



Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board

Learning from Regional and National SAR Cases

Title of Review: The Independent Safeguarding Review: Lessons Learnt from Events in the Parishes of Stowe and Maids Moreton, 2012-2019

Theme of Review: Physical Abuse, Financial Abuse, Grooming and Exploitation, Psychological Abuse, Discriminatory Abuse

Local Authority: Dioceses of Oxford*

*Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board decided not to undertake a Safeguarding Adults Review in this case and at the time there was a Domestic Homicide Review underway. (From internet searches the DHR does not appear to be publicly available).

Date Published: Finalised May 2020. Published October 2021.

Report Links: [Report Webpage](#); [Learning Briefing](#); [Full Report](#)

Case Summary

This Case Review explores the circumstances highlighted by the trial and conviction of Ben Field, who murdered Peter Farquhar in 2015 and committed fraud against Peter and a neighbour, Anne Moore-Martin. The Review identifies learning to improve safeguarding of potentially vulnerable adults attending church.

Peter was a retired teacher and academic, who had written and published four novels. He was a highly intelligent man. He was an active member of Stowe Church and had strong conservative Christian beliefs. He was homosexual and celibacy was his way of reconciling his beliefs and sexuality. He wanted, and believed he had, an emotionally intimate friendship with Ben. They had a betrothal ceremony in March 2014 to validate their relationship after Ben 'proposed' to Peter.

Anne was a retired headteacher (aged 83), who was reported to have been a friendly neighbour. She had not married and had no children but was close to her niece. She was a member of the local Catholic church. She fell in love with Ben and had a sexual relationship with him.

Both Peter and Anne lived on the same road in the village and owned their houses. Both had lived with and looked after their elderly mothers, who had died, so they lived alone. They were both devout Christians.

Ben is the son of a Baptist Minister. He was an undergraduate and post-graduate at the University of Buckingham. He had worked in various jobs before becoming a care assistant in a local Nursing Home (in the trial it became apparent that he was abusing residents in the home). He defined himself as heterosexual and also had sex with men. In the Court Case he

was described as having a Personality Disorder, which: *'included a lack of empathy, a callous lack of concern for the feelings of others, and an incapacity to experience guilt or to profit from experience...a sense of superiority towards others, the exploitation of others to achieve personal gain, the need to belittle and humiliate others, fixation on fantasies of power and success, intelligence, a need for admiration from others, and a sense of entitlement together with an unwillingness to empathise with the feelings, needs and wishes of others.....very little understanding of (his) own inner world, leading to (his) need to deceive and destroy others.'* He groomed and coerced, and emotionally and psychologically abused through 'gaslighting' both Peter Farquhar and Anne Moore-Martin for considerable financial and material gain, by exploiting their needs for intimacy. He drugged, defrauded and murdered Peter Farquhar. He sexually exploited and defrauded Anne Moore-Martin.

Ben influenced Peter to amend his will which provided Ben with rights to live in Peter's house after his death and he gave Ben expensive gifts and significant amounts of money. In January 2015 Ben started drugging Peter so that he appeared confused and mentally unwell, experienced hallucinations and falls. Ben told people it was due to dementia and alcohol consumption. Doctors investigated but found no sign of dementia. Some people believed Ben's diagnosis due to his previous job in a Nursing Home. Peter was taken to hospital on several occasions due to these symptoms. In October 2015 Peter went into a Nursing Home for a few days respite and recovered considerably. In hindsight that recovery was because Ben was no longer administering drugs.

In November 2015, Peter was found dead in his home by his cleaner with a bottle of whiskey beside him. The Coroner said the cause of death was alcohol toxicity. Ben received £142,000 when the Peter's house was sold in 2016.

In June 2015 Ben wrote love letters and poems to Anne who was Peter's neighbour. This was part of the grooming process. Ben later moved in with Anne. He pretended that he was in a loving relationship with her but was isolating her by preventing her from seeing her family and friends. He was 'gas lighting' her by manipulating her religious beliefs. This activity aimed to influence Anne to give him money and change her will in his favour.

In February 2017 Anne was admitted to hospital following a seizure. She had spoken to a friend about a 'white powder' that she had been given by Ben. The friend was concerned about this incident, raised a safeguarding concern and police were informed.

Ben was prevented from seeing Anne in the Hospital and the police started investigating the allegations regarding Anne. Ben was arrested in March 2017. His connections with Peter Farquhar and concerns about the circumstances of his death led to Peter's body being exhumed in May 2017 and a second post-mortem taking place. This provided evidence that Peter had been drugged. Ben Field was found guilty of murdering Peter Farquhar, defrauding both Peter Farquhar and Anne Moore-Martin, and was sentenced in October 2019.

Key Findings:

More detailed findings are included within the full report. The Seven Minute Briefing highlights the following key themes:

1. The need for emotional intimacy is universal.
2. Volunteers must be supported and monitored.

3. Screening of people exploring ordained ministry.
4. Raising awareness and information sharing.
5. Learning more about complex needs.
6. Supporting Parishioners and Clergy.
7. Inclusivity is the key to a safer church.

Key Findings Relevant to the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board

Thirteen recommendations were made within the report directly to the Diocese and some were directed to the National Church of England. Elements relevant to the wider community have been included below.

Whilst the murder was an extremely unusual event, the grooming and abuse of vulnerable elderly people and rural elderly congregations is not. This case reiterates that loneliness and isolation and a person's need for intimacy is a risk factor linked to abuse and exploitation. Reducing social isolation and vulnerability is a broader community responsibility. This case reinforces the need for maintaining social contact within communities of interest as protective factors, particularly as people age and become house bound. Recognising that older people have needs for emotional intimacy, relationships and to express their sexuality is often not socially acceptable and is a manifestation of the ageism that exists within society. More open acknowledgement of these needs would reduce the potential for predators to take advantage and use this as a means to abuse and defraud older people.

