

Student's mother in police appeal over drowning

By John Steele, Crime Correspondent

TH**E** mother of an Asian student found dead in the Thames two years ago joined police yesterday in appealing for information about two white men suspected of racially abusing him and his friends on the night he disappeared.

Susander Reel, the mother of Ricky Reel, wrote a press conference at the district waiting time set off King's Cross station last week.

"I am looking for clues to his death. She was making her first joint criminal appeal with police in a case which has been subject to a large-scale re-investigation by the Metropolitan Police force and has been presented by some campaigners as the most important test of police relations with the ethnic communities since the Stephen Lawrence inquiry."

In the Lawrence case, Mr Reel said, "The Police Complaints Authority has questioned the standard of the Met's initial investigation."

Mrs Reel is convinced her son, a 20-year-old student at Brunel University, was killed by "racist thugs," and that police did not properly investigate his disappearance in Kingston in October 1997.

Policing initially concluded that Mr Reel, who had been out drinking with friends,

The mother of an Asian student probably fell into the river accidentally and drowned. Though police insist there is no evidence to link the racial incident with his death, Det Chief Insp Sue Hill — who is re-investigating the case under the head of Scotland Yard's Race and Violent Crime Task Force, Dep Asst Commissioner John Chave, said she had an "open mind" about what happened.

Mr Chave said it was a measure of a civilised society that police should be able to answer questions about how a young man was found dead in a river.

The focal point of the new inquiry is to identify two white men — aged between 18 and 30 — seen in Kingston town centre and thought to have been involved in a fight with Mr Reel's friends.

Mr Reel — not a young man likely to become involved in a fight — walked away and was found in the Thames a week later.

DCI Hill said: "We must separate that racial incident from Ricky's death because there is no evidence to link these two [men] with Ricky's death." But she stressed that the men should come forward to clarify what happened after the racial incident.

Reel family and cops in plea for witnesses

Do you know man in new CCTV film pictures?



TRACE HIM: Did you see this man?

CAMPAIGNERS who claim Asian youngster Ricky Reel was murdered in Kingston held their first joint press conference with police chiefs this week.

The historic event, at New Scotland Yard on Tuesday, was held to mark the release by the police's new Racial and Violent Crime Unit of new CCTV pictures of a man in a hooded parka-style coat and light trousers.

The unit has stepped up the probe into the death of the 21-year-old student, who died in the Thames after a night out with friends in Kingston in October 1997.

Police say he fell in the river and drowned but his family and friends maintain that he was murdered. It is known that Ricky and friends had a violent row with white youths minutes before he was last seen alive - and the CCTV photo is believed to show one of the white gang.

Members of the Reel family and campaigners from the Justice for Ricky Reel campaign met with Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Greave and Detective Chief Inspector Sue Hill.

DCI Hill, who is heading the investigation, said: "The release of these new pictures shows we are committed to carrying on our tireless investigation into the death of Ricky Reel.

"The team here has looked into every possible lead. We now hope the people in these pictures can help us unravel the truth.

"Everybody on the Racial & Violent Crimes Unit shares the same belief. It must be the worst thing in the world to lose a child, and we are trying to solve this crime as quickly as possible.

"We want the Reel family to know this. The conference comes just weeks after the Reel family and their campaign supporters were told by Home Secretary Jack Straw that they were not to be allowed to release details of a Police Complaints Authority (PCA) report into the original handling of the case.

Ricky's mother Sukhdev said: "The police had a real opportunity to show they are willing to be more open in this and many other cases with the PCA report, but now that has gone.

"It has taken 20 months for us to get this press conference.

"We are determined to show that we are not going away - we want justice."

Hundreds of demonstrators took part in a protest outside New Scotland Yard before the press conference.

