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Police identify child killer after 24 years

Russell Jenkins

Police have unmasked the killer of a nine-year-old boy whose murder has remained unsolved for 24 years.

Imraan Vohra vanished on his way home from Frenchwood Junior School in Preston, Lancashire, where he had been playing marbles with friends. He was found strangled to death two days later in a local park.

His killer has now been identified as Robert Morley, a petty thief and convicted sex offender, who died in 1997 aged 62.

It has emerged that Morley, a Londoner, lived at the time in an apartment block close to the child's home. Although he had convictions for indecent exposure his name had not emerged during the initial inquiry.

The unsolved murder was reopened in 2001 allowing officers to use the latest advances in DNA forensic science. Over a six year period officers have tested 1,400 men against a sample taken from the scene.

Although Morley's DNA was not on the national database, he was identified through advances in 'familial DNA' from samples of family members.

Detective Chief Superintendent Graham Gardner, of Lancashire Police, said that the chances of Morley, a "violent, sexually controlling man", not being responsible for Imraan's murder are one billion to one.

He said: "Many detectives and scientists have worked tirelessly on this very sad case for many years.

"The findings clearly point to the fact that Robert Morley is responsible for Imraan's death and we are now endeavouring to find out more about his life in Preston."

The child's naked body was found in thick bushes in Avenham Park two days after he disappeared. He had been the victim of a sadistic sexual assault before he was strangled.

His trousers were found tied to a tree a short distance away in a gesture identified by detectives at the time as the killer's calling card. Despite emotional appeals for information, supported by the offer of a £4,000 reward from The Muslim Society, the trail went cold.

Morley, who had seven children from a number of relationships, had spent time in Lancashire when he was evacuated from London during the Second World War. He moved back to the county in 1979, settling first in Accrington before moving to Preston later that year. Between 1983 and 1987 he lived in Lancaster House, a tower block in Avenham, close to the park where the body was found.

He returned to Charlton in south east London in 1988 and remained there until shortly before his death in Essex. He had a number of convictions for theft, the last in 1985.

Mr Gardner said that throughout the intervening years Imraan's family have conducted themselves with great dignity in the most distressing circumstances.



(Lancashire Constabulary/PA)

Imraan Vohra

He said: "There is no happy ending to this story but in some ways it does bring some conclusion to them. I would have liked to have seen this man brought to justice in crown court".

The family released a statement thanking police for their continuing efforts to find the killer.

The statement read: "As a family we would have liked to have seen justice in the courts but justice will be done hereafter."

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