Peter and Anne had unique characteristics linked to sexuality, age and religion. The reviewer found there was a closed culture within the Church including attitudes towards homosexuality. The wider policies of the Church of England regarding homosexual practice and approach to sexuality and relationships put Peter at risk and vulnerable to exploitation. A culture which supported openness and transparency would have better safeguarded Peter. Whilst people continue to feel forced to hide or lie about their sexuality, they can become vulnerable to exploitation. Peter was also of a generation with experience of living in a society where homosexuality was illegal and criminalised for many years. This case review calls for a concerted effort to be made to reduce the stigma of homosexuality within the wider Church of England communion, so that it can provide a safer place for lesbians and gay men to worship, as is its intent.

'Secrecy' is a pervasive negative factor in safeguarding adults, not least because of the emotional impact of abuse on victims, and a 'culture of secrecy' has been identified as a significant inhibiting factor in safeguarding people in Church communities. Raising concerns about safeguarding is not easy in this context, particularly if there is a culture of secrecy and non-disclosure generally regarding homosexuality i.e. 'don't ask don't tell'. A cultural change is required to enable people to express their concerns in a way that is non-judgemental to counteract this culture of secrecy. This would support improvement in safeguarding adults' practice in terms of prevention as well as protection. In the context of safeguarding adults, disclosing concerns as an outcome of respectful curiosity and caring interest, speaking up for someone who is experiencing harm or abuse, should be encouraged.

Safeguarding awareness training is essential, but it needs to be more than familiarity with identifying the signs and symptoms of abuse. Developing the knowledge and skills necessary to build trust and have difficult conversations about potential grooming or scamming might have been helpful in this case.

The Review explored issues about recruitment of volunteers. Ben pursued a 'scam', pretending to be interested in the church and ministry, and deceiving and effectively grooming the Stowe Vicar and congregation by becoming PCC Secretary and Deputy Church Warden. During his trial it became clear that Ben saw ordination as a route to being able to harm more people. This case is a reminder that there needs to be robust background checks and recruitment processes in place. However, it was recognised that this was difficult due to Ben having no previous criminal convictions.

Tragic and traumatic events can have a significant impact on communities and the church can be a central place to help and signpost people to support. This case review illustrates how priests are also vulnerable and can be victims themselves of grooming and abuse. Parish priests are not therapists. However, a focus on developing resilience and self-care should be considered in their training as well as reviewing the provision of mentoring and peer support to maintain the wellbeing of the clergy.

Peter was reported to have changed his will for a second time, removing the specified time period for Ben to live with him to then be able to benefit and have a lifetime interest in his house after his death. He also was reported to have given Ben Field and Martyn Smith (Ben's friend) Lasting Power of Attorney. These decisions appear to have been made shortly after an event where Peter appeared to be hallucinating (due to Ben Field administering him drugs) and was very unwell. It is unclear whether anyone questioned Peter's mental capacity at this time to make these and other decisions. When Peter told the Stowe Vicar he was gifting a car to Ben, she advised him to record this through a solicitor, so there was some awareness of the need to properly record such expensive 'gifts'. However, it is not known whether he did go to see his solicitor, or what his state of mind was when he made the final changes to his will.

There is learning from this case review regarding 'warning bells' when a carer inhibits or hinders relatives and friends from having access to the person they care for. Additionally, there is learning in terms of making referrals when there are concerns, and not seeing this as 'gossip'.

Considerations for TSAB

- The Business Unit recently attended an inter-faith forum and hosted a stall with safeguarding resources, how can we extend these links further, across Tees?
- Can we promote the Safeguarding Champions scheme amongst faith groups which would help to raise awareness of safeguarding, mental capacity and trauma, promote TSAB training, how to recognise abuse/neglect and report Safeguarding Concerns as well as sharing learning from SARs (including this report). In addition to raise awareness of TSAB's Safeguarding Adults Policy template which can be used by groups who may not have a policy in place.
- This case is a reminder for professional curiosity in cases where a person's will is changed or expensive gifts are given to others and to ensure that mental capacity is considered. Professional curiosity could also have helped to seek explanations for a person's behaviour (for example Ben's account that Peter had dementia and was dependent on alcohol was often accepted without challenge). This case is also a reminder to recognise 'warning bells' when a carer inhibits or hinders relatives or friends from having access to the person they care for.

- Social isolation can be a risk factor to abuse and exploitation and therefore highlights the importance of social inclusion, interaction and support within the community.
- This case is a reminder for organisations (including voluntary, community and faith groups) to have open, honest and inclusive cultures where people feel able to report safeguarding concerns and to reduce stigma and discrimination.
- This case is a reminder to have robust background checks in place when recruiting individuals (including voluntary positions).
- This report to be shared with TSAB partners (which includes the voluntary sector) for consideration and dissemination amongst their networks.

Once connections have been made with local faith groups, work can continue to build on those relationships which will help church communities to have a good understanding of safeguarding and to prevent and protect adults from abuse and neglect in future.

Useful Resources:

- [Discriminatory Abuse Briefing for Practitioners](#)
- [Safeguarding Leaflets and Posters \(including Predatory Marriage\)](#)
- [Safeguarding Champions Scheme](#)
- [Find Support in Your Area](#)
- [TSAB Training and How to Report Abuse](#)
- [Church of England Safeguarding Information](#)
- [Research In Practice Podcast - Discriminatory Abuse](#)
- [LGA - Discriminatory Abuse Self-Assessment Tool Safeguarding Adults](#)