Met blocked independent inquiry into Asian's death

The Observer 15/8/99

and uncovered witnesses at a time when their memories were still fresh. Instead, the case was put on hold while Surrey police conducted its inquiry. When it was completed some 14 months later, it found 'weaknesses and flaws' in the original Met investigation and found three officers guilty of neglect of duty. The report, never made public, prompted a fresh inquiry by the Met's Racial and Violent Crimes unit into Ricky's death, but by then the trail was cold.

Today, nearly two years on, Sukhdev Reel still listens to her dead son's voice every day, sometimes dozens of times. It is recorded on the answering service of the mobile phone he always carried with him. Now his mother uses the same phone to help co-ordinate the campaign to track down his killers.

When divers recovered Ricky's body, even before the post mortem had been completed, the police announced to the Reel family that his death had been a tragic accident. His flies were open and they concluded that he had fallen in the river and drowned while relieving himself. His family find this impossible to believe. Although able to swim, Ricky was terrified of water. The post mortem eventually showed that his bladder was full at the time of his death.

Last week the family's campaigning paid off when Scotland Yard relaunched the inquiry with a joint appeal with Sukhdev.

Enhanced CCTV footage showing two white men walking down Pratt's Passage alleyway soon after the racial incident was released with a fresh appeal for witnesses. But the delays caused by the PCA probe and the blocking of the new investigation into the death by Surrey Police have reduced the chances of anyone remembering the incident clearly. For Louise Christian and the family, this clearly shows the police have learnt nothing from the Lawrence case. 'The procedures are not in place to allow mistakes to be rectified quickly and efficiently,' Christian says. 'Justice for Ricky Reel, c/o TMG, PO Box 304, Southall, Middx, UB2 5YR 0181 843 2333.



Reel: his death was dismissed by police as an accident.

THE METROPOLITAN Police blocked an attempt by another police force to investigate the mysterious death of Asian student Ricky Reel. The Observer can reveal.

The 21-year-old, who had a morbid fear of open water, went missing soon after he and three of his friends were assaulted and racially abused by two white men in Kingsdon upon Thames late one night in October 1997. A week later his body was found in the Thames.

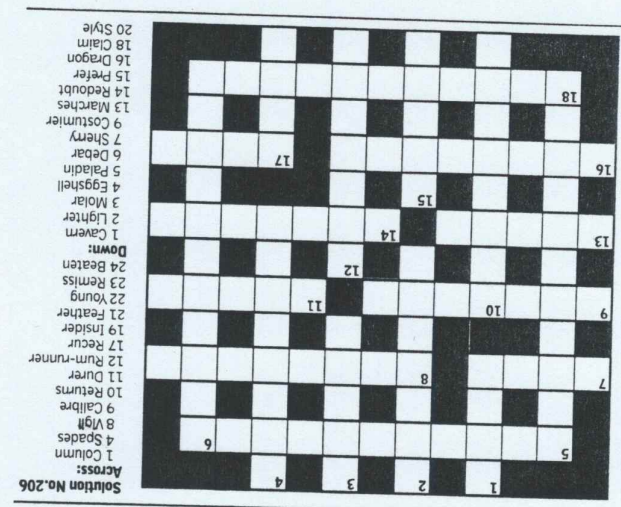
Despite knowing of the attack, police refused to treat his disappearance as suspicious, believing instead that he had simply run away from home. After an official complaint by Reel's family four weeks after his death, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) appointed Surrey Police to investigate.

I received a letter from the PCA saying they were not going to repeat the mistakes of the Lawrence case and that, in addition to investigating the complaint, Surrey Police would also re-investigate the death itself.

Thrown up vital new evidence new investigation could have a death had been a tragic accident. His flies were open and they concluded that he had fallen in the river and drowned while relieving himself. His family find this impossible to believe. Although able to swim, Ricky was terrified of water. The post mortem eventually showed that his bladder was full at the time of his death.

