

CHAPTER 7 – RUMOURS, STORIES AND JOKES

Introduction

- 7.1 The Savile investigation invited information from a wide range of people who had worked at the BBC. We encouraged current and former employees to contact us with any information they had about Savile, including rumours and stories they had heard. This kind of material was important, not in order to establish the truth of what Savile did or to establish actual knowledge of that on the part of the BBC (for which purposes it would be useless), but in order to get some idea of whether there may have been any general view that Savile's sexual conduct was in any way unlawful or inappropriate and, if so, in what respects. We were also anxious to establish at what level or levels in the BBC such rumours and stories circulated.
- 7.2 The number of witnesses we saw and their evidence on this question means that we were not, in fact, able either to draw any statistical conclusions from the evidence or to come to any clear conclusion that any general belief existed. In summary, we took statements or heard evidence from 117 witnesses who had worked at the BBC and who had heard rumours and stories about Savile's sexual conduct. 76 of them had worked with him and 41 of them had not. On the other hand, we heard from 180 witnesses who worked at the BBC but did not hear rumours about Savile's sexual conduct. Of those, 90 worked with him and 90 did not. Many of the witnesses worked for the BBC for a long time, often for decades.
- 7.3 I must stress that this group of witnesses was not selected as representative of a cross-section of BBC people. The witnesses were self-selected. We invited people who had anything they wished to say about Savile to contact us. In addition of course, there were a large number of people who

were invited to give evidence on specific issues. They were asked whether they had heard rumours about Savile's sexual conduct. All one can say from these numbers is that, while a lot of people did hear rumours or stories, a lot did not, including some who were at the BBC for a long time and might have been expected to.

- 7.4 Nor is it possible to draw any conclusions as to why some people heard rumours and stories and others did not. I had thought at one stage that those who heard rumours might have been frequent visitors to the various BBC Clubs, but that does not seem to have been the case.

Rumours

- 7.5 The rumour most generally heard in the BBC was that Savile was sexually attracted to young girls. Only a few heard that he was attracted to young boys; that is very young boys under the age of say 10 or 12. When asked what was understood by the expression 'young girls', roughly 17% of the group understood him to be interested in pre-pubertal girls under the age of 13. About 26% thought that he was interested in pubertal but underage girls in the 13 – 15 age range, and about 22% thought he was interested in the 16-17 age group. There were some who had not applied their minds to what was meant by the term 'young girls' but when pressed said that they thought they had been told that Savile liked teenage girls but not necessarily underage. Some witnesses told me that they assumed that he was gay because he was a bachelor who never appeared to have a regular girlfriend. Some had the impression that he was asexual. Only one witness who gave evidence to the Savile investigation heard a rumour that he was bisexual, which in fact he was. Also one witness to the Hall investigation had heard rumours that Savile might be bisexual.

- 7.6 Most of those who heard rumours about Savile's sexual life did not appear to have been shocked by them. Many seem to have regarded them as amusing. No one to whom we spoke ever thought that he or she ought to report such a rumour to a person in authority. Most people who had heard the rumours assumed that other people had also heard them. Some also assumed that the BBC management must be aware of Savile's reputation and did not think it was for them to do anything about it.
- 7.7 There were a number of specific rumours. Perhaps the most surprising was that several people (about five or six) heard that Savile was a necrophiliac. Some heard that he was a paedophile; for example, A25 heard a rumour that he was a "paedo". She told a female editor who appeared to be aware of the rumour but advised A25 not to "rock the boat". Others heard that he liked to have sex with people with disabilities. Some heard that he took girls to his camper-van for sex. Others heard that he took girls to his flat near Regent's Park. One thought that the police were interested in him as a paedophile.
- 7.8 One very strange rumour was heard by Elizabeth McDowell, who worked for the BBC for many years, mainly in the Continuing Education Department. While on attachment, she worked for a time in Television Centre. She recalled an occasion when having a drink with colleagues who worked in Light Entertainment, being told that "*Mothers take their daughters to Jimmy Savile... for him to sort them out*". It was clear that the others present had heard this before and that they were talking about something sexual. They spoke about this in a matter of fact way, not jokingly but not apparently concerned either. Ms McDowell did not report this conversation, as it was only rumour. This rumour struck me as so odd that I would

have been tempted to think that Ms McDowell had either misheard or mis-remembered the occasion, were it not for the fact that there is evidence that Savile himself said something similar to C25 when he took her out for supper: See paragraph 5.93.

