doing so denied justice to the headmaster's victims for a further ten years.

Caldicott today is a very different school. Recent inspections found that its standards of residential and pastoral care were, respectively, "outstanding" and "excellent".

In a statement, the school said that any allegation of sexual abuse in 2013 would immediately be reported to the local authority's designated child protection officer, who would decide "in conjunction with police what further action should be taken". The safety and welfare of pupils was, it said, "at the heart of everything we do".

"We are deeply saddened that adults in a position of trust and responsibility committed crimes of this nature against children in their care at Caldicott and we applaud the bravery of the victims who came forward to give evidence against Peter Wright and other staff members," the school added. "Although long delayed, we are pleased to see justice done."

*Additional reporting by Tom Knowles

Paedophiles allowed to avoid justice

Continued from page 1

aged 12, who was raped by a teacher that the child would "not be affected" by the abuse and that "in the long run some good" might come of it. The best therapy would be "plenty of healthy sport".

Another pupil, who was joint head boy with Mr Clegg, said of Wright: "You have to understand the power he wielded. He had a huge personality. We were all desperate to be in his good books. School was all about pleasing Peter Wright. It was almost like a personality cult."

The abuse cases, which could not be fully reported until now, have a troubled legal history. The first victim broke decades of silence by contacting police in 2001. More former pupils came forward and, in 2003, Wright was charged with 16 offences against five boys at Caldicott during the 1960s.

A few months later, Judge Roger Connor terminated the prosecution, primarily on the basis that a trial would not be fair because Wright's alleged offences were historical.

For the next eight years Judge Connor's decision was used by prosecutors to explain their refusal to bring new charges when more victims reported abuse at the hands of Wright and other Caldicott teachers.

In 2011 Alison Levitt, QC, principal legal adviser to the Director of Public Prosecutions, decided that Wright should be charged with new offences against five different boys, also from the 1960s. Charges for sex crimes in that decade and in the 1970s were also brought against another three former Caldicott teachers.

When Wright was finally put on trial this year, ten ex-pupils, including the original five complainants, gave evidence of being abused by him. Yet because Judge Connor's "stay of indictment" has not been overturned, jurors were only allowed to return verdicts in relation to the five victims who contacted police from 2004 onwards.

During the past 14 months, the Crown has twice applied in vain to lift the stay. At the first hearing, Judge Joanna Cutts, QC, Wright's 2013 trial judge, made it plain that she disagreed with Judge Connor's decision to block the original prosecution but ruled that she had "no power" to overturn it.

Tom Perry, one of the original five complainants, vowed last night that their fight for justice would continue "until a jury is allowed to decide whether we are telling the truth".

Mr Perry, 60, and fellow ex-pupils are demanding the introduction of a mandatory reporting requirement under which all schools and similar institutions would have a legal obligation to report every known or suspected case of child abuse to their local authority.



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