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Convicted at last after 1989 rape

JULIA SUTTON



Robert Saint

Justice has finally caught up with a 'dangerous sexual pervert' who raped a young woman 22 years ago at the country park where he worked.

When Robert Saint was not caught at the time his victim made a determined effort to put it behind her and get on with her life.

But then 20 years later police knocked on her door wanting to re-open the investigation.

She agreed she would assist them even though it meant all the memories of her ordeal came flooding back.

The victim, who was 21 when she was attacked in the Priory Country Park in Bedford, bravely gave evidence to a jury last

year.

Saint was convicted and jailed for nine-and-a-half years, but her torment didn't end there. He successfully appealed against the conviction on a legal point and the conviction was quashed and a retrial ordered.

In March this year she went into the witness box at Luton Crown Court again and repeated her evidence and her denials to defence questions.

Saint, 52 was convicted again, unanimously, but that couldn't be reported for legal reasons at the time. He will be resented at a later date.

On Friday, Saint who had worked for many years as a park ranger at the scene of his crime, was convicted of five other sexual offences on a young girl dating back to 1986. Following his arrest for the rape charge that investigation was also reopened and witnesses traced.

His arrest also led to the police finding child pornography on his computer and evidence of voyeurism. He was charged with those offences and stood trial last year after which he was convicted and jailed for four years.

Prosecutor Gordon Aspden said in 2008 Bedfordshire Police began a 'cold case' review of the case using forensic evidence that had been retained.

He said: "There had been major advances in DNA profiling and police thought that would assist.

"The officers suspected the attacker was a local man who knew the park well and revisited people who had been working there in the 1980s and requested DNA samples from them, one of which was Robert Saint.

"There was a major breakthrough as a full DNA profile matching him was obtained and the probability of it coming from someone else was one in a billion." Describing the attack he told how the woman and a man she was having an affair with had gone to the park on January 5, 1989 in separate cars and had sex, after which her lover left the area and she got out of her car as her seat belt was trapped.

He said: "Suddenly a man appeared behind her and put his hand over her mouth. He said 'don't scream, do as you are told and you won't get hurt' and frogmarched her across the muddy ground towards some trees.

"On a muddy track he told her to lay down and she thought she might be murdered.

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"When he left he told her to go home and forget it but she will never forget what happened to her that night." Saint, who was still living in Bedford near the park when arrested, pleaded not guilty to the charges claiming he had consensual sex with the victim, probably in his lunch hour, the day before she alleged she had been raped.

The victim, now married and aged 42 gave evidence to the court live from the witness box and 'absolutely' denied his allegation of having casual sex with him.

Saint was convicted of rape, two charges of sexual assault and false imprisonment. In the other historic case he was convicted of two charges of indecent assault and three charges of indecency with a child.

The judge who jailed him for the child pornography charges called him a 'dangerous sexual pervert'.

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