7.9 An interesting point was made by Dr Peter Scott-Morgan, who, as a consultant, carried out some research for the BBC in 2003 as part of the initiative known as *Making it Happen* instigated by Greg Dyke, then the Director-General. In the course of his work, Dr Scott-Morgan spoke to a large number of BBC staff. He was trying to establish what were the unwritten rules which governed behaviour within the BBC. One idea which he was exploring was that there might be a group of people, 'the Talent', who were so important to the BBC that their behaviour was outside any real control. They were too important to the BBC for them to be required to observe the rules and values which applied to everyone else. When asking members of staff about this concept, Dr Scott-Morgan would use Savile as an example of a member of the Talent who, in the past, had been able to get away with unacceptable behaviour – in his case sexual misconduct with young girls. He had been previously unaware of the rumours about Savile but picked them up during the course of his interviews with BBC staff. Dr Scott-Morgan found that a significant proportion of the people to whom he mentioned Savile immediately showed that they understood the point. In other words, the suggestion that Savile had got away with inappropriate sexual behaviour was not news to them. Some would respond by mentioning their own awareness of the rumours about Savile, such as that he was thought to be a necrophiliac.

Specific Examples of Who Heard What

- 7.10 It would not be appropriate for me to set out all the evidence of who heard what about Savile's sexual habits. However, I think it important to mention a few particular names, if only to demonstrate that these rumours were heard by some people who were fairly senior in the BBC or, if not actually part of management structure, were of some standing within the BBC. I also include the evidence of some senior people who told me that they did not hear any rumours about Savile.
- 7.11 Lord Birt, former Director-General, told us that he never heard any rumours at all about Savile. He added that he was not aware that any of the other former senior BBC staff members to whom he had spoken since the Savile scandal had broken had heard such rumours either. None of the former Directors-General whom we interviewed had heard rumours about Savile's sexual life.
- 7.12 Dame Esther Rantzen heard that Savile was sexually interested in young girls. She first heard a rumour about him in the early 1970s from a researcher who had come into the BBC from a job in Fleet Street. She heard that the people making a programme about Savile in the ITV series *This is Your Life* had wished to include the parents of a young girl with heart problems for whom Savile had provided financial help. The parents refused to allow that and she said that *"the implication was that there was another side to it which was a darker side"*. But, she said, this rumour was one of many which *"swirled around"* at that time in respect of all sorts of famous people. Dame Esther said that she was told by a sound editor of *Savile's Travels* that Savile had recorded himself having sex with nurses at Stoke Mandeville; there was no suggestion that the nurses were unwilling. Her personal experience of him was that he was repulsive in the way he kissed or, rather, licked her

hand and up her arm when they met. On the ITV *Exposure* programme broadcast in October 2012, Ms Rantzen (as she then was) said “We all blocked our ears to the gossip... I feel that we, in television – in his world, in some way colluded with him as a child abuser, because I now believe that’s what he was”.

- 7.13 Louis Theroux, the documentary film-maker, heard rumours, well before he joined the BBC in 1998, that Savile was a paedophile and a child molester. Later, he also heard rumours that Savile was a necrophiliac and had a sexual interest in people with disabilities.
- 7.14 Lord Grade, who was Controller of BBC One in the mid-1980s, told *Channel 4 News* that he had “fleetingly” heard rumours about Savile but never heard anything that he thought required investigation.
- 7.15 John Helm, who was eventually the Head of Outside Broadcasts, said that there were rumours about whether Savile was bisexual or perhaps even asexual.
- 7.16 Sir Terry Wogan (who died in January 2016) is reported to have described a conversation about Savile with the well-known columnist Jean Rook, in which she asked “When are they going to expose him?” And he replied “That’s your job”. I assume that he meant that it was the job of the press, not of Ms Rook personally. Sir Terry is reported to have commented to the press “And nobody ever did (expose him), even though everyone had heard the rumours”. We attempted to speak to Sir Terry in 2014 but unfortunately he said that he was too busy working on *Children In Need*. We then asked him via email whether he could confirm the accuracy of the press report, to which he replied that Ms Rook had said “*when is somebody going to tell the truth about him?*” (or something along those

lines) but that his recollection was that he had not replied to her directly but had only thought to himself "Surely that's your job". He added that he knew nothing about Savile other than vague rumour, which, he said tended to be about Savile's sharp commercial practices and shameless use of his charity work for his own greater glory, rather than his sexual behaviour.

