

= Murder of Suzanne Capper =

The murder of Suzanne Capper was committed in Greater Manchester , England in December 1992 . Sixteen @-@ year @-@ old Suzanne Jane Capper died in Withington Hospital on 18 December 1992 , from multiple organ failure arising from eighty percent burns after she was deliberately set on fire on 14 December . Before her death , Capper related that she had previously been kidnapped and kept prisoner for seven days at a house in Moston , Manchester , where she was beaten and tortured . She was taken from the house by car , driven into the countryside and forced out of the car virtually naked into a wood at Werneth Low where petrol was poured over her and she was set alight . The torture and murder arose from the " avenging [of] trivial grievances : a sexual insult , infection with pubic lice and the loss of a pink duffle coat . "

Detectives conducting the inquiry said that " for sheer mindless brutality " the crime ranked alongside the torture inflicted on children by the Moors murderers . The case went to trial in November 1993 , but received " comparatively little publicity " as it coincided with the trial of Robert Thompson and Jon Venables for the murder of James Bulger . On 17 December 1993 , Jean Powell , aged 26 , her ex @-@ husband Glyn Powell , aged 29 , and Bernadette McNeilly , aged 24 , were sentenced to life imprisonment for their parts in the murder . Jeffrey Leigh , aged 27 , was jailed for twelve years for false imprisonment . Jean Powell 's brother Clifford Pook , aged 18 , was sentenced to fifteen years in a Young Offenders ' Institution for false imprisonment and conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm . Anthony Michael Dudson , who was 16 years old at the time of the murder , was also found guilty of murder and sentenced to be detained at Her Majesty 's pleasure under section 53 (1) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 .

= = Background = =

Capper , described as " a gentle and easily influenced girl , " had been babysitting for Jean Powell since she was ten years old . In 1990 she had spent time in the care of the local authority after her mother , Elizabeth Capper , and her stepfather separated , after which Suzanne and her older sister Michelle stayed with their stepfather . Around this time Capper began to truant from Moston Brook High School , and her attendance during the final two years of schooling was described as " erratic . " Capper increasingly spent her time at Powell 's house . Powell lived at 97 Langworthy Road , Moston , a small Victorian terraced house , where she also dealt drugs and was involved with the handling of stolen motor vehicles . Michelle Capper had briefly lived with Powell , but moved out in August 1992 because she did not like the " evil new friends " Powell was associating with , particularly Bernadette McNeilly , who had recently moved in three doors away at number 91 . McNeilly , who had three children , subsequently moved in with Powell and her three children , where the two shared a bed in the downstairs dining room because the bedrooms were " full of children . " Capper continued to stay regularly even though Powell and McNeilly frequently bullied her . Her sister said : " It was not that she was scared of them , it 's just that she would do anything for them . She pampered their every whim . "

Powell was separated from her husband Glyn , although the two remained friendly and he would visit regularly from his nearby home . McNeilly 's boyfriend was 16 @-@ year @-@ old Anthony Dudson , who was also having sexual intercourse with Powell . Powell was sexually involved with Jeffrey Leigh , a regular visitor to the house as a purchaser of amphetamines . Another frequent visitor to the house was Powell 's younger brother , Clifford Pook .

= = Events leading to murder = =

= = = Kidnap = = =

At trial , it emerged that Capper had been kidnapped for " insubstantial , even trivial " reasons : Jean Powell claimed that Capper had tried to persuade her to sleep with a man for money ; McNeilly

and Dudson had contracted pubic lice which they believed were from a bed that Capper had also used ; and McNeilly believed that she had taken a pink duffle coat that belonged to her . In November 1992 , when Dudson had contracted pubic lice and had his pubic hair shaved , McNeilly told him she thought that he had caught them from Capper . Dudson believed otherwise , and said later : " I told Jean [Powell] I thought I got them from Bernie [McNeilly] . " On 7 December 1992 , Capper was lured to Jean Powell 's home , where Glyn Powell and Dudson were already waiting . She was grabbed as soon as she arrived and held down while Glyn Powell shaved her head and her eyebrows and then made her clean up the hair and place it in a bin . Then he placed a plastic bag over her head and walked round her while hitting her on the head . She was then kicked by Jean Powell and McNeilly as she lay curled up on the floor and both women took turns beating her with a three @-@ foot @-@ long wooden instrument and a belt . She was then taken to the bathroom and forced to shave off her own pubic hair as " ritual humiliation in revenge for having caused , as they claimed , Dudson and McNeilly themselves to be shaved . " Afterwards Jean Powell locked her in a cupboard overnight . The following morning she was taken upstairs and locked in another cupboard . On 8 December she was transferred to McNeilly 's house because of concern that Powell and McNeilly 's six children were disturbed by Capper 's crying . There she was tied spreadeagle to an upturned bed with electrical flex in a downstairs back room .