Speedy crossword No. 207

- DOWN**
- Public transport vehicle on rails (4)
 - Searchers (7)
 - Goods vehicle (5)
 - Type of thin porcelain (8)
 - Detained for conversation (11)
 - Lacking individuality (11)
 - Women's rights advocate (8)
 - The shore (7)
 - Saucy soprano? (5)
 - Simmer slowly - difficult situation (4)
- ACROSS**
- Hurdy-gurdy (6-5)
 - Axis of plant - restraint flow (4)
 - Paraffin (8)
 - Solace (7)
 - Horizontal position (5)
 - First digit (5)
 - Horse hair? (7)
 - Bed covers (8)
 - Mistake - lose footing (4)
 - Refusing to comply (11)



- DOWN**
- Column
 - Spades
 - Vight
 - Calibre
 - Return
 - Diver
 - Rum-runner
 - Recur
 - Fischer
 - Round
 - Beaten
 - Miss
 - Light
 - Major
 - Paigell
 - Padan
 - Shoar
 - Costume
 - Mast
 - Recluse
 - Preter
 - Dragon
 - Claim
 - Style

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FAMILIES' FIGHT FOR JUSTICE CONTINUES

As we go to press, details of the suspected racially-motivated murder of Joseph Alcendor in Kilburn, north London, are being released by police. And in yet another brutal racist incident, Liban Ali, a 20-year-old Somali, was left in a coma after being attacked on 15 June in Leicester city centre. Despite senior police officers declaring that the police will now be taking racial murders seriously, the families of Ricky Reel, Michael Menson, Farhan Mire, Surjit Singh Chhokar and James Tossell, must still battle for justice.

NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT EVENTS
 17/9/99 @ 7pm, Irish Centre, Brunswick Road, Sheffield. Sheffield NCRM meeting with Janet Alder, Paddy Hill, Hillsborough Campaign, and M25 Three Campaign.
 Further info contact: Fuggie Johnson 0114 231 6960
 19/9/99 @ 7pm, Hackney Empire. An evening of music, comedy and other acts. All proceeds to NCRM. Organised by Hackney Teachers Association.
 9/10/99 Public meeting to launch Plymouth and South West NCRM: Mike Mansfield, Kwesi Menson, Sukhdev Reel, Suresh Grover. Further info contact: National Office or Plymouth NCRM - John McKenzie 01752 264 848



Joseph Alcendor, 62, was punched in the head while dancing outside a private party in Kilburn on 24 July. Police believe the attacker, who was drunk, was refused entry to the party and assaulted Mr Alcendor as he left the house. After the attack he also punched a minicab driver. A white man, in his 30s, Leo Kearney, has been arrested in connection with the assault.

Liban Abdi Mohammed Ali: On 15 June, Liban received serious head injuries after being attacked by up to four white men in Leicester city centre. Despite three separate operations to treat the severe head injuries he sustained, the young Somali remains in a coma. One man has been arrested.

James Tossell, 16, died in 1998 in an arson attack in Kenfig Hill, near Bridgend. Yet thanks to a bungled investigation by South Wales police, no one has been brought to trial for his murder. The fire broke out in the flat of James' friend, Steven Gibbs. Earlier, the two young friends had been forced to barricade themselves into the flat as a number of youths shouted racist taunts and hurled bricks at the windows. It seems that the police were called and their lack of action has been the subject of a complaint by a relative of James Tossell. The CPS, however, has ruled that there is insufficient evidence to bring charges against any officer. Meanwhile, charges brought against two youths have been dropped due to insufficient evidence.

Ricky Reel: The mother of Ricky Reel, the Asian teenager who died in October 1997 in a suspected racist attack (see *CARF* 42), met

Mr Straw agreed to meet Sukhdev Reel only after her constituency MP John McDonnell threatened to invoke parliamentary privilege to make the PCA report public.

Michael Menson: On 24 June, two men stood before the Old Bailey accused of murdering Michael Menson and obstructing the police investigation into his death.

