

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

It was nearly nine years ago that the body of 23-year-old Anthony Walgate was found in a street in East London, just outside the home of a man called Stephen Port, who had been the one to call 999, saying someone he thought might be drunk or ill had collapsed outside. Within a week, police had discovered Port had a connection with the young man, he had hired him as an escort. All he was charged with was perverting the course of justice. Within the next three months, two more young men, Gabriel Kovari and Daniel Whitworth, were found propped up against a wall in a nearby church graveyard. They were dead. Stephen Port spent three months in prison after pleading guilty to perverting the course of justice over Anthony Walgate, and not long after his release, another body was found in the same graveyard, 25-year-old Jack Taylor. It was later CCTV footage of him with Stephen Port that finally sparked the police action, which then linked all four victims who had died of fatal overdoses of date-rape drugs.

Stephen Port is serving a whole life term, but an inspector's report out today says the Metropolitan Police is still not investigating unexpected deaths properly. Donna Taylor is the sister of Jack Taylor, the last victim, who died in September 2015, and who had already been buried when the police realized that his death was likely to have been murder. She's on the line now. Good morning, Donna.

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

Good morning.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

Tell us first about your initial dealings with police after Jack was found.

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

So the initial dealings that we had was that they just turned up at my parents' house and just said that Jack was dead, there was no, "Can you sit down? We need to talk to you, we've got some news." There was nothing like that at all. And then we didn't hear from anybody for 11 days. My parents assumed that that's because they was investigating what had happened and that they would be in touch as soon as possible. So me and my sister had to respect that. And then after the 11 days, we'd seen Jack for the first time in the mortuary, and that's when we then took it upon ourselves to contact the police and find out exactly what was going on, to actually find out that there'd been nothing going on.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

But you were told, weren't you, that Jack had died of a drug overdose, which immediately rang alarm bells for you?

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

Yes, it did, because Jack was anti-drugs, he wasn't that way at all. And the fact of where we were told that he was found at the time in a park area, not necessarily near a cemetery or graveyard, we was just told park area. And once again, Jack wouldn't have walked the streets at that time in the morning. And as bizarre as it might sound for his age, he was quite scared of the dark, so he definitely wouldn't have gone and sat over an area like that. So just the fact that it was drugs and the fact of the time that they're assuming that he walked in to this place was, yeah, it didn't add up.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

Did you link his circumstances where he was found to the previous deaths?

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

Yes, we did. And we raised that with the police and we were told that that was completely different issues and different situations, and they was not connected. We raised that several times. And on one of the particular times that we raised it, and this wasn't with the same police officers by the way, this was with different ones, different ranks, we asked, "Before you say that we're wrong, can you at least try and look into it because this doesn't make sense?"

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

And just to be clear on that, you were saying other young men have been found dead in exactly the same spot recently?

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

Well, we never said exactly the same spot, what we said was the same area, because until we were shown where Jack was found, we wasn't aware at that moment in time that the other side of the wall was where the other two poor boys were found, we just knew it was that area. It wasn't until it unfolded that we realized that point, we didn't know that at that precise moment, we just knew the area.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

And it was only when they looked at CCTV footage that then the attitude changed?

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

Yeah, but even with the CCTV footage, we'd asked numerous times about the CCTV footage, and they'd told us at one point that they had Jack walking into this green area and shortly after, followed by a man. Well, we asked them, "Did Jack ever come back out of that green area?" They said, "No." And we asked, "Well, did the man ever come back out of that green area?" And they said, "No." So based on that, and based on that alone, we then asked them to re-look at it because otherwise potentially they could be looking for another body then if they're saying that nobody else walked out. And it wasn't until me and my sister pushed and pushed and pushed for them to look at the CCTV again, that it came out that obviously it was Port.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

And that he had walked out and Jack hadn't?

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

No, but they'd never walked in together, that wasn't my brother. That was completely different footage.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

Okay. And I know that in the end Jack's body had to be exhumed, so you had to go through that, which means that the police had said it was all right, the body could be released for burial.

