



Out of the dark

The Met's cold case team is using past evidence and cutting edge science to bring sex offenders to justice and prevent victims having to look over their shoulder. Syreeta Lund reports

Some horrific crimes such as rapes and murders can go unsolved; no one knows for sure who is responsible because of a lack of evidence to convict or even to track down a potential offender. For the victims who are left to carry on, they can feel they are forever looking over their shoulder; the course of their lives can be changed forever in a single moment.

The Met's cold case team aim to bring such offenders to justice – often years after they believe they have got away with their crimes. Det Insp Andy Geneux and Det Con Andy Lawrence are both part of the Cold Case Sapphire Unit, which sits under the Violent Crime Directorate, and was set up in 2003 to investigate unsolved stranger rapes between 1988 and 1991.

The cold case unit, which is partly funded by the Home Office, only came about when the Forensic Science Service (FSS) identified around 360 cases of serious sexual offences where they had retained material, such as swabs, slides, hair or blood. Cutting-edge scientific techniques means DNA evidence and materials taken from crime scenes which could not be identified in the past can now be used to help track down the perpetrators.

The unit, based at the Met's Territorial Policing Headquarters in London has a detective inspector heading up the team, two detective sergeants, six detective constables, an analyst and an administration assistant working on the cases. The team has already managed to secure the convictions of 26 serious sexual offenders, taking them off the streets.

One such case involved a serial sex attacker who preyed on young girls for eight years before being put behind bars. His attacks were described as a 'reign of terror' by Det Con Andy Lawrence, involved in the investigation.

Anthony Peter De Boise, 58, from Holmbury St Mary, Surrey, pleaded guilty to six counts of indecent assault on a female child at Southwark Crown Court in June this year before being sentenced to 13 years for his crimes.

The attacker was only tracked down after being arrested for an unrelated matter of theft in April 2005, when a DNA sample had been taken and although the case was never progressed, his DNA was placed onto a national database where it matched that from two serious sexual assaults dating back to August 1995.

Det Con Lawrence described him as a 'predatory sexual offender who preyed on young vulnerable children'. The attack in 1995 involved two 13-year-old girls who had walked along a path in a Surrey wood and stopped to watch some horses in a field when De Boise approached them armed with a knife. He took them into a clearing in the woods and indecently assaulted both girls.

“When you read some of the impact statements [which look at the impact of a crime on the victim] it's quite moving what people have gone through and it's good to know we can offer some justice. It stops them having to lookover their shoulder.”

It emerged De Boise had a history of sexual assaults on young girls. In 1989 a 13-year-old girl was playing with her sister and friend, climbing trees on the Downs in Surrey when he struck again. When they began to head home De Boise ran past them and grabbed the girl, her sister ran screaming to get help while he took the girl, threatened to rape her and then sexually assaulted her.

Two years later, in August 1991 he grabbed a 16-year-old girl who had taken her dog out for a walk. He pushed her to the ground as she screamed for her dad. He put his hand over her mouth and checked the coast was clear before indecently assaulting her and threatening to hit her.

In December 1994 he ran up behind a 15-year-old girl who had gone for an

afternoon walk; he jumped on her from behind and stifled her cries by pushing his hand over her mouth. Armed with a knife, he tied her hands together behind her back and marched her to a wooded area. He repeatedly sexually assaulted her before making off.

In a fifth attack in June 1996, saw De Boise targeting a 14-year-old girl as she walked home from school. He tried to approach her and strike up a conversation but she felt uneasy and walked away from him. He then jumped on her, forced her to the ground face-down as she begged him not to hurt her. He sexually assaulted her and then undressed her and assaulted her again, before leaving her laying on the ground and wishing her a happy birthday.

Det Con Lawrence was involved in tracking down the offender, he said: “It's very difficult for some people to move on from such attacks. When you read some of the impact statements [which look at the impact of a crime on the victim] it's quite moving what people have gone through and it's good to know we can offer some justice. It stops them having to look over their shoulder. Knowing it's someone who attacked them. Knowing they are off street.”

Det Insp Geneux explains how each officer on the team gets allocated a number of cases, and how it can take months of meticulous sifting through box loads of paperwork and statements.

“First of all we review the case and we liaise with the Crown Prosecution Service to see if it is viable. We would then look do a complete investigation go through every statement, go back to speak to every witness again.”

Officers will approach victims with a specially trained sexual offences investigative technique officer to ensure they are given the right support. The victim's original statement will be looked at and an impact statement put together on the affect the crime may have had on the victim's life and potentially family and friends.

One of the victims in the De Boise case, who is now in her 20s, but

wishes to remain anonymous, said she had to move schools twice after the attack.

She told the officers that she still did not go walking by herself and it had affected her whole family.

“It affected my mum the worst. She's been really ill over the last ten years since it happened. It also affected my brothers and sisters having to move away from our home.”

