

# Britain: Documentary shows police laughing as man dies in station

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On April 14, the BBC showed the documentary “Death On Camera,” which included CCTV camera footage of the last 11 minutes of Christopher Alder’s life, as he lay dying on an East Yorkshire police station floor surrounded by policemen.

The BBC obtained a copy of the original CCTV footage from unknown sources after police refused to hand over the original. It was shown as part of the *Rough Justice* series. The programme makers said they had decided to show the tape, despite its disturbing character, on the grounds of public interest. The film was made by the same team that produced “The Secret Policeman,” an investigation that exposed racist behaviour amongst Cheshire police.

The copy was of poor quality, so alongside the footage the programme makers had reconstructed the exact scenes shown on film. The original tape also included footage shot immediately after Alder’s death, in which laughter and monkey-like noises could be heard (Alder was black).

Christopher Alder, 37, had been arrested on April 1, 1998, and died at Queen Gardens police station in Hull, East Yorkshire, without regaining consciousness. A former paratrooper, Alder died face down on a police station floor, with his hands cuffed behind his back and his trousers and pants around his knees. Throughout the 11 minutes of footage, Alder can be heard struggling for breath and making terrible rasping noises, whilst some five police officers look on indifferently.

His arrest was itself bizarre. Alder had been the victim of an attack outside a nightclub in the early hours of April 1, during which he was hit in the face and then fell backwards onto the pavement, hitting his head. Having lost consciousness, an ambulance was called to take him to Hull hospital.

After regaining consciousness, Alder became very

agitated—on several occasions refusing to have tests done. During the documentary a pathologist explained that such behaviour is consistent with trauma to the head.

Alder was finally checked over by a doctor who recommended he remain in hospital. But staff refused to x-ray the former soldier, complaining that his behaviour was “extremely troublesome.” When Alder urinated on a toilet floor, police were called to the hospital and he was arrested for breach of the peace.

According to an eyewitness, Alder was conscious and placid when he was placed in the police van. However, by the time he had arrived at the police station, just five minutes away, Alder was unconscious. His trouser belt was missing, and his trousers and pants hung around his legs as he was dragged into the station with his hands cuffed behind his back.

The CCTV camera picked up from when Alder was brought into the building. Left face down in the middle of the station floor, his breathing is clearly heard getting slower and more laboured. Blood seeps from his mouth onto the floor.

Janet Alder, Christopher’s sister who has fought for the last six years to uncover the truth of her brother’s death, was interviewed. “The sound is loud and rasping and yet no one goes to help him,” she said. “It’s one of the most horrible things I have ever seen. I saw my brother die a painful, lonely and horrific death. I have only seen the video twice but it haunts me.”

If someone had intervened it is highly probable Alder could have lived. According to the pathologist acting for the family, Jack Crane, “There is no doubt that someone in that state must be taken to hospital. Instead, for 11 minutes you see the man literally fighting for his life. I find the CCTV film very disturbing. Alder was so deeply unconscious he did not even move when police

removed his handcuffs.”

During the 11 minutes police are seen walking around and getting on with their business. One police officer says that Alder is “play acting” and deliberately blowing blood to annoy the police.

While Alder’s dying moments had no impact on the police, one of the inquest jurors who watched the CCTV still has nightmares. “I was absolutely shocked at what I had seen and in a way that someone could be treated, not as a human being,” she said.

After the film was aired there was large media interest shown in the case, but most interviewers questioned whether the tape should have been shown. In fact, the family have been wanting the footage to be shown for years because they feel the truth behind Christopher’s death has been deliberately blocked. An inquest into Christopher’s death returned a verdict of unlawful killing, but a subsequent trial of the five police officers involved collapsed after the judge ruled that the jury must acquit them.

Janet Alder said, “They are very difficult images but people should brace themselves, look at them and then make their own minds up.” The executive producer of “Death on Camera,” Simon Ford, said, “When I saw it I thought it would be unquestionably the case that it would be in the public interest to show it and allow people to make up their minds.”

The family are demanding a public inquiry into Christopher’s death—a call that has so far been flatly refused by Home Secretary David Blunkett, who commented, “Public inquiries in such circumstances cannot be triggered by TV footage of material which was already known during the judicial and inquiry investigations.”

Instead the case is to be referred to the new Independent Police Complaints Commission, which is nothing more than a mechanism for blocking any true account. This toothless internal body has notoriously refused to act against police officers. In relation to Christopher’s death it has said that it will only take written testimony and that its remit is solely for “lessons to be learnt.”

In the year 2002-2003, 104 people died in police custody, yet not one police officer has been found guilty of any crime. Commenting on the government’s proposal of a review of the case Janet Alder said, “We don’t want a review. We want a public inquiry. A

review is another blockade, another obstacle towards finding the truth.”



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