

At that time as a society our knowledge, understanding and experience of child abuse was quite limited and we did not fully recognise the importance of listening to children. Did Smith's use of corporal punishment alone constitute a criminal offence?

So perhaps Patrick Ross had gone to see Smith and told him that this behaviour must stop forthwith, issuing him with a " yellow card " ! Of course because of Smith's " hero status " I realised that for any court proceedings to succeed, the Police would need to have a " cast iron " case against him - such a popular and powerful figure who had contributed greatly to public life in Rochdale - raising thousands of pounds for many local good causes, who had founded local charities and voluntary organisations, providing care and support to the poor and disadvantaged whether they be children, elderly or handicapped people. He was indeed held in the highest esteem for his tireless work to the community and in promoting Rochdale. So could it be in this context, that the boys at Cambridge House, coming as some did from troubled backgrounds, would not be considered to be credible witnesses? It was certainly a case that one couldn't afford to lose. Years later, on reflection, I wondered whether someone had " leaned " on Patrick Ross - one of Smith's influential friends in high places?

So what could I do now that the Police were not proceeding? Again I did not discuss with anyone lest Smith would learn of it and institute Court proceedings against me for defamation of character assassination. But I was still unhappy with boys continuing to live at Cambridge House whilst Smith was to be involved with the running of the hostel in light of what I knew about him. Fortunately, [RO-A49] left before the end of November and I was greatly relieved when the hostel actually closed at the end of 1965. It reopened soon afterwards under the Management of the Boys and Girls Welfare Society - a reputable Childrens Welfare Organisation with its Head Quarters in Manchester. So the boys were no longer " at risk " , I felt.

I received no further allegations about Smith whilst I was Childrens Officer serving in that capacity until June 1971 when I became Rochdale's first Director of Social Services, a post I held until October 1984 when I took early retirement. In the years that followed there was the saga of Smith's involvement at Knowl View Special School. Smith had played a leading role in establishing this Special School for Maladjusted boys in the 70s, but as it was designated a school and not a residential home the Local Authority Education Department and not the Social Services Dept. was responsible for the education and welfare of the resident boys, so I had no contact or involvement with the school.

So on reflection, I feel that I acted promptly and appropriately at the time in referring the allegations against Smith to the Police - the agency best placed to

undertake further investigations. In the 49 years that have elapsed since then, I have never thought that I could have or should have acted differently or done anything more.

A FOOTNOTE CONCERNING CAMBRIDGE HOUSE

Cambridge House was a private independent hostel for about 15/20 older boys and young workers, not a local authority establishment.

It had been set up in 1962 by Cyril Smith and other Trustees. It had its own management committee of which Cyril Smith was Secretary.

Some of the resident boys worked as apprentices at Smiths Springs, a local company of which Smith was managing Director. I think he had brought some of the boys down from Scotland - from near the Glasgow area.

Not being a Rochdale County Borough Council establishment, Cambridge House was not included on the Childrens Committee's Homes Visiting Sub Committee rota. The Sub Committee, on a monthly basis, visited Council homes, hostels, day nurseries, day care and family support centres throughout the County Borough. The purpose of this Sub-Committee (of members and officers) was to ensure that all establishments were properly equipped and staffed and geared to the welfare interests of residents, etc. It reported back to the next Childrens Committee meeting. I had no responsibility, as the Council's Childrens Officer, for the care regimes at Cambridge House. I was not involved in the appointment, management, deployment, supervision, support, training or performance review of staff. This was because the staff were employed by the Hostel Management Committee and were not Council employees, nor on its payroll. No Council member or officer was represented on Cambridge House Management Committee.

I think Rochdale County Borough Council acting through its Childrens Department, had placed a small number of boys in its care at Cambridge House from the time it opened in 1962. When I received the first intimation of Cyril Smith's " irregular punishments " of resident boys in late October 1965, I think there may have been 3/4 boys at the Hostel who were in Council care. They had all been removed by the end of November 1965.

Financial Assistance to Cambridge House.

I understand that the Council through its Childrens Committee had given financial assistance towards Hostel running costs before I came to Rochdale. I can remember that the Hostel Trustees, through representation by Cyril Smith, again requested support in the Autumn ? of 1965 as it was in financial difficulty, and if not forthcoming, to take over responsibility for the Hostel. The requests were refused