

Brother of boy whose identity was stolen by police spies demands apology

Anthony Barker says police could have put family in danger by using identity of brother John, who died aged eight



John Dines, a police sergeant who adopted the identity of John Barker to pose as an environmental campaigner, pictured in the early 1990s

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Undercover police were "reckless" when they stole the identity of an eight-year-old boy who had died of leukaemia, according to his brother, who is demanding an apology for putting his family at risk.

Anthony Barker, whose brother John Barker died in 1968, said he was shocked to discover the boy's identity was resurrected and adopted by undercover police spying on political groups.

The Metropolitan police **has admitted that two of its undercover units** appear to have used the identities of dead children, a practice which has lasted four decades and was still going on in the 2000s.

The identity of John Barker was adopted by a **police sergeant called John Dines, who posed as an environmental** campaigner between 1987 and 1992.

"The danger the police put my family in - and all the other families this has happened to - is horrendous," Barker said. An investigation by the Guardian has established police used the identities of dead children so their undercover agents could pose as real people. Barker said that in doing so, they placed innocent families at risk.

"In our case, we now discover, there was a girlfriend who was left behind when the policeman pretending to be my brother disappeared from the scene," he said. "Apparently she was so worried about him that she tracked him down to the house we had moved out of a few years earlier.

"Now, imagine that policeman had infiltrated a violent gang or made friends with a volatile person, then disappeared, just like this man did.

"Someone wanting revenge would have tracked us down to our front door - but they wouldn't have wanted a cup of tea and a chat, like this woman says she did."

Although many police spies using dead children's **identities were infiltrating peaceful leftwing and environmental** groups, many were also deployed in violent far-right groups.

"If we had told those sorts of people that the man they thought they had known for so many years has died as a little boy, they would have thought we were lying," Barker said. "Who knows what would have happened to us then?"

He added: "These people could have found our family in a heartbeat. That was an absolutely reckless thing for the police to do."

Anthony Barker, who was born the year after his brother died, said: "My parents always said he was a lovely lad. They could not afford more than one child. They only had me because John passed away."

"It totally shattered my parents when he died. You can see from photographs how much his death aged them. When I was a toddler they looked like my grandparents."

Barker described the use of dead children's identities as a "clinical, mechanic way of policing" and morally "horrific". He believed his parents, who are now deceased, would have been appalled to discover a police officer was posing as their beloved son.

"In my view, these were politically motivated undercover operations. That is what I cannot understand. What kinds of crimes did these political activists commit? We're not talking about drug dealers or terrorists. These operations must have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, and all the while my parents were living in poverty."

He added: "Not only is it horrendous to steal the identity of a child but by taking that identity into an unpredictable and potentially dangerous situation, they're putting entire families at risk."

The Met has declined to say [how many dead children's identities it believes](#) have been used by covert agents, although the force has stressed that the practice is not currently in use.

A document seen by the Guardian indicates that the Special Demonstration Squad, one of two police units known to have used the practice, [used the identities of around 80 dead children](#).

On Tuesday the Met's deputy assistant commissioner Patricia Gallan told a parliamentary inquiry that a second unit involved in spying on protesters appears to have used dead children's identities.

The second unit, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit, [was founded in 1999 and operated throughout the](#) 2000s.

It suggests the total number of dead children's identities used by police could exceed 100.

MPs expressed their disapproval when Gallan, who is overseeing a £1.25m review of protest spying operations, refused to apologise for any hurt caused until her inquiries were complete.

She also [refused to say whether she would contact the families](#) involved, saying there were "legal and ethical issues" to consider.

Barker said: "I strongly believe all the families who this has happened to need to be told. They have been placed at risk. That is the bottom line. These were undercover operations. Anything could have happened."

The Barkers are the second family to speak out after discovering the identities of deceased relatives were used by an imposter.

The home affairs select committee also heard of the case of Rod Richardson, a boy who died two days after he was born in 1973.

His family believe his identity was used by an undercover police officer deployed between 2000 and 2003 and are also demanding an apology. The Met has been investigating the Richardson case for almost two weeks.

On Wednesday, the Met said it was "determined to uncover as much factual information as possible about the methods previously used to provide undercover identities in certain covert policing units".

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