

Vicar who was accused of rape, murder and child neglect says he felt 'vilified' after ALL charges against him were DROPPED

Rev Jim Percival, 65, and daughter Ruth, 29, arrested in November 2014

Charged with murder of baby and conspiracy to conceal the birth of a child

Clergyman was also facing historical rape charge - which was dropped

Today, the pair told murder investigation had finally been drawn to a close

The 18-month probe has 'ruined Rev Percival's life', who retired from work

By [EUAN MCLELLAND FOR MAILONLINE](#)

PUBLISHED: 20:54, 13 April 2016 | UPDATED: 01:41, 14 April 2016



Reverend Jim Percival (pictured) - today cleared of killing his newborn grandson - has told how he felt 'vilified' when police brought charges of murder and child neglect against him

A vicar today cleared of killing his newborn grandson has told how he felt 'vilified' when police brought charges of murder and child neglect against him.

Reverend Jim Percival, 65, and daughter Ruth, 29, were both arrested in November 2014 after detectives were alerted to a stillbirth at the vicarage of Holy Trinity Church, in Freckleton, Lancashire.

Shortly afterwards, Lancashire Police dropped historic allegations of rape against the respected clergyman.

Then in January, Rev Percival and his daughter were told the baby murder and conspiracy to conceal the birth of a child investigations had been dropped.

Today they were finally told the complete investigation was now closed after officers dropped any claims of child neglect against them.

Rev Percival smiled briefly as he left Blackpool Police Station after he was told in person about the case being closed and police bail was lifted.

But friends stressed that the 18-month investigation has ruined his life - as he has since felt the need to resign from his village position.

One said: 'He feels he has been vilified over this. He has waited 17 months to be told he is a free man.

'In those months he has lost his eldest daughter to cancer and there have been other family troubles.

'Today is not for celebration but one must question the time it has taken for the police to make a final decision and relieve a man of God of this massive burden.'

'Some of the mud will always stick and that is why he has moved even though his Bishop has been very supportive of him.'

Rev Percival was vicar of the village's Holy Trinity Church for ten years having previously worked at churches in Preston and Blackburn.

He was previously a carpenter in Putney, London until he joined the priesthood in 2003.

He and office cleaner daughter Ruth were first arrested in November 2014 after the police were alerted to a stillbirth at the vicarage.

During the week which followed the birth he disappeared for a few days bizarrely leaving details for his own funeral.

Prayers were said for the family after the initial arrests, with friend and stand-in vicar Rev Scholz stressing it was wrong to 'jump to conclusions'.

He added at the time: 'The congregation are all nice people and, like any family going through difficult times, they will pull together.'

The village ran amok with rumours about Rev Percival's disappearance but he returned for the Christmas lights switch on and police quickly did a finger tip search of the vicarage.

Villagers had not known his daughter was even pregnant and her father initially said she had been taken seriously ill.

One 87-year-old parishioner said: 'It's very, very sad. I sat behind Ruth every week at church and never realised she was pregnant.'

'Personally, I think the vicar is excellent, pastorally he was great. He would regularly visit the sick and infirm. He was a nice man.'

The vicars wife Susan, 66, was also arrested in November 2014 but was soon told no action was to be taken against her.



Reverend Percival, 65, and his daughter Ruth, 29, were both arrested in November 2014 after detectives were alerted to a stillbirth at the vicarage of Holy Trinity Church, in Freckleton, Lancashire

Lancashire Police today issued a statement confirming the whole matter was now closed.

The force said: 'A 66-year-old man and a 29-year-old woman from Freckleton have today been told they will face no further action following the death of a baby boy.

'The pair were re-arrested in January and questioned on suspicion of child neglect.

'They both answered bail today and, following consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service, have been told they will face no charges.

'Both the man and the woman had been previously arrested on suspicion of murder and conspiracy to conceal the birth of a child.

'They were also released no further action in respect of those offences in January.'



Friends stressed that the 18-month investigation has ruined the respected clergyman's life - as he has since felt the need to resign from his village position

Although not mentioned in their statement, a force spokesman said the historic rape allegation has previously also been dropped.

Detective Supt Sue Clarke, who led the investigation, said: 'We have worked very closely with the Crown Prosecution Service from the very early stages.

'It was an extremely complex and sensitive enquiry, which was led by our Force Major Investigation Team, and we respect the decision they have made not to bring any charges.

'While we recognise the impact that such investigations can have on all those concerned, we are clearly duty bound to thoroughly investigate incidents such as the death of this baby boy.

'We would like to stress that those arrested as part of our inquiries have been dealt with professionally and sensitively throughout.'

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3538368/Vicar-accused-rape-murder-child-neglect-says-felt-vilified-charges-against-DROPPED.html>