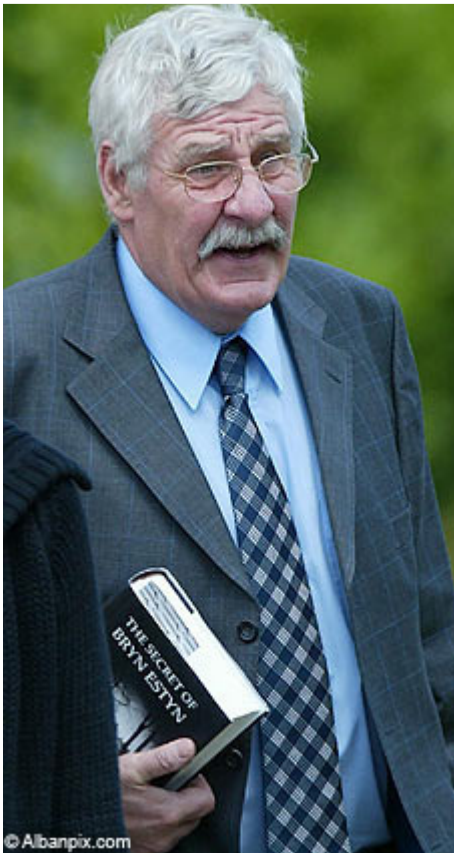


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MailOnline

'Bully' boss ran special needs school under 'climate of fear'

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George Robson: Faces jail for a string of cruelty charges

An ex-headmaster who ran a private special needs school was tonight facing jail after being convicted of a string of cruelty charges.

Detectives said George Robson operated a "climate of fear" at Banham Marshalls College in Banham, Norfolk, during the 1970s and 80s.

Police said pupils were made to settle differences with "staged fights", beaten with a studded belt, force fed - with one victim saying he was made to eat his vomit - and thrown into a freezing pond.

A seven-year-old boy was also forced to smash a favourite toy with a hammer as a punishment for causing minor damage to a locker, detectives said.

Two other former staff members - one Robson's brother Anthony - were also convicted of cruelty.

Details of the crimes emerged after legal restrictions preventing reporting were lifted.

George Robson, 66, the school's former owner and principal, and Anthony Robson, 63, former head of care at the school, were convicted of cruelty offences against pupils between 1975 and 1988.

Both men, who are from the Banham area, were convicted at earlier trials and are awaiting sentence.

Former warden David Clarke, 56, also of Banham, admitted cruelty at an earlier trial and was given a nine-month suspended jail term, police said.

A former houseparent - Leslie Beckett, of Harleston, Norfolk - was accused of indecently assaulting pupils. Mr Beckett, who would now be 92, died before he could stand trial, detectives added.

Orders preventing reporting of the offences and allegations were lifted by a judge at Norwich Crown Court.

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'Climate of fear': Banham Marshalls College in Banham, Norfolk

The school, initially known as the Old Rectory school, is now under new ownership and operates under a different name.

Detectives launched an inquiry four years ago after former pupils came forward to complain about the way they had been treated during the 1970s and 80s.

Detectives said they investigated hundreds of allegations against children aged between seven and 16. They said many victims were interviewed.

"The school was clearly run in a climate of fear with 'control' of the children being of paramount importance," said Detective Inspector Matt Sharman, who led the inquiry.

"Even in the days when corporal punishment was still legal the events at the school went far beyond what was acceptable, particularly to vulnerable children."

He added: "This has been a long and involved investigation looking into events that took place up to 30 years ago.

"The many victims in the case, some of whom had never come to terms with what happened to them, were traced to addresses all over this country and even abroad.

"Many of these people have been greatly affected by their treatment at the hands of George Robson and his team."

Detective Inspector Debbie Gunnill said George Robson was a "bully" and added: "Many of the witnesses described George Robson as an arrogant and condescending individual."

She went on: "George Robson led from the top and created a regime of fear."

Lisa Christensen, Norfolk County Council's director of children's services, said: "I would like to pay tribute today to the former pupils who have helped to finally bring the defendants to justice."

"These convictions send out a powerful message to victims everywhere, that it is never too late to speak out."

She added: "The situation today is much changed from the 1970s and 80s - there are now much more robust child protection procedures in place and a clear inspection regime is in operation."

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I had nine years at that school. I bet they don't even get a custodial sentence!

- Anon, UK, 16/10/2007 21:06

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"These convictions send out a powerful message to victims everywhere, that it is never too late to speak out." Let them speak out NOW. This sort of thing is going on NOW.

- Cj, London, UK, 15/10/2007 19:00

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