= = = Torture = = =

Over the next five days Capper was subjected to a series of violent acts , " increasing in severity and brutality as the time passed . " She was regularly beaten and injected with amphetamines , burned with cigarettes , and had rave music ? in particular a 45 @-@ minute long remix of Hi , I 'm Chucky (Wanna Play ?) by 150 Volts , featuring samples from the movie Child 's Play ? played at maximum volume through headphones . McNeilly would commence each torture session with the phrase " Chucky ? s coming to play " and soon the words themselves were enough to make Capper scream . At some point during the week Pook and Leigh called at the house and were shown Capper , blindfolded and gagged , tied to the bed . By this time , Capper had been lying in her own urine and faeces for several days and was placed in a bath containing concentrated disinfectant and scrubbed with a stiff brush with sufficient force to remove skin . Pook then used pliers to extract two of her teeth , which police later found at his house " like some kind of macabre trophy . " Dudson said : " I was stood at the doorway with Jeanie [Powell] and Bernie [McNeilly] . Cliff [Pook] took her gag off . He told her to open her mouth . He said : ' Right , I 'm going to rip your teeth out ' . He started hitting her teeth with the pliers . He got the pliers on and started pulling it out . But it just snapped and chipped . Then he hit them a few more times . He put the pliers on again and really , really pulled . He pulled Suzanne 's head forward until there was a snap and he had the tooth in the pliers . He did the same again and he was laughing . "

= = = Missed opportunities for rescue = = =

David Hill , 18 , was asked to " sit in " at the house , and while there heard Dudson shout " Shut up , you slag ! " in the back room . When he asked what was going on , Leigh had shown him Capper . He said : " She had a sort of cloth over her face , from just above the eyebrows and covering her nose . She had a bit of dried blood on her lip . She had no hair . " Hill also said he had heard them talking about " dentistry work . It was something about pulling her teeth out with a pair of pliers . " Later , he was left alone in the house with Capper , who pleaded with him to untie her . He said : " She asked me if I could help but I told her I couldn 't . I asked her who she was . She said her name was Suzanne . She asked me if I could untie her . I said I couldn 't do anything . " He later claimed that he was too afraid of Leigh to intervene or raise the alarm , saying : " I thought they would batter me . If I 'd said [anything] they 'd all have got me , wouldn 't they ? I didn 't know what to do . I was too shocked to do anything . " While Capper was being held in the house , Leigh and Dudson met up with her sister 's fiance Paul Barlow to help him repair his car . Barlow said : " They could have told me there and then . The door would have been kicked down and I would have got Suzanne out

. I did not think they were capable of such savagery . Now all I want is ten minutes with them in a back room . "

= = Murder = =

The six finally agreed that Capper had to be removed from the house after Michelle Capper told them her stepfather was going to report her to the police as a missing person . In the early hours of 14 December 1992 , Capper was forced into the boot of a stolen white Fiat Panda car and driven 15 miles to a narrow lane at Werneth Low near Romiley , on the outskirts of Stockport . In the car were McNeilly , the Powells and Dudson . McNeilly " giggled " as they made the journey . Capper was pushed down an embankment into a patch of brambles and then McNeilly poured petrol over her . Powell stated : " Suzanne was still wobbly and fell over . Bernie [McNeilly] said ' Get up . ' Bernie pushed her down the hill and poured petrol on her . " When McNeilly had difficulty getting the petrol to ignite , Glyn Powell asked Dudson for some paper , who handed him a folded envelope which Powell then attempted to light and use as a taper . After three failed attempts , Dudson said : " In the end he just went up to her with a lighter and lit her . He lit her on the back . She went straight up in flames and was screaming . The flames lit up the whole forest . " McNeilly began to sing " Burn baby burn ! Burn baby burn ! " from the Trammps ' song Disco Inferno . Believing Capper to be dead , the four returned to Jean Powell 's house , stopping to buy canned drinks on the way . Both Leigh and Pook were at the house when they arrived and Dudson stated : " Cliff [Pook] asked Glyn [Powell] , ' Have you done it ? ' Glyn said ' Yes ' and he was laughing . He gave Cliff his lighter back . "