7.17 Andy Kershaw, who became a BBC Radio 1 disc jockey and presenter, first heard rumours and stories about Savile while at Leeds University in the early 1980s. As Entertainment Secretary, he came to know people involved in the entertainment business in the city. He heard from many sources that, in the 1950s and 1960s, Savile had a reputation as a gangland enforcer and would personally use physical violence against anyone who upset those who ran the nightclubs or dancehalls in Leeds. When Mr Kershaw arrived at the BBC, he was advised by John Walters, who had in the past produced programmes with Savile, to steer clear of Savile because he was "*a bad lot*" and "*a nasty piece of work*". Mr Kershaw found that that was so. He heard stories relating to Savile's sexual interest in underage girls; for example it was said that he had sex with young teenage girls in his camper-van. He never heard any rumours that Savile was interested in young children, either boys or girls, only teenage girls. Mr Kershaw added that these rumours had been rife throughout the entertainment industry and were not limited to the BBC. He believed that the press were also aware of them.

7.18 Liz Kershaw, the BBC Radio 1 disc jockey and presenter (and sister of Andy Kershaw) heard stories that Savile had sex with teenage girls. She heard a story about Savile having sex in his caravan while his production staff were outside.

- 7.19 David Treadway, while Chief Assistant BBC Radio 2 in the early 1980s, heard rumours that Savile liked sex with young girls (he thought that meant girls in their mid to late teens).
- 7.20 Derek Chinnery, who was Head of BBC Radio 1 in the 1970s and became Controller of Radio 1 in late 1978, accepted when he spoke to the Savile investigation that he must have been aware in the early 1970s that there were rumours about Savile's interest in girls, although he has no personal recollection of this. Mr Chinnery died in March 2015. I was told by Doreen Davies, an executive producer in BBC Radio 1, who attended a meeting between Mr Chinnery and Savile probably in 1973, that Mr Chinnery asked Savile about rumours that he had young girls staying in his London flat. Ms Davies said that Savile had agreed that that was so but had said that he invited the girls to come and stay in sleeping bags on his lounge floor. They would be offered tea in the morning and would then leave. Ms Davies said that Mr Chinnery had accepted this explanation.
- 7.21 Johnny Beerling, eventually Controller of BBC Radio 1, heard that Savile liked young girls but did not hear that these were underage. He said that Savile used to say that the reason he wrote a column for *The People* (which he did for many years) was because "*These people - they don't shit on their own, John, so if I write for The People, they will never write anything nasty about me*".
- 7.22 Richard Wilson joined the BBC in 1991 and left in 1996 as a senior producer. He heard rumours that "*Jimmy Savile fucks kids*".
- 7.23 Jeff Simpson, a press officer in the 1980s and 1990s, heard that Savile had sex with young girls and also girls who were in hospital. He thought that the girls were "*young*" but did not know how young. He heard a story that Savile had been

having sex with a young girl in the camper-van while the producer of *Savile's Travels* was driving it. The producer, Ted Beston, denies the truth of that rumour. Mr Simpson also heard that Savile would invite girls back to his flat.

- 7.24 Pete Murray, the disc jockey and presenter, said that there were general rumours in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s that Savile had a sexual predilection for pubescent girls.
- 7.25 Alan Monahan, who eventually became Chief Publicity Officer for Radio, recalled that the disc jockeys of BBC Radio 1 had told him that Savile had a predilection for young girls.
- 7.26 Roger Cook, the investigative journalist, heard rumours about Savile being sexually interested in "*young and old, able-bodied and otherwise*". In the spring of 1980, he received two anonymous communications at Broadcasting House, one a letter, the other a telephone call alleging that Savile abused patients at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. He also heard a version of the story about a lady bringing a cake she had baked as a present for Savile to thank him "*for all [he'd] done for the youth of this country*": see the 'Stories' section below.
- 7.27 Brian Clifford, who was Head of Information Services from 1988 until the early 1990s, said that there were rumours that Savile invited guests to his camper-van after *Top of the Pops* but did not hear that these guests were underage girls.
- 7.28 Derek Wiseman, who became a project manager in the Studio Planning Department and worked at the BBC from 1969 until 1994, heard rumours about Savile being a womaniser and that maybe he took advantage of the 'groupies' who followed him around. But Mr Wiseman said that no one would have thought that the young people might have been underage. He said that there was a perception at that time that the young girls were

chasing the men – the pop stars and their associates – and that they were sexually available.

