

Withdrawn Traces: a Retrospective.

Withdrawn Traces was published in 2019 by Penguin, Random House. Authored by Sara Hawys Roberts, Leon Noakes and with the input of Richard's sister Rachel Edwards. Below, I, Sara Hawys Roberts, and I alone hope to address the controversy that has stemmed since its release.

Due to the public misgivings, relentless misinformation and copious accusations, I have felt the need to protect the reputation and integrity of certain elements of the book, whilst also rectifying what I believe were inaccuracies and oversights that were made during what came to be a complex writing process.

Beyond this retrospective, I have little to say on the matter anymore.

Thank you for reading.

WHY WRITE THE BOOK?

As prefaced in the introduction, *Withdrawn Traces, Searching For The Truth About Richey Manic* was written to chronicle and illuminate the life of Richard Edwards, as an artist and scholar, but mostly to shed light on his life outside of the music press, as an individual, as a friend and predominantly as a brother.

We hoped the book would set out to effect real life change pertaining to the ongoing search for Edwards - a fresh appeal for potential new information (from fans and the general public alike), and a possible resurgence of interest in Richard's case as a Missing Person for the past two decades.

Unlike other books on Edwards and the band, the people who were close to Richard and who knew him in the past spoke in depth and at length for the first time about his life from their own unique perspective.

Before the authors of Withdrawn Traces were announced, the Manic Street Preachers and their management sent a '*cease and desist*' letter to the publishers Penguin, Random House – with only the knowledge that Rachel Edwards intended to write a book about her missing brother.

It was a move that the publishers and authors found puzzling, and somewhat intimidating, but our overall stance was that it was cruelly unfair to try and silence Rachel Edwards' voice after two decades of not being able to authorise her full, complete story.

From this starting point it was now deemed unnecessary to involve the band in the process of writing the book. The band had already made their feelings quite clear by pursuing legal avenues in an attempt to block its release. They never refused, for they were never asked.

I can agree with the concept that their involvement would give more of a complete picture of Richard, but the general feeling of those writing and publishing the book was that, given the band's previous animosity, their personal involvement in the publication was no longer feasible.

The authors subsequently sought to somewhat imitate the 1991 publication '*Feast of Friends*' centred on the Doors Jim Morrison, which aimed to look beyond and individualise him from his life in the music industry, and thus extricate him from his former band members. The book stated that the remaining Doors members had ample opportunities to discuss their friend throughout their decades long career, and that it was time to let others who knew Morrison speak. There are plenty of biographies in the same vein where other band members do not contribute to their bandmates' stories for their own personal reasons, and these books stand on their own merit, as I believe does ours.

Withdrawn Traces was initially proposed as a straight-up, linear biography of Edwards. However as the book was discussed further, an investigative approach was deemed necessary, in terms of the events that led up to Richard's disappearance, and what may have caused such a tragic outcome. We understood that the publishers needed an extra angle in terms of making sense of his vanishing, which continues to make his story so much of a public fascination all these years on.

In terms of the title 'Withdrawn Traces – Searching For The Truth About Richey Manic' – I think the definitive word is that of '*Searching*.' The book proposes hypotheses, theories and possibilities when it comes to Richard's disappearance. Some of these I still stand by, some of them I don't, some of them I never did – it was about exploring as many conceivable angles as possible from all the new information we had gleaned.

The majority of fresh evidence was passed down during the interviewing process, and no matter how trivial or insignificant it may have felt to some readers, these were the words of those around Richard which we focused and speculated upon. As authors, we did not give a concrete, definitive answer of what became of Edwards, nor of his fate.

In hindsight I do feel it would have been easier, less convoluted and definitely less contentious to drop the investigative angle and write the book as a simple biography, yet I do feel that from a biographical angle, the book offered more insight into Richard's life – the dichotomy of Richey Edwards in the band, and that of the Richard Edwards outside of it.

*“Treat it as a biography with a few suggestions of what might have become of him thrown in’ Just not sure what some people were actually expecting when you do find out more about the behind the scenes life of Edwards by those who actually knew him, rather than some other (hacks I won’t mention) books that only ‘know’ him via the music press, including the word of the band (still in the music business) who may still have a reason to sell or sanitise their certain version of events when it comes to their missing friend. No shade at them just it’s time to let others who knew Richey tell their story.’ – **Amazon Review of Withdrawn Traces.***

WRITING THE BOOK.