= = = Naming attackers before death = = =

Capper had not died immediately as her murderers believed , and after they left she managed to scramble back up the embankment and stagger along the lane for approximately a quarter of a mile to Compstall Road before being found at 06 : 10 by Barry Sutcliffe and two of his colleagues on their way to work . She told them : " Over there , in the field . They burnt me , they put petrol on me . " They immediately took her to a nearby house and roused the residents , Michael and Margaret Coop , to call for an ambulance . Michael Coop said : " Both her hands appeared like ash . Her legs were just like raw meat and her feet appeared to be badly charred . I was struck by how polite the victim was . She was constantly thanking my wife for her assistance . " Margaret Coop said : " I instinctively went to put my arms around her but she pulled away because she could not bear to be touched . Her head was shaved and there were recent , not new , cuts to her head . Her face was almost featureless . Her hands were red raw and black at the fingertips . Her legs were red from top to bottom . She couldn 't bear anything near her legs . " Capper drank six glasses of water , but was unable to hold the glass herself because of the injuries to her hands . Margaret Coop said : " She looked like the victim of an attack in the Vietnam war . But I felt she would survive . I had this theory that , now she had got to somewhere she could be helped , she would live . " Capper was rushed to the hospital and was able to give the names of her six assailants and Powell 's address before falling into a coma . The extent of her burns was such that her mother and stepfather were unable to recognise her , and she was positively identified by a partial fingerprint from her thumb , the only part of her hands not severely burned . She died on 18 December 1992 , without regaining consciousness .

= = = Arrests = = =

The inquiry was led by Detective Inspector Peter Wall of Greater Manchester Police . At 07 : 30 on 14 December , he instructed officers to attend 97 Langworthy Road and arrest everyone that they found there . Jean Powell and McNeilly laughed and joked with each other as they were arrested . Initially , all six denied involvement . Under questioning , Dudson , who had been urged by his father to tell the truth , began to talk . D.I. Wall said of Dudson 's statement : " As the story began to unfold , we just couldn 't believe it . I kept asking myself how one human being could do this to another . "

Police officers " wept as the extent of Suzanne 's suffering was revealed , " and together with civilian staff at the station the police collected cash to send flowers to her at the hospital . On 17 December 1992 , the six accused appeared before magistrates in Manchester and were remanded into custody charged with kidnapping and attempted murder . Following Capper 's death they were charged with her murder on 23 December 1992 .

= = = Inquest = = =

The inquest was opened by Leonard Gorodkin at Manchester Coroner 's Court on 8 January 1993 . Dr William Lawler , a Home Office pathologist , testified that Capper had suffered 75 ? 80 per cent burns consistent with having had petrol thrown over her and set alight , and that her chance of survival had been minimal . " It was clear from the outset that Suzanne was unlikely to survive . She suffered widespread burns that led to several complications internally . " Death was due to complications caused by these burns . The coroner said : " It is clear that this young girl must have suffered a great deal of pain and had no chance of survival . But she did fortunately survive long enough to give information which led to the people mentioned being charged with her death . " To Capper 's mother and stepfather the coroner said : " I offer you , not just on my behalf but on behalf of the whole nation , my very deepest sympathy and condolences at this tragic happening to your young daughter . "

= = Convictions = =

The trial commenced on 16 November 1993 , and lasted 22 days . All six denied murder and in their testimonies each defendant tried to minimise their part in the crime . On 24 November , Clifford Pook was cleared of murder on the directions of the judge Mr. Justice Potts . The jury began their deliberations on 16 December 1993 , and took nine hours and fifty @-@ two minutes to reach their verdicts . Mr Justice Potts said : " Each of you has been convicted on clear evidence of murder which was as appalling a murder as it is possible to imagine . "