Mr Menson, a 30-year-old musician, died in February 1997, after being set alight on the North Circular road, north London. Before he died he told police he had been attacked by a white gang but detectives assumed he had set himself on fire in a suicide attempt. The Met later admitted that serious mistakes had been made by senior officers and an inquest jury returned a verdict of unlawful killing.

Mario Pereira, a 26-year-old student, and an unemployed man named Constanou, 26, denied murder and, with a third man, conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. Their trial begins on 8 November. A further suspect was arrested in Northern Cyprus in July.



Surjit Singh Chhokar

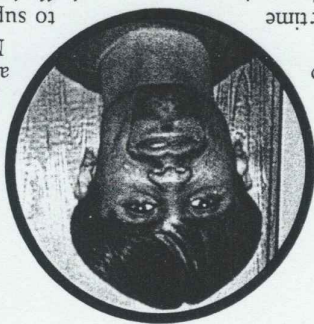
Surjit Singh Chhokar: Andrew Coulter, 18, and David Montgomery, 22, are to stand trial in August for the killing of Surjit Singh Chhokar, who died after being attacked outside the home of his girlfriend Liz Bryce in Overton, Llanarkshire in November 1998. In March, block as Mr Chhokar, was convicted of assault in connection with the murder. Aamer Anwar, spokesman for the Chhokar Family Justice Campaign, said that delays in bringing further charges had prolonged the suffering of the family, who are demanding a public inquiry. ■

Farhan Mire: Police investigating the murder of Farhan Mire, a Somali student kicked to death in December of last year, had to release a man charged with his killing when the CPS ruled there was not enough evidence against him. The ruling came as a second blow to the investigation after a key witness disappeared. The case has been referred to Scotland Yard's racial and violent crimes task force which will review any murder case opened since 1 April and left unsolved within 28 days, to be reviewed again every six months thereafter.

UNISON Sept/Oct-99

'Tell us why he died'

Almost two years after the death of her son Ricky, whose body was found in the Thames following a racist attack, Sukhdev Reel talks to Nisa Ali about her continuing fight for justice.



SHE wears a gold ring on her right hand embossed with the letter R. It's the first letter of her family name but also of the son she lost in mysterious circumstances two years ago.

Sukhdev Reel has not been able to retrieve her firstborn Ricky, 20, who was found in the Thames after he went missing following an attack by youths.

Since that night in October 1997 she has not rested. "Will I ever find out what happened to Ricky?" she asks.

"I won't rest until I get justice." The family campaign, initiated at the height of the Lawrence Inquiry, forced the police to accept Ricky died after a racist attack.

Now the family want the Police Complaints Authority report into the handling of the investigation released - seven days elapsed after the family reported him missing before a full search was mounted by the police.

Sukhdev has thrown herself into the justice for Ricky Reel campaign. She works as a homeless persons officer by day and on the campaign every night: writing letters or leaflets, travelling to speak at public meetings and discussing the next steps in the campaign.

Supporters from as far afield as Dundee and Plymouth regularly keep in contact. She admits her family doesn't see much of her and that her health has suffered, but she can't stop.

Still seeking justice: Sukhdev Reel addresses this year's UNISON conference in Brighton.

ANDREW MARDELL

Some helped Ricky the her to look for

mining.

from the begin-

at Sukhdev's side

branch have been

local government

Members of Hounslow

Ricky always wins."

myself, 'should I give up?' but

"You can't turn your back on a child. I ask

"I've collapsed but I just get up again.

cumstances.

but it is Sukhdev, the mother, who has been

thrust into the limelight in the most cruel cir-

Her family help too with leafletting at events

campaign before bed at 11.30pm.

Then it's back home for more work on the

offices from work and won't finish until 8pm.

Sometimes she goes straight to the campaign

back home by 7pm.

work at Hounslow council at 8.30 and gets

and energy into the campaign, she gets into

She is up at 6am ploughing her time

that promise.

