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## Life Sentence For Historic Rapist

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A man who raped a woman in Blackburn more than a decade ago and then sent letters to police describing her underwear, which was missing from the scene, has today been given an life sentence.

HGV driver, Graham Darbyshire, (born 20/05/54) of Elm Grove in Cuerden, Leyland, Lancashire was arrested 13 years after the original offence after an investigation by Greater Manchester Police Cold Case Review Unit linked the offence, by DNA, to an indecent assault in Boothstown in 1993. Darbyshire was then traced using a new DNA technique. It is the first time in the world that the technique has been successfully used to obtain a conviction in a criminal investigation.

Darbyshire pleaded guilty to two counts of rape and two counts of indecent assault at Manchester Crown Court on Thursday 27 September 2006. He was today, Friday 15 December 2006, jailed for an indeterminate sentence, with a recommendation he serve six years and 160 days before he is eligible for parole.

Around midday on Saturday 31 July 1993, a 22-year-old woman was walking her dog in fields just off the East Lancs Road near to Boothstown, Greater Manchester, when Darbyshire grabbed her around the neck and threatened to strangle her. He forced the woman to walk to a nearby tree and pulled her t-shirt over her head, binding it with tape, before indecently assaulting her. After the attack, he told the woman to wait for five minutes as he ran off. Darbyshire pleaded guilty to the indecent assault of this woman.

In interview, the 22-year-old woman described the offender as a white man, between 5ft 8in and 5ft 10in tall and of stocky build. She said that he had dark hair, was aged between 30 and 40, and was wearing a distinctive pink T-shirt.

More than two years later, on Sunday 8 October 1995, the second victim, also aged 22, was walking her dog in Witton Country Park in Blackburn when Darbyshire walked up behind her and asked her for the time. She told him it was 1.30pm. He then grabbed her around the neck and forced her into some undergrowth where he raped and indecently assaulted her over a one-hour period. Darbyshire then tied the woman's feet together with shoelaces and placed her jeans over her face, before telling her to wait ten minutes as he ran off. Darbyshire pleaded guilty to two counts of rape and one count of indecent assault in relation to this incident.

The victim in this case described her attacker as a white man, aged in his thirties or forties of stocky build. She said that he had dark hair that was greying and was wearing a distinctive pink T-shirt.

In the second attack, the offender took the victim's black bra and white knickers with him. After the attack police in Blackburn received a letters with a black binliner inside it. Cut out letters from a newspaper had been glued to the binliner, one of which said: "By the time you get this I'll be long gone." It went on to describe the colour of the victim's underwear, which had not been made public at that time.

In 2004, a review of the attack in Boothstown was carried out by GMP's Cold Case Review Unit. An upgraded DNA profile was obtained from the semen staining found on the 22-year-old's t-shirt. The profile was loaded onto the National DNA database and did not match any known individual, but did match the partial profile from the rape in Witton Park.

Further enquiries made by GMP, assisted by Lancashire Constabulary, and funded by the Home Office as part of Operation Advance, resulted in the arrest of Darbyshire for both offences. A DNA sample taken from him following his arrest was found to match the DNA profile that had been loaded onto the database.

When interviewed Darbyshire denied all involvement in the offences. He said that he had never been to the location where either of the rapes took place. He also strenuously denied ever having owned or worn a pink t-shirt. A picture of Darbyshire on holiday wearing a pink t-shirt dated 1999 was recovered from his home address after his arrest.

Detective Inspector Jeff Arn old, who led the investigation said:

"This was a difficult investigation even at the time that both offences were committed. GMP re-investigated both cases under Operation Advance, funded by the Home Office. We were only able to utilise innovative, cutting-edge forensic science with the support and assistance of the FSS, the Police Standards Unit at the Home Office and the National Centre for Policing Excellence.

"The methods applied in this case were a world-first and combined with the dedication of all those involved they allowed us to identify Graham Darbyshire as the offender for both of these offences.

"Darbyshire is a violent and dangerous individual who has certainly offended over three decades. I feel confident that the streets are a safer place now that he has been imprisoned.

"I particularly want to praise the support and determination of both victims in this case. Taking this dangerous man off the streets would certainly have been more difficult without their support and commitment. It is to their credit that they have found the courage to revisit these very difficult, traumatic in very difficult and traumatic circumstances to pursue this individual.

The victim of the attack in Boothstown said:

"It is very difficult to try and put into words how I initially felt after the attack. I was hurt, I was angry, I was in a state

of disbelief. For someone to have complete control over what you are doing is so frightening. I felt completely helpless. I knew it had happened but when I thought about it, it was as though I was watching an incident on video. I felt that it would not go away, that there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

"In the early days I was always looking around, hoping to see this man, to identify him. I do not know what I would have done if I had seen him, I just felt a compulsion to find him.

"Eventually I realised that I had two choices, either to get on with my life or to stay in my house going over and over what had happened. I learned to try and lock the attack away in the back of my mind.

"I find it hard to talk about how Darbyshire has affected me. I try not to dwell on it because I am determined that he should not have control over my life.

"Once the police told me that the case is being reinvestigated after more than twelve years, I felt like a deep painful wound had been reopened and salt poured into it. I had sleepless nights, reliving the whole incident, which made me feel angry, annoyed and upset.

"I have never been able to return to where I was attacked or to any other similar country-type walking area. I am too frightened. I stick to public footpaths and streets now. The fact that I have to do this because Darbyshire has put that fear in me makes me very angry.

"When I heard that Darbyshire had been arrested I just felt disbelief. Its difficult to describe the feeling. I came to court today to see a man sentenced for an attack on me that I thought he would never be brought to justice for. It just doesn't seem real. The advances in DNA technology have been fantastic and I would encourage any victim of a sexual offence to report it to police - no matter how long its been there's always a chance that the offender can be caught.

"I can honestly say that today's events haven't quite hit me yet but the knowledge that Darbyshire has been brought to justice I know will help me to close this chapter in my life and move on."

Policing Minister Tony McNulty said:

"We are delighted to have been able to provide a significant contribution towards the costs of the DNA work which scientifically linked this individual to these crimes - committed over 10 years ago.

"This is the third case supported by the Operation Advance project since its launch in 2004, where the offender has been convicted for multiple offences that took place in different parts of the country, as well as yet another successful example of the use of 'familial' DNA technology.

"Almost all of the offenders convicted so far have proved to be persistent and prolific violent criminals with offending histories that stretch from the present day, back over many years. Their removal from our communities has undoubtedly had a significant impact on community safety.

"The message is clear - people who commit these horrific crimes need to know that these cases are never closed by the police and that they will be brought to justice by this and other new technologies.

"We are determined to ensure that victims receive the justice they deserve - the effect of this cannot be underestimated."

NB. Darbyshire had two previous convictions for similar offences:

On 22 December 1970 a schoolgirl was walking along a canal path in Lancaster when she was approached by Darbyshire and threatened with a leather belt. Darbyshire indecently assaulted the girl and was convicted of this offence in early 1971.

Darbyshire has also previous conviction for a stranger rape committed in Leyland in 1984 for which he was sentenced to five years in prison. The attack was strikingly similar to the Witton Country Park offence.

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