



Metropolitan police

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Rod Richardson: the mystery of the protester who was not who he claimed

The mother of the real Rod Richardson, who died at two days old, fears an officer assumed his identity to pose as an activist

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Wed 6 Feb 2013 16.56 GMT

Rod Richardson celebrated his 29th birthday in style on 5 January 2002. After drinking tequila and absinthe, he let his housemates push him through the snow on a tray to Nottingham's Elm Tree pub.

It was karaoke night. "I remember Rod was one of the first up and did Firestarter by the Prodigy," a friend recalls. "He was literally screaming it, picking up a chair over his head and waving it and then running around the seating shouting: 'I'm a firestarter!'"

It was an energetic performance given the circumstances. The man on the microphone was not born on 5 January 1973. And his name was not Rod Richardson. He is now suspected to have been an undercover police officer. The question of his identity was [raised in parliament on Tuesday](#) and has been the subject of a Metropolitan police investigation for the past 11 days. Records show there was only one Rod Richardson born in 1973. He cannot have been the man singing karaoke in the pub because the real Rod Richardson, born on 5 January in a St George's hospital in Tooting, south London, died two days later.

Twenty-seven years later, in the year 2000, it appears, the dead baby's identity was assumed by a man posing as a radical anti-capitalist protester.

The real Rod Richardson's mother, Barbara Shaw (above), was deeply upset to discover his identity was seemingly used in this way. "He is still my baby," she said. "I'll never forget him. We believe we deserve an apology for what happened. It's wrong that someone took Rod's identity without us knowing."

Shaw, 72, lodged a complaint with the Met over the apparent unsanctioned use of her dead child's identity.

On Tuesday her lawyer, Jules Carey, alleged at a parliamentary inquiry: "We believe that a police officer used the name Rod Richardson, which is the name of the child, and was deployed as an undercover police officer in about 2000 to 2003 using that name and infiltrated various political groups."

The Met has a policy of neither confirming nor denying the identities of its covert agents. However, it launched an investigation when informed about Richardson by the Guardian almost two weeks ago.

That inquiry is continuing, but the force is refusing to give details about the scope or nature of the investigation.

There is some dispute about the cause of Rod Richardson's death. His death certificate lists respiratory problems and pneumonia. Shaw believes her boy died after choking on his milk, because of an error by the nursing staff.

"I'll never forget to this day what the doctor said: 'I am sorry to tell you Mrs Richardson that your boy is dead.' Then he walked off."

Her then husband, Brian - a painter and decorator who died in 1983 - was devastated at the loss. The couple, who had other children, named their boy Rod after a neighbour and close friend.

The man suspected of using her child's identity spent three years posing as Richardson, infiltrating radical protest groups in London and Nottingham. He travelled abroad to participate in anti-summit protests in Sweden, France and Italy. The Guardian has been unable to contact him and is not aware of his real name. He is thought to have been a predecessor to Mark Kennedy, the police spy unmasked two years ago. Both men lived in the same Nottingham house, often used by activists, although they never overlapped.

Richardson is described as a boisterous and quirky character by friends who knew him in Nottingham. "One of the first things he did when he moved in was use gloss paint to cover his wall with images of giant tadpole-like sperm," says another friend. "It was bright red paint on a yellow background. That was Rod. He seemed to be quite eccentric."

He drove a dark blue Peugeot 505 and claimed to be earning money working as a fitness instructor. Instead it appears he was part of a sophisticated surveillance operation. Among his targets were the White Overalls Movement Building Libertarian Effective Struggles, an anarchist collective known better as the Wombles that was famed for dressing up in protective padding ahead of confrontations with the riot police.

According to friends, he was particularly involved in May Day protests, fox hunt sabotage and a group called Movement Against Monarchy. He travelled abroad to participate in anti-summit protests in Sweden, France and Italy.

"Roddies", as he was known among friends, was extremely camera-shy; on one occasion, at the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001, friends say he scratched out his face from a photograph of masked activists. Three photographs survive. In two, he appears to be attempting to hide his face. The third is a fuzzy image of the suspected police operative in fancy dress.

The Guardian has chosen not to publish the images following confidential representations from the police.

Nearly all of the undercover police officers identified so far have had long-term sexual relationships with the people they were spying on. However, the man calling himself Rod Richardson was an exception. He occasionally introduced his friends to a woman called Jo, who they now fear was also probably a police operative.

The couple moved to Australia in 2003, after Jo said she had found work at a university there. Rod Richardson vanished soon after. His last contact with friends was an email sent that July. "I have been travelling around Europe and getting up to no good," he said.

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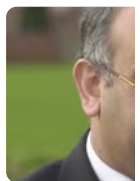
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