

## Cover-up that let the head of Nick Clegg's prep school get away with abusing boys for decades

- Peter Wright molested children at Caldicott Prep School in 1950s and 60s
- Convicted at Amersham Crown Court of a string of historic sex offences
- Three former teachers previously convicted of child sex offences at school
- Former England cricket captain Andrew Strauss was a pupil at school

By [Paul Bracchi](#)

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**Scandal: Peter Wright, pictured in the 1960s, has been found guilty of 12 counts of abusing children aged between eight and 13**

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Roland Peter Wright still lives in a cottage overlooking the playing fields at Caldicott School.

The person who answers the front door is a bespectacled old man with a walking stick and hearing aid.

'Go away,' he snaps. This is the same man who, in his heyday, was the charismatic and distinguished

headmaster of the blue-chip Buckinghamshire prep school.

One of the (now) famous former pupils under his charge was Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister. He was head boy. Andrew Strauss, the former England cricket captain, was a pupil in the late Eighties.

Indeed, those who attend £20,000-a-year Caldicott (motto: 'Per Victorium Ad Glorium' or 'Through victory to glory') regularly win scholarships to Eton, Harrow, Marlborough and Wellington.

Many Old Caldicottians occupy important positions at the heart of the British establishment.

It was Wright — known by his middle name Peter — who is credited with turning Caldicott into the renowned educational establishment it is today.

'The finest prep school headmaster of his generation' is how a fellow head at another public school once described Wright, who taught at Caldicott for 41 years and was head from 1968 until 1993.

But the opposite was true. For Wright, now 83, was at the centre of a paedophile ring at the school for more than two decades it emerged this week when he was convicted at Amersham Crown Court of a string of historic sex offences. He will be sentenced in February.

In the meantime, he has returned to his home — where he has lived all his adult life — just 30 yards from the school grounds in the village of Farnham Royal.

'It is obviously far from ideal that he should be living so close to the school. But given it is a private house and he owns it, we cannot stop him living there,' says a senior member of staff at Caldicott.

'We will be discussing the situation with the authorities after sentencing.'

Wright is the third former teacher recently convicted of child abuse at the school in the Sixties and Seventies. A fourth died before he could be charged and a fifth was acquitted earlier this year after a retrial.

Boys were sexually assaulted on an almost daily basis in their beds, baths, teachers' bedrooms and on school trips.

In all, more than 30 pupils — that we know of — aged between eight and 13 were molested.

One victim, who was joint head boy with Mr Clegg, told how he was frequently touched improperly by the headmaster at mealtimes.

Wright, he said, would sit at the head of the 'top table', with him on one side and a 13-year-old Nick Clegg ('Slightly built, good-looking and very bright') on the other.



**Wright would wake pupils in the middle of the night and take them to his bedsit where they would be abused**

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Mr Clegg was quick to quash any speculation that he might have known about the scandal.

‘These reports will disturb everyone, but most especially those, like myself, who were pupils at the school and were entirely unaware that such abuse was taking place,’ he said after Wright was found guilty.

But how many people of influence, then and now, did know about the allegations concerning Peter Wright and his cronies but stayed silent?

The activities of Wright and his accomplices certainly aroused suspicion.

The boys themselves did not always share their experiences out of fear or misplaced embarrassment and shame.

But the suspicions were known in local Buckinghamshire society, which included many of the aspirational, fee-paying parents who sent their children to Caldicott and, in the process, gained ‘instant access to the equivalent of an exclusive private members club’, to borrow the words of one victim we spoke to this week

Some in this gilded social circle simply turned a blind eye to the rumours about the ‘handsome headmaster’s’ unhealthy predilections.

Apart from anything else, the school provided parents with excellent ‘networking opportunities’, as another contemporary from those days put it.

Back then Britain was a very different place, with the horrific revelations about Jimmy Savile many years in the future.

But this does not fully explain how these events, which blighted so many young lives, were allowed to continue unabated for so long.

It was in 2003 that Peter Wright first faced the courts. He was charged with 16 offences against five boys at Caldicott during the Sixties.

At a pre-trial hearing, however, his defence team argued that putting him in the dock would ‘resurrect ghosts of the past that are best left undisturbed’.

Judge Roger Connor, who presided over the case, blocked the prosecution on several grounds, including that



it would not be fair because Wright's alleged crimes were historical and a deterioration in his health 'would have made it very difficult for him to give a clear account of himself'.

The victims, who came forward after decades of silence, are now questioning whether Judge Connor should have declared an interest.

Why? Because they claim he knew socially the then chairman of the board of governors at Caldicott: fellow judge, Lord Justice Scott Baker.

The two judges, both retired, live just down the road from each other in Buckinghamshire. Both are members and past presidents of neighbouring Beaconsfield and Denham golf clubs, which play each other in 'derby' contests.

