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Ritual **abuse** claims all lies

A WITNESS at the centre of one of Scotland's most shocking sex **abuse** scandals has confessed she made up her allegations.

Angela Stretton wrote to police admitting she made up stories about satanic sex rituals.

Her evidence was crucial in bringing a case against nine people on the Isle of **Lewis** in 2003.

At the time, a senior police officer expressed serious concerns about her evidence.

Stretton, 39, who has learning difficulties, said: "I felt really under pressure, so I suppose I told them what they wanted to hear. I just agreed with what was being said."

Nine people were initially charged with sex offences after they were arrested in October 2003 on **Lewis** and in Dorset, Leicestershire and West Yorkshire as part of a police operation codenamed Operation Haven.

Stretton could now face prosecution for wasting police time.

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

NEWS SUBJECT: (Crime (1CR87); Social Issues (1SO05); Sex Crimes (1SE01))

REGION: (United Kingdom (1UN38); Europe (1EU83); England (1EN10); Western Europe (1WE41))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (SCOTLAND)

KEYWORDS: NEWS

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'Satanic sex case' witness lied to police

A WITNESS at the centre of one of Scotland's most shocking sex abuse scandals has confessed she made up her allegations.

Angela Stretton has written to police admitting many of the claims she made about witnessing satanic sexual rituals during the case on the island of Lewis in 2003 were untrue.

But the 39-year-old has since revealed she only told police "what they wanted to hear". Stretton, who has learning difficulties, said: "They had a list of names, including my mum and brother. They said things about drinking animals' blood.

"At first I said no, they wouldn't do that. But they said I had to tell the truth for the children.

"I suppose I told them what they wanted to hear. Plus I wanted to get my own back on my mum. I know this is wrong. I want to say sorry to them and clear their names." Nine people were charged with sex offences in October 2003. Eight, including Stretton's 75-year-old mother Lily Place and brother David Disney, appeared in court. But the case was dropped nine months later with no explanation.

A spokeswoman for Northern Constabulary said further inquiries would now take place.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

NEWS SUBJECT: (Crime (1CR87); Social Issues (1SO05); Sex Crimes (1SE01))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (SCOTLAND) (David Disney; Stretton)

KEYWORDS: NEWS

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Section: Home news

Chief witness in Lewis sex trial admits she lied

THE woman whose testimony was at the centre of a controversial child rape trial on the Isle of Lewis in 2003 has admitted that she made up her allegations, in part to get back at her mother.

Nine people were arrested after a police investigation which spanned four forces, involved 100 officers and cost more than Pounds 100,000. Eight people were later charged with the rape and other sexual abuse of children in the course of black magic rituals, after allegations by Angela Stretton, now aged 39. Her mother, Lily Place, now 75, and brother David Disney, were among those charged, but the case was dropped abruptly after nine months.

Ms Stretton, who has learning difficulties, and who has a conviction for making hoax calls to emergency services, has now written to police admitting that many of the claims she made about witnessing satanic sexual rituals were untrue. She said she told investigators and police "what they wanted to hear" under repeated questioning and had wanted to get "her own back" on her mother.

Northern Constabulary confirmed that a copy of a letter from Ms Stretton had been received and said that further inquiries would take place.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

NEWS SUBJECT: (Crime (1CR87); Social Issues (1SO05); Sex Crimes (1SE01))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (Angela Stretton; Chief; David Disney; Lily; Stretton)

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Section: News

Calls to reopen Lewis abuse case over false allegations

ALAN MacDERMID

NO further action is to be taken by the Crown Office following claims that a key witness in the Lewis child abuse scandal has admitted her allegations were false.

The witness, Angela Stretton, 39, admitted she made the allegations under pressure from police and social workers, eventually telling them what she thought they wanted to hear.

Fresh demands were made yesterday to reopen the case, which ended with no proceedings being taken against nine people who had been charged and appeared in court.

