

## Michael Stone - 4 reasons people think Kent's most notorious killer is actually innocent

A number of theories have been put forward suggesting why Stone has suffered a miscarriage of justice



**Michael Stone has appealed his conviction twice but failed both times** (Image: Scott Barbour/Getty Images)

On July 9, 1996, a mother and daughter were murdered in Chillenden in one of the most shocking crimes Kent has ever seen.

Lin Russell, 45, and her daughters Megan, 6, and Josie, 9, were viciously assaulted by an attacker who tied them up and bludgeoned them with a hammer as they walked home from a school swimming competition.

Lin, Megan and their dog all died, however Josie survived, though she was reportedly so injured she had to have a nine-square inch area of her skull replaced with a titanium plate.

In July 1997, Michael Stone, who was 37 at the time, was charged with the murders. Despite adamantly denying that he committed the crimes, he was found guilty after a trial at Maidstone Crown Court.



**Lin Russell, who died in the vicious attack, pictured in 1989 with her daughter Josie who somehow pulled through (Image: PA Archive/PA Images)**

At his sentencing he told the judge: “It wasn’t me Your Honour, I didn’t do it.”

Despite a retrial being ordered due to one of the witnesses admitting to have lied in the initial trial, Stone was again found guilty and was given a life sentence in 2001.

Stone has always maintained his innocence, and he is not the only one.

A 2017 BBC documentary, *The Chillenden Murders*, examined the killings as well as the case against Stone.

One of the panel members, Stephen Kamlish, QC, agreed to represent Stone after the filming, believing him to be innocent.

A number of theories have been put forward for why Stone is innocent.

Kent Live has looked at why people have claimed he was not the killer, and how others have responded to some of these claims.



## **1. Lack of forensic evidence**

Barrister Matthew Stanbury argued the case for Stone's conviction being resent for appeal when he appeared on the CBS documentary *The Jury Room*, citing the lack of forensic evidence tying Stone to the crimes.

He said: "Michael Stone's defence in essence was simply that he wasn't there, he had never been there. There was no forensic evidence linking him.

"Michael Stone had asked to be segregated, precisely to avoid being incited to make confessions. The jury are then asked to believe that he has then voluntarily, with his head against a pipe, made a confession."

Dr Georgina Meakin, who took part in the 2017 BBC documentary, said of the DNA results: "We end up with DNA that doesn't point to Michael Stone and points elsewhere."

## **2. Levi Bellfield's 'confession'**

In November 2016, Stone's solicitor Paul Bacon told a press conference he had "received evidence of a full confession" of the Russell murders by Levi Bellfield, who is currently serving two life sentences for the murders of two women and schoolgirl Milly Dowler.



**Levi Bellfield is alleged to have confessed to the murder of Lin Russell and her daughter while in prison**

Mr Bacon said: "In the confession, Bellfield describes how he came across Lin Russell and her two children, how he attacked them with a hammer and his motivation for the killing.

"The confession is detailed and has a number of facts which are not in the public domain."

Bellfield denied making any such confession and his solicitor said Stone, who was believed to have been in a separate wing of HMP Frankland from Bellfield, had offered him payment to confess.

Julie Cooper said: "Mr Bellfield denies the murders of the Russell family and denies ever making such a confession.

"Mr Stone has offered payment to our client, which he anticipates receiving as compensation for time served in custody.

"Mr Bellfield instructs that he has invited Mr Stone to undertake a polygraph test, which has been declined.

"For the record, Mr Bellfield is willing to undertake such a test in respect of the murders for which he is serving a life sentence and the murders of the Russell family."

While Bellfield is 6ft 1ins, Stone is only 5ft 7ins.

Josie had also described seeing a beige Ford at the murder scene.

Bellfield drove a beige Ford Sapphire at the time which he later reported stolen.

Following the murder of Milly Dowler, he had reported his girlfriend's red Daewoo to have been stolen, before getting rid of it so it could not be found.



**Megan Russell (right), who was killed, with her sister Josie (left) (Image: PA Archive/PA Images)**

Josie Russell had said that the killer had been a little taller than her 6ft father.

Colin Sutton, a former senior Metropolitan Police detective who investigated Bellfield, said he did not believe him to be guilty of killing the mother and daughter.

He said: "He said: "I have very good knowledge of the Levi Bellfield case and indeed Levi Bellfield the man.



**Michael Stone was convicted of killing a woman and her daughter**

"Our investigation into Levi Bellfield told us that on the day of the Chillenden murders, Levi Bellfield was in west London, Surrey borders, having a meal with his then girlfriend and some family to celebrate a birthday, and couldn't have been in Kent at that time.

"His attacks were using something like a hammer, in some cases. He always attacked people who were alone. I have no reason to suspect that Levi Bellfield would actually attack a child with a hammer.

"His hammer attacks were on adult women. He had very distinct and discrete areas where he offended.

"I don't think he killed Megan and Lin Russell."

### **3. The credibility of prisoner witness Damien Daley**

Stone was found guilty in 1998 following a trial at Maidstone Crown Court during which it was heard three witnesses had heard him confess to the killings.

His defence had claimed these three to be unreliable and when one of them retracted their evidence after the first trial, it led to a retrial in 2001.

Stone had been put in a cell next to Damien Daley prior to his original trial after a psychiatrist said the e-fit released after the killings resembled a patient, Michael Stone, who had admitted having fantasies about killing someone.

Daley claimed that Stone admitted to the murders through a heating pipe.

Although he was found guilty by a 10-2 majority at this retrial, he applied for an appeal on the basis that the prosecution witness Daley was a known liar, which the jury had not been told, and that he could have got details from news stories.

However, the conviction was upheld.

Daley would go on to be convicted of murder himself, which has caused some to question his credibility as a witness.

Mr Sutton said that he did not feel Daley's murder conviction should cast doubt on his testimony.

He said: "The fact that Damien Daley is now himself a convicted murderer doesn't particularly worry me in this case.

"Even amongst murderers there is a line. A random brutal hammer attack on a mother and her two daughters is probably beyond the line of most people, including most murderers."

### **4. The 'niggling doubt' of father Shaun Russell**

Shaun Russell, Lin's husband and Megan and Josie's father, had previously expressed doubt over Michael Stone's guilt.

The former University of Kent lecturer told the Daily Mail: "All the way through there's been this niggling doubt. If I'd been on that jury I think I'd have been one of the two against the 10 who thought he was guilty.

"I couldn't have said 100 per cent that he killed Lin and Megan, and while there is that doubt I cannot direct my anger or hatred towards him."

<https://www.kentlive.news/news/kent-news/michael-stone-4-reasons-people-2779220>