- 7.29 Nicky Campbell, the radio disc jockey and television presenter, heard rumours that Savile was a necrophiliac but thought it was utterly incredible and regarded it as an urban myth. His personal impression was that Savile was sexless.
- 7.30 Mike Read, the radio disc jockey and presenter, heard talk about “*Jimmy and his young ladies*” whilst working for BBC Radio 1 but he never gave any thought to what age the expression “*young ladies*” implied.
- 7.31 Ed Stewart, who died recently, was a radio disc jockey and presenter. He was not interviewed by the Savile investigation but was reported as having told *The Sun* that the *Top of the Pops* hosts used to warn each other not to go to Savile’s parties because “there were girls of all ages there and you couldn’t be sure how young they were”.
- 7.32 Mark Lawson, the journalist, broadcaster and author heard rumours about Savile before he joined the BBC and afterwards. Before joining the BBC, Mr Lawson worked for various newspapers. He told the Savile investigation that it was common knowledge in that world in the 1980s that Savile was interested in underage girls and that he was a ‘groper’. While at the BBC, he heard it said that that Savile was difficult to work with, was a ‘groper’ of females (over the age of consent) and that he was a paedophile.
- 7.33 Andrew Neil, who made a Channel 4 programme (*Is this your Life?*) with Savile in 1995, said that, long before then, he had heard talk in Fleet Street that Savile was sexually interested in young girls, although the age of the girls was never exactly specified. The gossip was that the girls were underage; they were the kind of girls you might see on *Top of the Pops*. There

was a minority view that it was much worse than that; his interest was in children. But no one was ever able to produce any evidence to take the story forward.

- 7.34 It is only fair to mention that some people who one might have expected would hear rumours did not. One such example is Peter Rosier, who was for some years the Head of the Information Division and later the Head of Corporate Affairs and Media Relations.

Stories and Urban Myths

- 7.35 I have received evidence from several witnesses who had heard two similar stories about Savile. I have come to regard these two stories as urban myths, mainly because, although the background facts are slightly different, the punch line is the same. The first is called the 'marmalade story'. The tale is that Savile was living in his camper-van whilst recording one of his shows on location. One afternoon, an elderly lady approached the van and found a member of the production team sitting outside. She asked to speak to Savile but was informed that he was not there (or, depending on the version of the story, was busy). In fact, Savile was inside the van with a young girl and it was apparent, from the movement of the van, that the two were having sexual intercourse. The old lady did not realise that. She handed the producer a jar of jam or marmalade, saying that she had brought it for Savile to thank him for all the good work he did for young people.
- 7.36 There was a variant on this story. Roger Cook was told a similar story by a freelance cameraman who claimed to have seen this incident for himself. In this version, the lady knocked on the door of the caravan and, after a while, Savile appeared in person, looking dishevelled. The lady handed over not a jar

of marmalade but a cake she had made. The punchline was the same.

7.37 Another story, which has a similar punchline, was told to me by Mr Simpson. He said that he had heard a story that the producer of *Savile's Travels* had been driving Savile's camper-van while Savile was having sex with a girl in the back. They were driving to a civic reception. On the outskirts of the town, the van stopped and the girl got out. The van drove on a short distance and Savile stepped out of the van to be greeted by the Mayoress who welcomed him and thanked him for all the good work he did for children. As I have already said, the producer in question, Mr Beston, denies the truth of that variant of the story.

7.38 Mr Simpson also told me that Mr Read had told him that whenever he came out of Broadcasting House during the school holidays there would be a gaggle of young girls on the pavement. Sometimes, they would ask him when he was "*coming up to Jimmy's*". Mr Read understood that Savile had invited them to his flat, giving them the impression that he (Mr Read) was also going to be there. Mr Read had no intention of going and told them so. This suggests that Savile was using Mr Read as bait. Mr Read has confirmed that this story is true. He said that he would not even have known where Savile lived and he believed he had said as much in his response to the girls.

7.39 Another story was recounted to me by David Simmons who worked at the BBC between 1970 and 1979. An acquaintance of his had told him that he had been to a 'gig' and a young girl had said that she was going to marry Savile. When she was asked how that could possibly be, she had said "*well, after what happened last night, he's got to marry me*". Mr Simmons stressed that this was gossip and he did not know if it was true.

7.40 As I have said, the story which came from Mr Read is true. The marmalade or jam or cake stories seem to have their origin in an incident which was described to me by Mr Beston, who for many years was Savile's BBC Radio 1 producer. I set out his account at paragraph 11.73. It appears that the story which went the rounds has been embellished to some extent. The interesting thing is that the people hearing these stories seem to have been amused and were neither surprised nor outraged. That does not mean that they approved of the behaviour described.