Northern Constabulary said it had received a copy of the letter and was making inquiries, but a spokeswoman for the Crown Office said no further action was planned.

A Crown Office spokeswoman said: "Extremely serious allegations were made in this difficult and complex case by a number of witnesses. It was necessary for such serious allegations, involving children under the age of 16, to be thoroughly investigated. The Crown has a duty to take action and investigate in such circumstances and it did so in a fair and professional manner.

"When the available evidence was the subject of detailed scrutiny before the Crown counsel, it was concluded the evidence did not meet the standards required for criminal prosecution."

Ms Stretton reportedly penned a written confession admitting she fabricated certain allegations. Some of the nine people who were charged with abusing three girls following Stretton's accusations were her own relatives.

The nine were charged over numerous alleged sex offences including claims of the rape of toddlers, sex orgies, witchcraft, animal sacrifices, blood drinking and devil worshipping.

But the extensive and serious charges against the nine were abandoned by crown counsel with little explanation. A subsequent investigation by the social work inspectorate concluded that the girls were sexually abused. However, it failed to indicate who was guilty or innocent, leaving a cloud of suspicion hanging over those who had been accused.

The claims centred on the crofting district of Ness in Lewis, but other incidences were said to occur in Lochs and Carloway. Properties in Point were also searched.

The claims of the rape of toddlers, which allegedly continued as the children grew older, widened into allegations of occult practices, satanic rituals, and orgies.

It resulted in raids, involving around 100 police officers, on homes belonging to Stretton's close relatives and others she implicated in Lewis, Leicestershire, West Yorkshire and Dorset.

Last night accused John Sellwood said: "The case should now be reopened and our names cleared. We want to get our lives back on track."

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (ACROWN OFFICE; CROWN; CROWN OFFICE; LEWIS) (Angela Stretton; Calls; John Sellwood; Stretton)

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Satanic abuse witness 'was not pressurised'

POLICE yesterday rejected claims they unduly pressurised a key witness in a satanic abuse investigation on the Isle of Lewis, after she admitted lying to detectives after intense questioning.

Angela Stretton, 39, says she was pressurised by detectives investigating abuse claims from three girls and "told them what they wanted to hear".

Her comments have raised questions about police handling of the investigation, which led to eight people from Lewis appearing in court over serious sex offences involving children. The charges were later dropped as the evidence was not of a sufficiently high standard. Despite that, social workers found more than 220 incidents of abuse between 1990 and 2000 - including allegations of satanic rituals - involving at least four adults.

Ms Stretton, who has learning difficulties, said after repeated questioning she told police and social workers she saw her mother, brother and other islanders abusing children.

"I felt under pressure. I told them what they wanted to hear."

A Northern Constabulary statement said: "Ms Stretton was accompanied by an appropriate adult when being interviewed to ensure all questions were proportionate to her understanding."

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (POLICE) (Angela Stretton; Stretton)

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Police deny putting pressure on 'satanic abuse' witness

Michael Howie home affairs correspondent

POLICE yesterday rejected claims they put undue pressure on a key witness in a satanic abuse investigation on the Isle of Lewis, after she admitted lying to detectives following days of intense questioning.

Angela Stretton, 39, says she was put under severe pressure by detectives investigating systematic abuse claims from three girls and eventually "told them what they wanted to hear".

Her comments have raised questions about the way police handled the investigation, which led to eight people from Lewis appearing in court charged with serious sex offences involving children. The charges were dropped by prosecutors nine months later because the evidence was not of a sufficiently high standard.

Despite that, social work inspectors found more than 220 incidents of abuse between 1990 and 2000 - including allegations of satanic rituals - involving at least four adults.

Their report described how the girls were made to go without proper food, clothing or bedding and how one girl routinely slept in a cupboard. It is also claimed another was so hungry that she ate cat food.

