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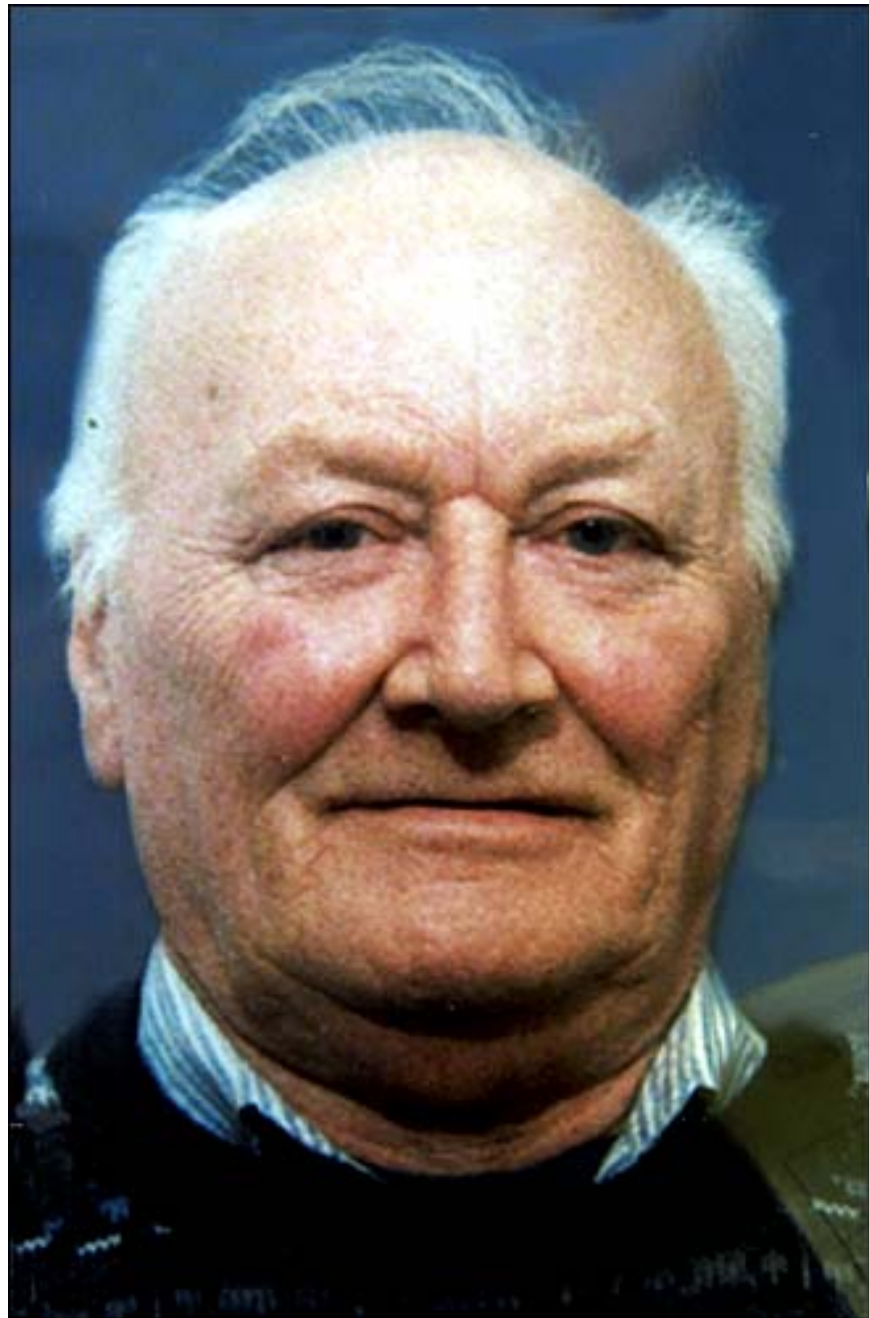
## Dangerous paedophile gets 15-year jail term

A "dangerous paedophile" who was exposed by the BBC Newsnight programme has been jailed for 15 years.

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Stanley Claridge, 72, was convicted at Liverpool Crown Court earlier this week of a string of sex attacks on children dating back to the 1970s.

The pensioner and former lorry driver, of Eastham, Wirral, was found guilty of 19 charges including rape, buggery and indecent assault.

His co-accused, Reginald Morton, 73, a former market trader formerly of Aspendale Road, Tranmere, was jailed for 12 years after being convicted of three counts of rape and five of indecent assault. A third man, former club singer David King, who uses a wheelchair, is expected to be sentenced later this month.

King, 59, of Eastham Rake, Eastham, buried his head in his hands when he was convicted last week, during the same trial, of one count of rape and one of indecent assault.

Friends Claridge and Morton were jailed on Monday but restrictions banning publication of reports of the trial were only lifted today. Both men were ordered to sign on to the sex offenders register for life.

The offences were said to have occurred mainly on Birkenhead's Noctorum estate, to have involved girls and a boy aged from six to 17, and took place over a period 1975 to 1980.

During the hearing, the jury was told how Claridge had committed an "appalling catalogue of abuse", raping one of the young victims and also acting as her pimp by forcing her to have sex with numerous men aboard a ship.

Frustrated that her frequent efforts to expose her abuser had failed, the women eventually approached a Newsnight journalist to tell her story. After the report was broadcast in November 2000, Merseyside Police and Wirral Social Services launched a joint investigation code-named Operation Phoenix, which resulted in the arrest of seven men.

One of them, Brian Kearney, 59, of Wallasey, Wirral was cleared of raping and indecently assaulting one girl, while a second indecent assault charge was dropped. The judge ordered that rape, indecency and indecent assault charges against three other men should lie on the file after the Crown Prosecution Service said it had concluded it was not in the public interest to proceed to trial.

*Story filed: 16:16 Friday 1st March 2002*

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