Jokes – Black Humour

7.41 As I have just observed, the fact that a story is greeted with laughter does not mean that the laughing listener approves of the conduct described. The same is true of the jokes which I am about to relate. They might properly be described as black humour.

7.42 As well as telling me that a well-known joke about what Savile and Margaret Thatcher had in common, which did the rounds in late 2012, soon after the Savile scandal broke, had actually been around 20 years earlier, Mark Lawson told me that, when his children were young, he and his wife sometimes had difficulty finding a baby sitter. When they had had a few refusals, it was a family joke that they would say "*Looks like we're down to Jimmy Savile or Michael Jackson*".

7.43 I was told that people called Savile's camper-van his 'fuck truck' or his 'shaggin' wagon'. Paul Hughes-Smith said that while he was working on *Top of the Pops*, people would say that Savile wore track suits because they were quick to get off. One witness said that *Top of the Pops* was known as "*Jimmy Savile's fodder night*".

7.44 Ian McGuinness, who was a staff relations officer at Thames Television in the 1970s, said that every Christmas some amusing tapes were made at Television Centre. These consisted mainly of film clips where something had gone wrong (a 'howler') and there had to be a retake. The material was circulated among the staff for amusement. However, Mr McGuinness remembers that one year, either 1975 or 1976, there was a film of a short sketch in which a man representing Savile was sitting on the *Jim'll Fix It* chair with another man, dressed up as a little girl, sitting on his knee. The man acting the part of Savile was making salacious comments about the girl. The announcement made on the film was "Jimmy So Vile".

Conclusion

7.45 I have no doubt that rumours, stories and jokes relating to Savile's sexual conduct and habits circulated in the BBC over a long period of time. However, they were not limited to the BBC. In particular, it seems fairly clear that rumours and stories about Savile also circulated in press circles. In Chapter 6, I have mentioned the ways in which Lynn Barber and Louis Theroux questioned Savile (in 1990 and 2000 respectively). It is clear that they were aware of rumours about Savile's sexual interest in young girls. Mr Theroux was aware of rumours that Savile was a paedophile. I have mentioned a conversation which reportedly took place between Jean Rook and Sir Terry Wogan, the basis of which seems to be that Ms Rook had heard rumours about Savile. In Chapter 11 I describe how, in 1973, Rodney Collins, a BBC publicity officer, made enquiries of some journalist friends as to what was known about Savile in Fleet Street. The answer was that there were rumours about him but no hard evidence. In addition, Andrew Neil gave similar evidence.

- 7.46 I accept that there were many people in the BBC who did not hear any rumours, stories or jokes, including some who worked with Savile and might have been expected to hear them. One of the things I have noticed is that people who had heard the rumours assumed that everyone else had heard them. That is a perfectly understandable attitude but it is not correct. They also thought that, if they had heard the rumours (and everyone else had too) it could not be up to them to do anything about the situation. Some also assumed that BBC management must be aware of Savile's reputation. However, more senior people would not necessarily know about rumours; as one would expect, more senior people do not seem to have had the same exposure to gossip and rumour as those in less senior positions. The BBC is a hierarchical organisation and, as a general rule, I think people tended to socialise with colleagues at their own level of the hierarchy.
- 7.47 It is clear that a number of BBC staff had heard rumours, stories or jokes about Savile to the effect that, in some way, his sexual conduct was inappropriate if not actually unlawful. The most common rumour seems to have been that Savile was sexually attracted to young girls in their teenage years.
- 7.48 In general, it seems to me that the people who heard these rumours, stories and jokes were not particularly shocked by them. It may well be that the more serious rumours were not regarded as credible and the less serious ones did not make any one feel that 'something ought to be done'.
- 7.49 It is important to end this chapter on a note of caution. As I explain at paragraph 7.3 all one can say from the evidence is that, while a lot of people did hear rumours or stories about Savile, a lot did not. Members of senior management generally did not hear rumours. In addition, as I state in paragraph 23 of my Conclusions, there are those who readily (and, frequently,

publicly) make the jump from awareness of rumours on the part of any BBC employee or freelancer to awareness on the part of BBC senior management and, as a consequence, the BBC itself. However, I approach this issue (as I must) as a judge, applying reasoned principles and reaching conclusions on the basis of the evidence I have heard and the inferences which I can properly draw.