Speaking at his home, Judge Connor, now a Deputy Lieutenant for Buckinghamshire, said: 'Of course I know Lord Justice Baker, but we are not friends.'

I was aware of his position on the board of governors at the school [he was chairman for nearly 14 years until 2005], but that had nothing to do with my decision.'

What's more, he said, he stood by it.

Nevertheless, the ruling added to his victims' sense of betrayal and had far-reaching consequences; it meant Wright escaped justice for most of the next decade.





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Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg who was a pupil at Caldicott school and, right, Peter Wright today

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Judge Connor's original ruling prompted the Crown Prosecution Service to reject all other attempts to bring charges against him, a policy that changed only in 2011 when the Director of Public Prosecutions decided Wright should be tried for offences against five boys from the same era.

Remember that Wright, aged 73, was considered too frail to go on trial — but Wright, aged 83, was not.

At the start of the former head's trial last month, the jury was asked to see the defendant not as he is now, but as the dashing young teacher he was, someone who swept into a run-down post-war prep school and reinvigorated it, attracting admiration from parents.

It is perhaps the key to understanding this story.

Wright taught French and was in charge of sport. He introduced rugby to the school, coaching the 1st XV. He drove an E-type Jaguar.

Caldicott, which sits on a hill above Farnham Royal, became the centre of the local community. There was a programme of social events that started with the New Parents' Supper that continues to this day. Bonfire Night and the school fete were other highlights.

'Peter Wright was a very urbane, charming, good-looking, dashing sort of chap,' said Tom Perry, 60, a retired businessman and one of the five former pupils whose 'allegations' were considered too 'historical' to allow into court by Judge Connor.

'The mothers absolutely adored him. But, periodically, rumours would sweep the car park on the school run that he was more interested in their sons, not them.'

His reputation was also common knowledge, it seems, at other schools that played sport against Caldicott. The truth behind the gossip was revealed in chilling detail at Wright's five-week trial, which went largely unreported.



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**Old boy: Former England cricket captain Andrew Strauss was a pupil at Caldicott in the 1980s**

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At one time he had a bedsit near the dormitories. Boys would be invited there in the evenings, often after rugby matches, to watch popular TV shows such as Top Of The Pops in their pyjamas or dressing gowns.

‘Occasionally, we would be allowed to take little sips of Johnnie Walker Red Label whisky,’ said one former pupil.

‘We would all go back to our dormitories, and long after everyone had gone to sleep, including myself, Mr Wright would come in, wake me up and tell me to come back to his room.

‘He would shake my shoulder and say: “Shhh — follow me.”’

Another victim, a talented rugby player, explained why he didn’t report Mr Wright.

‘He had strong links with my family and I was aware it would cause an awful lot of disturbance and upset to my relatives.’

A troubling amount of disturbing information about Caldicott was also known to the authorities.

Nothing epitomises the culture of official inertia and negligence more than the case of Martin Carson, a 26-year-old science teacher and paedophile appointed by Wright.

Carson was dismissed in 1973, but only because a matron, concerned by the lengthy amount of time spent by a 12-year-old in his room, raised the alarm.

The education authorities were informed and Carson 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. He was arrested in 2001.

Carson, who is now 67, admitted two offences of buggery and seven indecent assaults against two Caldicott pupils. In 2003 he was jailed for two years.

One of the boys he abused is the now married father-of-two Alastair Rolfe, head of marketing for a consultancy firm.

'The two-year sentence was laughable for what he did,' said Mr Rolfe, who has waived his legal right to anonymity. 'He was out in a year. I know the police were very disappointed by the sentence.'

The maximum sentence for buggery of a child under the age of 16 is life imprisonment.

That two-year sentence was handed down by Judge Roger Connor, the same judge who, months later, would 'stay' the case against Peter Wright.

Ian McFadyen was a contemporary of Nick Clegg.

His parents, from working-class backgrounds, hoped they were giving their son the best start in life by sending him to Caldicott.

Instead, he was repeatedly raped by George Hill, the school's deputy headmaster, who later took his own life.

Mr McFadyen's life fell apart when he left Caldicott. 'I went to the police, but they didn't want to know,' he said. 'It was all being swept under the carpet.'

By his 20s, he was a homeless drug addict, sleeping rough, a downward spiral that continued into his 30s. One Christmas morning he remembers waking up in a sleeping bag in Princes Street in Edinburgh.

Since then Mr McFadyen has worked as a homelessness and addiction counsellor. He is married and lives on the outskirts of Edinburgh.

Caldicott today bears no resemblance to the school you have just read about. Its standards of residential and pastoral care are 'outstanding' and 'excellent', according to recent inspections.

'We put the safety and welfare of our pupils at the heart of everything we do,' the school said in a statement.

'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 his staff.'

But many might think that the most shocking aspect of this case was the fact that Roland Peter Wright got away with it for so long when so many people were aware of the allegations about him.

- **Additional reporting: TIM STEWART and RICHARD MARSDEN.**



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