



PAUL HOPKINS

Runaway Peter Bessell explains sex-claim man's 'retainers' and tells Expressman Paul Hopkins...

'NO COVER-UP FOR THORPE'

I show him a letter and he says: I'm amazed

Paul Hopkins OCEANSIDE Tuesday

RUNAWAY Peter Bessell, the former Liberal M.P., tonight expressed astonishment over a letter he once sent to Norman Scott, the man who claimed he had a sexual relationship with Jeremy Thorpe.

The letter referred directly to consultations Mr. Bessell had with the Liberal leader regarding allegations.

Mr. Bessell ran away to start a new life two years ago and now lives in Oceanside, a palmy Californian village near San Diego.

I flew here to show him copies of the letters he wrote to Scott, whose allegations have caused a furor.

Mr. Bessell, 54, suntanned and looking fit, told me:

"I'm absolutely amazed that I wrote that reference to Mr. Thorpe. I can't for the life of me remember why I should have done it."

"There is no question of my making payments to Scott because of his Thorpe allegations."

"But I assume he must have said something to me which amounted to a threat to Mr. Thorpe. Perhaps that is why I mentioned it in the letter."

"Jeremy had asked if I would deal with Scott's case. Apparently Scott was making a nuisance of himself and kept calling on Mr. Thorpe. I met him, felt sorry for him and felt he had not been dealt with properly by the National Insurance people."

"I addressed to Scott on House of Commons notice paper and dated August 27, 1969, stated: 'I can understand your feelings and your anxiety and I wish very much that you would believe that I am anxious to do all in my power to help you.'"

Mr. Bessell referred to letters he had made to obtain for Scott a lost National Insurance card, adding: "I know your anxiety about this but I have no power to do anything about it."

"I have not the slightest intention of giving that advice. I do not hold any of the allegations against him are true."

Then Mr. Smith said: "As far as I am concerned the matter is finished. So long as Mr. Thorpe remains as a credible and honest man it is not necessary for the party to take any further action."

"If Mr. Thorpe had been involved in blackmail or in yielding to blackmail or anything of that character I would have advised him to resign."

The party leader had told Mr. Smith that former Liberal M.P. Peter Bessell, now in California, had made a statement to Mr. Thorpe's solicitor which had been deposited with police.

'Statement'

That was about a week ago, Mr. Smith understood. The statement contained a purported admission by Mr. Bessell that he had been having an affair with a woman at the time he was making payments to Norman Scott.

This was the man who stated in a court last week that he had a "sexual relationship" with Mr. Thorpe— which the Liberal leader at once denied as "wild allegations."

When told that Mr. Bessell had reportedly denied making any such statement Mr. Smith remarked: "If Mr. Bessell has denied it and Mr. Thorpe says he has a statement, then clearly one of them is telling lies."

Mr. Smith had seen an unsigned typewritten copy of the alleged statement.

Mr. Smith also raised with Mr. Thorpe yesterday the question of a West Country doctor who is alleged to have arranged to open a

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PICTURE BY MARK SCENNET

Half a world away from Thorpe, row but still at the centre of it—Bessell yesterday

Police hold £7m land deal man

By Brian Cashinella

ONE of the estate agents involved in the £7 million Beaubush land deal affair, 32-year-old Christopher Smith, has been under arrest since Monday morning.

He has been detained at Horsham police station since early Monday, but the arrest was kept secret until last night.

No charges are imminently pending and applications for police bail have been refused.

Smith, father of two young children, was at his Sussex farmhouse home on Monday morning when detectives arrived to place him under arrest.

As he was driven to the police station, detectives made a thorough search of the farm. They took away some



Christopher Smith

business files and a number of business letters. Yesterday morning, after a breakfast served from the police canteen, Smith was taken from his cell to the first floor office for a second day of questioning. In the presence of his lawyer,

Last night his wife, Judy, was permitted to visit him with his solicitor when a second bail bid was rejected. Most of the questioning has been carried out by grey-haired Detective Superintendent Laurie Fyfe, head of West Sussex C.I.D., and Detective Sergeant David Tomlinson, of the Sussex Commercial Branch.

Controversy

They have spent the past 12 months probing the complications of the land deal. There was public controversy when it was disclosed that a company led by Lord Ryder, chairman of the National Enterprise Board, made a £375 million profit in only four months.

Lord Ryder then Sir Don Ryder, and chairman of the Reed International group of companies — headed the "nominee company" of Keatford in the land coup.

Keatford, half owned by the Reed trust fund, bought the 31-acre Beaubush estate near Crawley, Sussex.

Four months later, in March 1973, half the land was sold in Crawley Council for £7 million.

One of the estate agents who handled both deals was Christopher Smith.

It's a peace deal at Chrysler talks

By John Harrison

A PEACE deal to solve the crippling Chrysler dispute was worked out in London last night. And there was confidence that when the details were put to the vote at the Linwood plant in Scotland today, they would vote to end their strike.



Keep up with all the action

THE Winter Olympics start today. The explosion of the ski-jumpers... the sheer guts of the downhillers... the grace and beauty of the ice rink... all the action will be captured by the Daily Express.

Chris Hilton sets the scene in Innsbruck on Page 15.

When you're watching on the telly at home, you'll need your Express to tell you the things the experts look for— Make the Express your Olympic choice—and be on a winner.

The deal came after two solid days of talks between Chrysler bosses and union chiefs. Hopes of a solution had been steadily growing last night as union officials hinted at progress. Although the plan is being kept secret until it is put to the men, it looks like a breakthrough by the firm. It was thought that the firm would be rescued from collapse in January when the Government offered £162 million to buy 17,000 jobs worth £100 million to pay the dispute. The deal was agreed last night.

One of the main stumbling blocks was reaching formulae for what happens after 1980, when production of the Avenger moves from Coventry to Linwood.

The two sides were brought together at the Arbitration and Conciliation Service by chairman Jim Morganer. The two sides spent most of yesterday in separate rooms with Mr. Morganer acting as go-between.

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Jeremy's 'I'll resign' offer turned down

John Warden, Brian Steel, Michael Charleston

JEREMY THORPE offered to resign as Liberal leader yesterday if his Chief Whip, Cyril Smith, thought he should do so. Mr. Smith advised him to stay.

After their meeting at the Commons Mr. Smith said: "Mr. Thorpe made it clear to me that if I advised him at any time that he ought to resign then he was prepared to do so."

"I have not the slightest intention of giving that advice. I do not hold any of the allegations against him are true."

Then Mr. Smith said: "As far as I am concerned the matter is finished. So long as Mr. Thorpe remains as a credible and honest man it is not necessary for the party to take any further action."

"If Mr. Thorpe had been involved in blackmail or in yielding to blackmail or anything of that character I would have advised him to resign."

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