She is determined to keep

him that I would get justice."

"It's just about killing me.

I recall the promise I made to

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You can support the Reel family by sending donations to the campaign at:

Justice for Ricky Reel,

c/o SMG Unity,

PO Box 304,

Southall,

Middlesex,

UB2 5YR.

Cheques made payable to: Justice for

Ricky Reel

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for copies of the petition.

Visit the Justice for Ricky Reel

website: <http://www.lansmith.co.uk/justice/>

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How police 'failed to get justice for Ricky'

AN MP last night listed the police 'failings' he said had been exposed by a secret inquiry into the death of Asian student Ricky Reel.

John McDonnell, the family's MP, used Parliamentary privilege to reveal the conclusions of a Police Complaints Authority report into the investigation.

With relatives of Mr Reel watching from the Commons public gallery, he said: 'It lacked thoroughness. There was a failure to establish an early reconstruction of what happened. There was a failure to set policies to ensure professional standards.'

Mr Reel, 20, was found dead in the Thames in October 1997, seven days after he disappeared. Minutes before he was last seen he and three friends had been assaulted and racially abused by two white men in Kingston upon Thames. His family are convinced he was the victim of a further attack.

Mr McDonnell, Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, hit out at the refusal of the Metropolitan Police to publish the PCA report and the 'cul-

By JAMES TOZER

ture of secrecy' the decision demonstrated.

He said: 'I believe our system failed and continues to fail the Reel family in their search for the truth about how their beloved son met his death.'

Mr McDonnell said the PCA had found a catalogue of failures.

Videotape evidence from cameras near the scene of the assault was not seized promptly enough to provide information.

Mr Reel's friends were never shown photographs of known racist offenders in the area in an attempt to identify the youths involved in the attack.

None of Mr Reel's clothing or the personal items retrieved from his body had been subjected to forensic examination.

Mr McDonnell said the PCA found that, in some instances, no records were checked to confirm or support witness accounts.

He went on: 'Cross-reference of information did not take place. Some witnesses were not found until the PCA investigating team found them themselves. Witness information was

sometimes not passed on from junior to senior officers.

'The PCA report states there were no debriefings, which would have been common in investigations of this nature. As a result, potentially important information was lost.

'I believe that is a dereliction of duty and a lesson that needs to be learned for future investigations.'

The PCA also criticised communications between the police and the Reel family, who were provided with 'conflicting infor-

mation'. Mr McDonnell urged Home Secretary Jack Straw to set up a public inquiry to try to regain public confidence following the case and that of murdered Black teenager Stephen Lawrence.

In reply, Home Office Minister Charles Clarke said he accepted that the 'culture of secrecy' the family felt they had been facing was a real and valid issue and promised action.

He said: 'I do believe the criminal justice system is too opaque and that people often do not



Ricky Reel: Found in Thames

understand what is happening to them. We are considering a range of proposals to get better communication with families.'

No-one from the Metropolitan Police was available for comment last night.

An inquest into the death of Mr Reel, a student at Brunel University, is to be held next month.

Army drunks are ticked off



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FRESH LEADS IN REEL CASE

Police follow up new clues in Ricky mystery after Crimewatch show

By LEE
HAYHURST

Police investigating the death of Ricky Reel are following a number of leads after last week's appeal on Crimewatch.

The BBC programme showed enhanced CCTV footage of two white men in Pratt's Passage on the night the 20-year-old student went missing.

Crimewatch rejected the case in August, saying the

stills were not clear enough, but after an appeal for information failed, producers agreed to broadcast enhanced images.

The programme coincided with the second anniversary of the night he disappeared. A week later he was found

dead in the Thames.

A police spokesman said: "We have received a number of calls at the incident room and these are being followed up."

The men are walking towards Kingston Bridge where Ricky and three friends were involved in a fight with two white men.

"These people happened to be walking along that pas-

sage very close to the time when they had this incident with these two people," he said.