The Social Work Inspection Agency report found that despite the children, who were born in England in 1989, 1991 and 1993, telling other adults what was happening to them, they suffered "severe and prolonged abuse". Ms Stretton, who has learning difficulties, said that after repeated questioning she told police and social workers she witnessed her mother, brother and several other islanders abusing children.

She said: "I had lots of meetings with police and social workers. They kept questioning me about different people. It was a different person every day. They had a list of names, including my mum and my brother. They said things about taking photos and killing animals and drinking their blood.

"At first I said no, they wouldn't do that. But they kept on and on at me. They said I had to tell the truth for the children. I felt really under pressure, so I suppose I told them what they wanted to hear. I just agreed with what was being said.

"Plus at that time I wanted to get my own back at my mum. I know this is wrong. I just want to try and put things right. I want to say sorry to them and clear

their names." She has written to police confessing that she made false allegations.

Lawyers criticised the police for building a case relying on Ms **Stretton** - who had a conviction for making hoax calls to the emergency services - as the only adult witness.

David Brookens, a solicitor who represented Susan Sellwood, one of those falsely accused, said: "People were hung out to dry. In addition, by relying on her as a witness, the door has been closed on prosecuting those who should have been prosecuted. Police spread the net very widely in this case and caught nothing."

Several of the accused have demanded an apology. Mrs Sellwood, who is fighting to clear her name and that of her husband, said: "We were subjected to vigilante attacks and our lives have been destroyed physically, financially and emotionally. People think the case was dropped because they didn't have enough evidence, rather than because police and social services made appalling mistakes."

Northern Constabulary yesterday insisted they had questioned Ms **Stretton** in an appropriate way and highlighted the damning findings contained in the SWIA report.

"In response to allegations made in her letter, police can confirm that Ms **Stretton** - who has learning difficulties - was accompanied by an appropriate adult at all times when being interviewed by police to ensure that all questions were proportionate to her understanding and to show that we, as an organisation, recognised her needs."

A Crown Office spokeswoman said: "Extremely serious allegations were made in this difficult and complex case, by a number of witnesses. It was necessary for such serious allegations, involving children under the age of 16, to be thoroughly investigated."

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

NEWS SUBJECT: (Social Welfare (1SO83); Social Issues (1SO05); Government (1GO80))

Language: EN

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Section: News

Abuse claim islander weeps as key witness admits lies

ALAN MacDERMID

ONE of the people arrested and charged with child abuse on Lewis three years ago yesterday broke down in tears as he was told that a key witness has admitted that her claims were lies.

Peter Nelson said his life had been ruined since police and social workers investigated the claims made by Angela Stretton, who suffers from learning difficulties, and three children. The charges were all later dropped.

It has emerged that Ms Stretton has now written to the police confessing that some of the allegations she made were false. In the letter, she says that she was put under pressure through persistent questioning, and was told that she had to tell the truth for the children. She also says that she supposes that she told her interrogators what they wanted to hear, and now wants to clear the names of those she accused.

Mr Nelson, aged 61, moved to Lewis with his daughter Mary-Anne in 1998 and the allegations about them were made in October 2003.

Mary-Anne was arrested but not charged, but her father and the others who were accused were taken to Inverness Prison ahead of a court appearance.

Yesterday he told how, on his release, they have been abused by neighbours, shop staff and many other people.

He said: "I have been threatened and had my property damaged many times. I am pleased that Angela Stretton has had the courage to admit that she lied, but she should have done it long ago."

Eight people had appeared in court accused of raping and abusing children in satanic rituals.

Mr Nelson yesterday said that there were a few people on Lewis who had stood by

them. Several people have been interviewed or prosecuted for attacks on the Nelsons.

A Social Work Inspection Agency report concluded that three children from one family had experienced severe and prolonged **abuse**.

A spokesman for Western Isles Council said it was confident that the correct procedures were followed.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

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OTHER INDEXING: (SOCIAL WORK INSPECTION AGENCY) (Angela Stretton; Inverness Prison; Nelson; Peter Nelson; Stretton)

EDITION: Final

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