Cancer sufferer commits suicide on Blackpool beach ‘after being falsely accused of rape’

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A frail grandfather killed himself after a woman he refused to lend money to accused him of rape in revenge, an inquest heard.

James Bamber, who was 82 and had prostate cancer, was "highly unlikely" to have been physically capable of having sex or attacking the woman.

But after she complained he raped her, Mr Bamber was interviewed by the police and complained of receiving threats by her friends.

Suicide: Mr Bamber took his own life by walking into the sea at Blackpool

He later barricaded himself into his home to escape his tormentors.

Finally, in despair, and with no news on whether he would face charges, the retired businessman walked into the sea near his home and drowned.

A coroner attacked the anonymous woman who made the rape claim, while Mr Bamber’s family demanded to know why he hadn’t been cleared sooner.

The divorced father of two ran a shellfish restaurant in Blackpool before retiring at the resort.

He was very weak but in May last year he was accused of raping a 60-year-old woman.

Mr Bamber later told a friend, Rodney Ford, that the woman had invited him into her house for a drink and told him of her financial difficulties.

He offered to lend her money and after more drinks they "began fumbling about," Mr Ford said in a statement to the inquest in Blackpool.

The next day, Mr Bamber decided to retract his offer of a loan.
He then allegedly received a threatening phone call from a friend of the woman and believed he was being followed on other occasions.

"On arrival at his house I found he had barricaded his front door shut using a stepladder," Mr Ford said.

"He went on to explain he was being accused of raping a woman he was friendly with."

Mr Bamber's body was spotted in the sea at Blackpool's South Shore just before midday on May 17 by a man walking his dog.

Detective Sergeant Chris Williams, of Blackpool Police, told the hearing that Mr Bamber had been interviewed under caution over the rape claim.

However, no decision on charges had been made at the time of his death.

Mr Bamber's 54-year-old son Edward, who lives in the U.S. state of Michigan, told the inquest his father walked with a stick and needed help getting in and out of the bath.

"Everybody who knew him would know it was a lie, a set-up," he said.

"It was physically impossible."

He said the threat of prosecution ought to have been dropped sooner.

Blackpool coroner Anne Hind said: "It seems highly unlikely given his state of health that he was capable of raping this lady but that was the allegation she subsequently made and she made that allegation in the cold light of day when he decided to withdraw his financial help.

"This wasn't news she took well and it seemed likely she decided to take her revenge in the cruellest way possible.

"He was in fear for his life.

"He barricaded himself in his house and kept weapons at his front door to defend himself."

Recording a verdict of suicide, she said he "couldn't countenance" what the future might have held and took his own life to "save embarrassment for his family" and to "escape those people who threatened him".

Mr Bamber's family declined to comment.