Following the show, calls included one from a man who thought he recognised himself. He will be interviewed by the inquiry team.

That is now headed by Detective Chief Inspector Sue Mills, of the Metropolitan Police's Racial and Violent

Crime Task Force, set up following the Stephen Lawrence case.

On Saturday at 6.45pm, a memorial plaque to Ricky Reel will be unveiled at the Guildhall.

There will also be a memorial lecture by Lawrence lawyer Mike Mansfield QC, who will represent the Reel family at the coroner's inquest on November 1.

Tudor
WILLIAMS
Mid-Season
SALE

Vicar's outburst on Weakest Link

by DUNCAN LARCOMBE

A VICAR launched an angry tirade against his fellow contestants after he was voted off the hit TV quiz show *The Weakest Link* last night.

He stunned millions of viewers of the BBC1 programme, hosted by Anne Robinson, as he claimed the others had it in for him because of his Church role. Ranting on for at least three minutes in his one-to-one interview, after being told by the presenter "you are the weakest link — goodbye", the vicar claimed his exit was a fix.

The vicar, known on the show by his Christian name David, was shaking with rage as he began his tirade. He was voted off in the third round of the controversial quiz show, despite having answered the most questions. He said: "I'm very disappointed with the attitude of the other contestants... they didn't want me there regardless of what I was like at answering at the questions. It's all because I'm a vicar."

Yard 'closes' £4m probe into race death claims

by JUSTIN DAVENPORT
Crime Correspondent

SCOTLAND YARD has effectively closed its investigation into the death of Asian student Ricky Reel after inquiries costing more than £4million.

The squad formed to look into Mr Reel's death — which his family claim was murder — has been disbanded and from now on detectives will only chase any new leads in the case. Met Commissioner Sir John Stevens decided to wind up the inquiry after two major police investigations failed to find any evidence that Mr Reel had been killed deliberately.

The move will anger Mr Reel's family who have waged a tireless campaign to prove that he was targeted by racist youths. Scotland Yard says it never "closes" investigations but one senior source confirmed that

the squad has been disbanded and the inquiry is now "dormant".

A small squad of officers is still assigned to the case but they are now routinely engaged in other inquiries and will only examine possible new leads connected with Mr Reel's death.

Mr Reel, 20, was in Kingston town centre with three friends from Brunel University in October 1997 when they got into an argument with two white youths who racially abused them.

He became separated from his friends and disappeared. His body was found by police divers in the nearby Thames a week later. Race campaigners and his family claim he

was murdered but two pathologists told the inquest they could find no signs of violence on his body.

An initial investigation by the Met conducted by murder squad detectives found that the evidence pointed towards Mr Reel's death being an accident, with the possibility that he fell into the river and drowned.

A second inquiry supervised by Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Grieve, head of the Yard's Racial and Violent Crime Task Force, also failed to find any evidence of foul play.

An appeal for two white youths caught on closed circuit TV cameras in Kingston town centre at the time of Mr Reel's disappearance, failed to provide new clues and the investigating officer, DCI Sue Hill, said that without further evidence she had to



Ricky Reel: police found no evidence that he was murdered

conclude the death was an accident. An inquest last November returned an open verdict.

The Met source said: "We feel we have done everything we can. The latest investigation chased every possible lead we had but there was nothing that suggested he was murdered."

The Police Complaints Authority's third inquiry into police handling of the case is examining allegations that the police attempted to "smear" Mr Reel's family at the inquest.

After the first PCA inquiry, three Met officers were found guilty of neglect of duty and the PCA apologised to the Reel family for "weaknesses and flaws" in the inquiry.

The Yard also completely overhauled its response to reports of missing people in London.

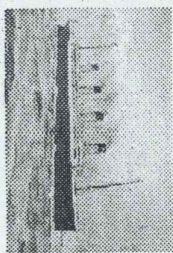
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