When officers first called round to see the victim years after the attack, she was pregnant and stunned. She said she thought the police had

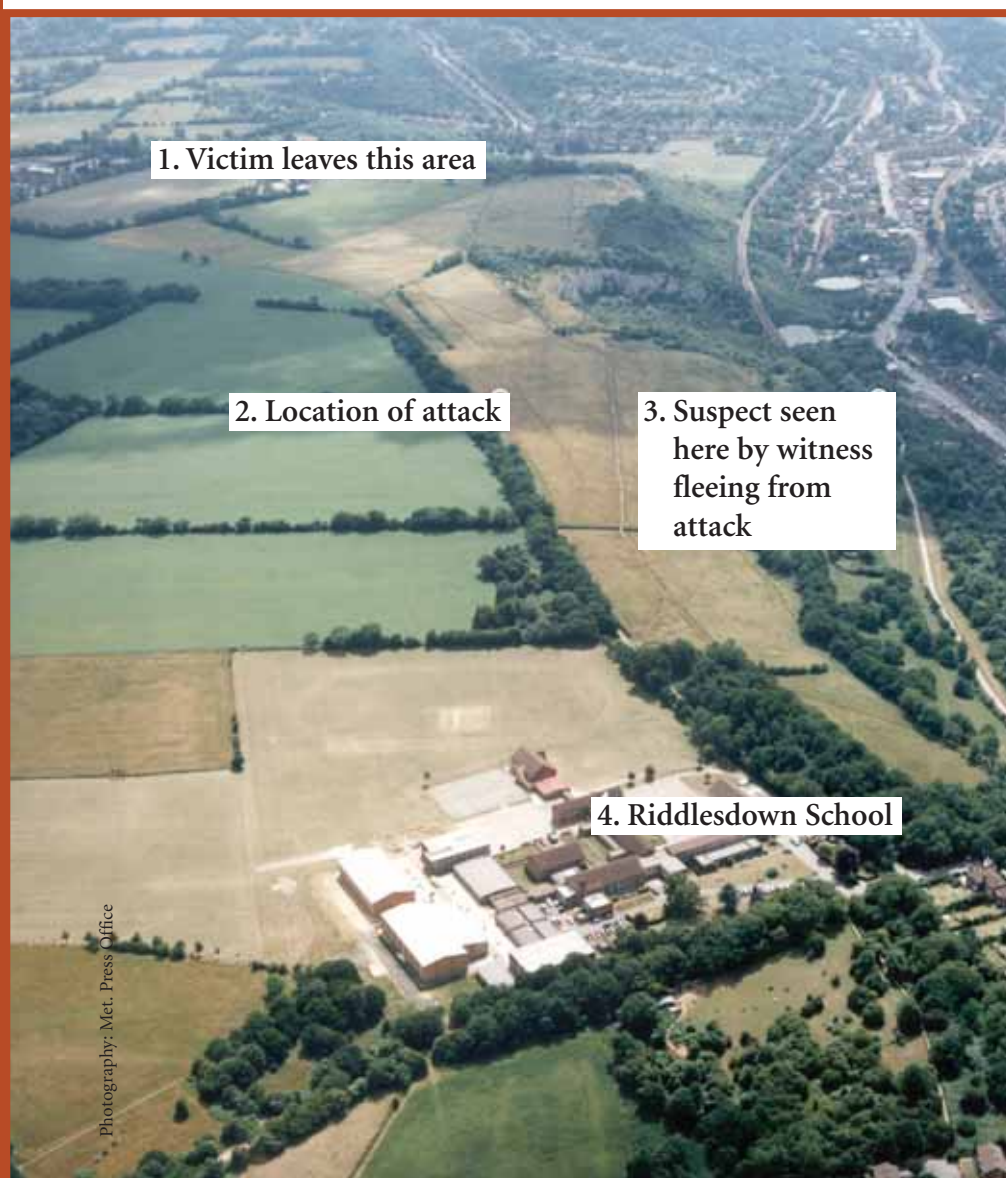
forgotten about her case. Det Insp Geneux, who has been an officer in the Met for 22 years, has a varied background but particularly in detective work. He has dealt with murder investigations, been on the flying squad, dealt with armed robbery but believes that providing justice for rape victims is extremely satisfying.

“It's different in each case. But it's the sheer scale of trauma because of the horrific nature of the attack and the long-term effects on their lives means it's good to be able to bring someone to justice.”

Det Con Lawrence, has 24 years in the Met, a solid background in CID as well as working on an intelligence team and five years on the Sapphire Unit.

He explains why he chose to work on the cold case team: “For those who have suffered a serious sexual assault or rape, the trauma can affect them for years – if the person responsible for that crime is never caught, it can forever mean they are looking over their shoulder, hopefully we help them to find some kind of closure.”

Aerial photograph showing the route taken by the last victim



Sex offender De Boise

The traits you need to work on a cold case team:

- Good thorough investigation skills
- Good written and communication skills
- Background in dealing with sexual offences
- Awareness of partner agencies

Facts and figures

Since 2003 the Met's Cold Case Sapphire Unit is:

- Reviewing 500 cases
- Achieved 64 sanction detections
- Had 20 other clear up detections
- Put 26 sexual offenders in prison