= = = Verdicts and sentences = = =

Bernadette McNeilly

guilty of murder ? life imprisonment with a minimum tariff of 25 years

guilty of conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm ? 20 years

pleaded guilty to false imprisonment ? 20 years

Jean Powell

guilty of murder ? life imprisonment with a minimum tariff of 25 years

guilty of conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm ? 20 years

pleaded guilty to false imprisonment ? 20 years

Glyn Powell

guilty of murder ? life imprisonment with a minimum tariff of 25 years

guilty of conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm ? 20 years

guilty of false imprisonment ? 20 years

Jeffrey Leigh

pleaded guilty to false imprisonment ? 12 years

acquitted of murder

acquitted of conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm

Anthony Michael Dudson

guilty of murder ? detained indefinitely with a minimum tariff of 18 years

guilty of conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm ? 15 years

pleaded guilty to false imprisonment ? 15 years

Clifford Pook

pleaded guilty to conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm ? 15 years

pleaded guilty to false imprisonment ? 15 years
acquitted of murder

As the sentences were announced two women jurors wept and there were cries of " Yes ! Yes ! " from the public gallery , which was filled with relatives of the victim . In a statement to the press after the sentencing D.I. Wall said : " Psychological reports say that these are absolutely sane individuals . It 's frightening that they are such ordinary people . There is nothing special about any of them . "

= = = Appeals = = =

Leigh appealed against his sentence , which was reduced from 12 years to 9 years on 4 November 1994 . In 2002 , Dudson 's minimum tariff was cut from 18 years to 16 years . Dudson appealed again , arguing that the reduction was insufficient and that the Lord Chief Justice " had failed to reflect the continuing obligation to have regard to Dudson 's welfare . " Lord Justice Kennedy and Mr Justice Mackay dismissed this second appeal on 21 November 2003 . He was moved to an open prison in 2009 .

Jean Powell and McNeilly were granted leave to have the lengths of their minimum sentences reviewed at the Court of Appeal in June 2012 . McNeilly 's sentence was reduced by one year .

= = = McNeilly prison controversy = = =

While she was incarcerated at HM Prison Durham , a routine security check in 1996 uncovered letters which revealed McNeilly had been having an affair with the prison governor , Mike Martin . The married officer resigned his position before disciplinary action could be taken . McNeilly , who was sharing a wing with Rosemary West and Myra Hindley , was immediately transferred to HM Prison New Hall .

= = = Releases from prison = = =

Leigh was freed early from his sentence in 1998 , as was Pook in May 2001 . Both were released on licence . McNeilly was released from prison in December 2014 .

= = Reactions = =

= = = Social environment = = =

There was wide commentary in the news media about the social situation in and around Moston . Writing in The Times , Jon Ronson focused on Manchester 's apparent economic imbalance , pointing out that while " superficially , it is a city of growth " ? hosting international environmental conferences in 1993 and bidding to host the 2000 Olympic Games ? this could not disguise the realities of the poor quality of " built @-@ to @-@ collapse " housing , the city council 's policy on homelessness , poverty , street violence and drug culture , all of which played parts in the events leading up to Capper 's murder . The city , he said , had violent ' no @-@ go ' areas , where " you can expect to be mugged , " created through drug abuse and hopelessness , and populated by people who " don 't work , have no money , and rarely leave the houses that they find themselves living in before dark . " Ronson highlighted a city of contrasts , where " expensive canal @-@ side cafes are springing up faster than you can count them : the joke around town is that you can sip cappuccino all day and gaze out at the corpses floating past . " David Ward , writing in The Guardian , similarly drew attention to the housing policies , and quoted an older Moston resident as saying : " These people are moving in and out every three months . They 're illiterate half of them ? just shagging and having kids . " The Daily Mail ? in what Barker and Petley called " ideological overdrive " ? described Capper 's killers as " the product of a society that tolerates petty crime , the break @-@ up of families and feckless spending ... Most of Suzanne 's tormentors were on social

security ... [and belong to] an underclass which is a grave threat to Britain 's future . " Author Carol Anne Davis agreed that when looking for answers about how this crime came about one need only " look at the upbringings of these women who were single parents to three children by their mid twenties , had teenage boyfriends who were barely legal and who supported themselves through drug dealing and theft . "

