

The Baby in the Concrete Block

Barepot, Cumbria

England, 2002

While clearing out an old garage, a grizzly find was to spark a major police investigation. The remains of a baby were found encased in a concrete block.



The Garage where the concrete block was found

A pathologist who examined the baby's remains determined that she had been about 5 months old when she died. Lara, the name the police gave to her, had been ill-treated and showed signs of beating and head injuries. She had also been neglected, a gum abscess had grown so large that it had eaten into her jaw. This would have caused the child intense pain.

DNA Samples were taken from local residents in the surrounding villages, but obtaining a DNA profile from Lara was to prove more difficult.

Dr. Stuart Black from the University of Reading carried out isotope analysis on the remains, to try and establish a time of death and a locality where Lara had been born. This concluded that Lara was almost certainly from Cumbria and had probably died between 1990 and 1992.

The remains of a baby being found in the construction concrete of a garage is sure to spark more than curiosity. Taking a closer look at the construction of the garage could give more details in this strange mystery. While finding remains of a possible murder victim in any building structure is enough to make the hair on the back of your neck stand up, finding the remains of a baby will always have a much more profound impact.

Police set about tracing every baby born in the area between 1989 and 1993. This accounted for 3,200 children but no Lara.

Mitochondrial DNA, inherited only from the mother, is present in greater quantities in the cells and so is better able to resist degradation. When they tested for this, they were able to raise Lara's full DNA profile.

This identified Anne Chadwick as a very close genetic match to Lara. So close, she could be her mother or her sister. Anne and Philip Chadwick now lived in Worcestershire with their three children.

While the DNA identified Anne as the possible mother, it also ruled out Philip as the father.



Anne and Philip Chadwick

The police arrested Anne and Philip, and a search of their house uncovered a collection of press cuttings about the Barepot baby.

After lengthy questioning and studying videos that Anne and Philip had from the years around 1990, the couple were released without charge.

The forensic scientists were forced to re-assess the dates they had from the isotope analysis and now acknowledged that baby Lara could have died anywhere between the mid 1960s and the 1980s.

Now the police attention moved to Anne's mother. Sheila Parker was known to have had a 15 year affair with local builder Joseph Thwaites who had fathered Anne and her sister Yvonne. Sheila and Joseph had passed away some years earlier and, unfortunately for the investigation, Sheila had been cremated.

However, a stroke of luck revealed that a local hospital had retained some histology slides from Sheila who had died of cancer. Although the slides were 20 years old they reveal sufficient DNA to show that Sheila could, indeed, have been Lara's mother. Sheila was known to have concealed earlier pregnancies, so why not Lara?

It is probable that Sheila gave Lara up for adoption and the adoptive parents were in some way responsible for her death and concrete entombment. But with so little evidence all the police can say with certainty, is that they have found the family that little Lara was born into.