Guest #1 Donna Taylor:

Yes, because what had happened with that, I'll just obviously quickly run through that, they'd come around to my parents' house numerous times, asking for toothbrushes, combs, anything that Jack may have touched. And all the time of asking for this information, Jack was in the chapel of rest not far from our home. So we was very confused. And we actually raised, once again, do you need this for DNA

reasons? And if you do, we pointed out where Jack was because Jack wasn't even buried at this point. And yeah, then he had to be brought back up. Obviously, you can imagine that was obviously heartbreaking and heartwrenching because we'd put him into peace. We'd put him exactly where with everything that we wanted him to be buried with. And the fact that he had to be brought back up was like you were doing it all again.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

Donna, thank you very much for going again through what you and your family have been through after the death of Jack. And listening to everything that you have said is Louisa Rolfe, here in the studio with me, Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Good morning to you.

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

Morning.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

The finding from Matt Parr, His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary's report that's just been released is that you've not properly learnt from the case of Stephen Port and his victims that history could repeat itself because unexpected deaths are still not being properly investigated to the extent they should be.

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

So the investigation of unexpected death is our most serious responsibility. And victims and those closest to them deserve our best service; that we leave no stone unturned, that we connect the dots, and that we listen and care. And it's so clear listening to Donna that that did not happen in Jack's case, and I'm so sorry.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

And it's not happening enough now, that's what the Inspector has found. A lack of training, poor supervision, unacceptable record-keeping, confusing policies, inadequate intelligence procedures. Do you accept this is basic policing stuff?

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

So the Inspector has identified that we're not getting the basics right, but they've also identified that we've made a progress that all unexpected deaths are now reviewed at local tasking meetings to ensure that things don't slip through the gaps. They've commended our work in training, but of course, that hasn't yet gone far enough that we've trained all of our officers in understanding unconscious bias, that our hate crime training is comprehensive, and that we have experts available 24/7, both forensic experts and homicide experts, and that all officers know how to access that specialist support. But clearly this is about ensuring that every officer has the right support, they're appropriately trained, and that when they attend an unexpected death, that they do the right things, that they are looking for those clues and ensuring... Now, our workforce is inexperienced and it is stretched, 30 unexpected deaths a day in London, but also 500 incidents of people in mental health crisis each week. But that's not an excuse, we must get this right. This is our most serious responsibility. And as we've heard, we let Donna and her family down, we must get this right.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

What will you change?

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

There are things that we're doing every day. And within the detail of the report, there's an awful lot of progress identified. But we are doing more, and this is a huge priority for us. Fundamentally, we must ensure that we listen to Londoners and that we work closely with them. I'm so grateful for the determination of Donna and her family, but also the families of Anthony Walgate, Gabriel Kovari and Daniel Whitworth because their determination, but also that of the LGBT+ community, to challenge us and push us forward.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

But this is about London as being let down right now, not just those families. 30 unexpected deaths a day, is it not possible for a more senior officer to go to each one of them to make sure that nothing is being missed by the original team?

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

So in many cases, that does happen.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

But not always.

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

But not always. But many of our officers, we provide comprehensive training. So the Inspector commended the training that we deliver now to every new recruit. But of course, we need to make sure that not every officer out there today is a new recruit. And those officers deserve our support, the right training, the right guidance, but also the right supervision. So we've just started a training programme that every one of our supervisors is receiving training on how to ensure that officers attending these cases do the right thing.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

But is it not logistically possible for a second more senior person to go to every one of those 30?

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

In many cases it is, and we do ensure that happens, but not in every case. And in some of these cases, the circumstances can be dealt with quite simply, but we must listen and care. And often this is about listening to families too.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

It's exactly the perception of what can be dealt with quite simply that's the potential problem, isn't it? Because someone may think it's absolutely simple. I mean, someone thought the body of Jack Taylor was a simple case, that there was nothing that raised an alarm in it, and yet we know now that he was murdered. Is it a resources thing that makes it not possible to send someone senior to every one of those 30 deaths?

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

Sometimes it will be, but I think also, it's really clear from listening to Donna's account that Jack's family we're raising concerns in an early stage and we should have listened. And so the training we're given to officers, but our supervision is about listening to families and ensuring that we care about their concerns. Because our training is focused on being professionally curious, looking for any clue, any concern that might be raised, and ensuring that we follow up those lines of inquiry.

Presenter: Mishal Husain:

Louisa Rolfe from the Metropolitan Police. Thank you very much.

Guest #2 Louisa Rolfe:

Thank you.