= = = " Moral panic " = = =

Davis also noted the unusual situation in that " a gang was involved and that two females were the sadistic leaders . " Following the convictions of Powell and McNeilly , there was wider press speculation about " girl gangs " and the rise in violent crime committed by young women , and " the probation service and ex @-@ offender organisations found themselves bombarded with requests from journalists seeking out case histories to illustrate this apparent explosion of LA @-@ style girl @-@ gang culture on the streets of Britain . " Mary Barnish , a senior probation officer at the Inner London Probation Service Women 's Centre , dismissed the notion , saying : " One woman does something somewhere and immediately there 's a great moral panic . People think there 's an epidemic of it . " However , statistics and research produced by the National Association of Probation Officers did show " an increase in the number of women jailed for offences involving violence . " The association 's assistant general secretary Harry Fletcher said that , like the women involved in the Capper murder , the group is " characterised by neglect , personal abuse , drug or alcohol abuse and low self @-@ esteem . Many have themselves been the victim of violence . The problem needs help rather than incarceration . " In one of the " starkest signs of change " there was evidence that " in the 15 ? 17 age group , girls are more likely to take pleasure in violence than boys , an indication we may face far more female violence in the future as these girls grow up . " Despite the focus on the female perpetrators around the time of the crime and trial Davis pointed out that , in cases like this which involved female and male sadists , " the female 's role is invariably forgotten over time . This was apparent when Dudson 's appeals were reported in the national press . Manchester newspapers named all of the killers involved , but most less @-@ localised reports simply referred to the ' violent gang ' he belonged to , and it probably wouldn 't have occurred to newer readers that this gang included two merciless female sadists who thought that an allegedly stolen duffle coat was an excuse to torture someone to death . "

= = = " Video nasties " = = =

The moral panic was not confined solely to the gender of the murderers , but also the role played by so @-@ called " video nasties " . The news media immediately made a connection between the Bulger murder trial and the Capper murder trial when the horror movie Child 's Play 3 : Look Who 's Stalking was mentioned as part of the testimonies . D.I. Wall said " throughout interviews with the accused there was no suggestion that the reason Suzanne was killed had anything to do with Child 's Play " but this was overlooked by more sensationalist headlines (Demonic doll Chucky links the horror crimes ; The curse of Chucky) . Neither Powell or McNeilly owned a video recorder , and the Child 's Play ? inspired music that had been used to torture Capper was a popular track at the time , taped direct from Manchester 's Piccadilly Radio . Broadcaster David Elstein called the video connection " a false story ... branded into the consciousness of the media , " and questioned the news media 's fascination with the film : " There is no reason to believe that Suzanne Capper would be alive today if the audiotope had instead contained the torture scene from King Lear , or a catchphrase from Bruce Forsyth ... But the Child 's Play hare has been running ever since the last day of the James Bulger murder trial . " Elstein argued that the film was simply a scapegoat which the press " made a three @-@ course meal out of . " The Guardian reported that 21 @,@ 000 four ? nine @-@ year @-@ olds watched each of BSKyB 's two transmissions of Child 's Play 3 ? but Elstein explained the figure was " simply a projection based on an average of just two actual viewers from BARB 's reporting panel , and that the margin of error means even the two may have been just one . But why spoil a good running story by asking what the figures mean ? "

In April 1994 , Professor Elizabeth Newson published Video Violence and the Protection of Children (the " Newson Report ") which attracted huge media interest due to its claims that it had " definitively established the long sought @-@ for link between screen violence and the real @-@ life variety , " and which cited the Capper murder as an example . Despite its support by the press , however , the report failed to demonstrate any definitive link , " merely drawing inferences from ... often highly speculative accounts in the press rather than independent first @-@ hand research . " Newson was called to give oral evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee on Video Violence , where she asserted : " The Suzanne Capper case is another example of very explicit imitation of video and the use of video and that was Child 's Play 3 . " The chairman of the committee , Sir Ivan Lawrence had to point out to Newson that this was incorrect , and that both the police and the British Board of Film Classification had ruled out any connection between the movie and the murder .

The link between the murders and Child 's Play 3 by the news media directly led to the delay of the release certification for both Natural Born Killers and Reservoir Dogs .