

Police sat on evidence to soften scandal of retained body parts

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Body parts of crime victims found in storage, including organs at Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, were kept secret from their families for more than four years while police chiefs discussed how to minimise the impact of the scandal.

An audit conducted by police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between 2010 to 2012 found that body parts were stored without families' knowledge or consent after post-mortem examinations. Police say they were kept in case of future criminal appeals or inquiries.

Human remains were retained by police, including brains, hearts and limbs, which resulted in grieving relatives having to hold multiple funerals. A police report in 2011 detailed organs found at the Manchester hospital that had been removed during post-mortem examinations in cases of suspicious deaths.

The report, written by the force's coronial manager, also warned of a foetus found in storage at a separate location. Remains belonging to 12 victims of the serial killer Harold Shipman were burnt in 2011 without telling the families and the remains of Pauline Reade, the first victim of the Moors murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, were kept without her family being told.

Behind the scenes, Greater Manchester police (GMP) was drawing up a strategy from as early as 2010 on how to deal with the scandal, which has echoes of the one that hit Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool when it was found to be storing children's organs without permission.

The Sunday Times has seen an email, sent in 2010 by Detective Superintendent Paul Rumney, which set out the GMP's strategy on the issue, saying it was important to decide "how we notify the families and manage their expectations around possible funeral arrangements for class 3 material (body parts)".

Janine Aldridge, whose

partner murdered their baby, Leah, on Christmas Day 2002, had to hold three funerals for her daughter in a case which shocked the Commons this month.

Rumney's email to senior officers called for a full audit of human tissue before a public relations strategy could be created. The email noted that forces across the UK were affected by the issue. Sources told this newspaper that most forces have no system to track removed organs and they are simply forgotten.

In Greater Manchester 180 families have been affected. Police started to approach relatives from September 2016. Officers knock on doors, say they still hold body parts of relatives and offer to cover the cost of a funeral.



Manchester Children's Hospital held body parts

Pete Jackson, a retired GMP detective inspector, told the Independent Police Complaints Commission in 2015 how officers were dealing with body parts discovered in the audit.

In his witness statement, he said: "An officer ... suggested destroying any information retained about the body parts, so there would be no information that could be provided should any FOIs [freedom of information requests] be received."

The GMP said: "We understand this is a deeply sensitive and private matter for all the families affected so every decision we have made has had them at the forefront of our minds.

"Throughout we have tried to place their feelings and needs first and based our decisions on not just what is expected of us but what we felt was morally right."

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