The book was announced for publication in 2016, and yet was delayed until the 31st of January, 2019.

Many have speculated the delay was due to legal proceedings undertaken by the band or certain individuals having their names redacted from the publication. To clarify – there were no legal ramifications whatsoever with *anybody* involved in the writing process. Despite the Manic Street Preachers and their management attempting to silence a Rachel-led book at the outset, the band did not take legal proceedings once it was written, nor did any unnamed individuals featured within the text. Before a book is released with a major publishing house, a final read is done by Penguin's legal team, and there was nothing deemed overtly contentious from their lawyers.

There were two main reasons for the book's delay – the first being that I, alone, was very unwell during the writing of the book. I do not intend to make this about me, or to seek certain sympathies, but I can only state

the hard, cold facts. One of the chapters was completed whilst I was staying overnight in hospital, and had been suffering physically and mentally for quite some time due in part to some unknown ailments. I believe this does show in the quality of some of the writing— particularly in the amateurish style within certain sections of the co-written Holy Bible analysis chapter.

I personally tried to leave the publication on numerous occasions, and throughout the publishers were patient and kind. They believed wholly in the project throughout those difficult times. I didn't want to let anyone down but in hindsight I can see I was in no fit state to be authoring a book of this magnitude.

Due to my illness, the communication broke down with my co-author. It was nothing less than a maelstrom of chaos at the time - two people authoring an important biography with barely any contact between them, and an abundance of bad feeling. During the writing process there were transcripts read down the phone, archive pieces that were mixed up with what I presume were both authors personal writings (in two cases), and a plenitude of disarranging bluster which I can now see in hindsight.

I ask anybody who feels misquoted or misrepresented to come forward, but for now I will address those who have already spoken out –

Jemma Kwint

'Very disappointing. I am (mis)quoted extensively over 3 pages in this book. No effort was made to check details before publication. Makes me completely sceptical about all the other quotes and so called facts. What a shame! It would have been so easy to check with me and presumably others. I knew Richey for a year at university and this lets him down.'

Since Mrs Kwint left this review on Amazon and Goodreads in April 2022, I have tried numerous times to make contact in order to gain clarity with regards where she feels she was misquoted in the text.

The interview with Mrs Kwint was recorded and I have gone over the tape to find there were no glaring instances in terms of being 'misquoted extensively.'

As writers, we discovered prior to go to print, that publishers adhere to a strict word count based upon a standardised number of pages available (90k in the case of Withdrawn Traces). Which means sometimes

ruthless changes during their editing down - such that material gathered during interviews sometimes has to be contracted in order to meet this requirement. Hence we merged Kwint's experience of Richard telling her, that he wanted to be in a band, with the instance of her seeing/hearing him pluck away with his plectrums in his room. The only factual error present in the publication with regards Mrs Kwint, was the episode of Richard, Nigel and Dan being called '*the three musketeers*' which was wrongly attributed to her and made in jest by another interviewee.

These are the only two instances where perhaps there might have been reason for this individual's discrepancy and concerns. When giving descriptions, or asking questions to contributors, and them saying 'yes' or agreeing with our statements, these were used to paraphrase. For example '*Would you say Richard was quiet?*' if the interviewee agreed and said 'yes', this would be written as a quote.

Perhaps this is the novice of first-time writers to paraphrase to that extent but in terms of being 'misquoted extensively' I still await Mrs Kwint's clarification on the matter. Again, I ask her to make contact for us both to gain further clarity on this issue and to give us both peace of mind.

Alan G Parker

Again, a taped interview is still in our possession from our face-to-face interview with Parker in the February of 2016. An interview where Parker mentioned he visited Blackwood with James Brown. After claiming to be misquoted Parker then replied to a tweet claiming everything else attributed to him in the book was false. However, upon calling him in June, 2023, asking why he was spreading this misinformation, he apologised for his tweets, and told us *Withdrawn Traces* was apparently one of his favourite books, and that he'd bought at least five copies to distribute to friends in the music industry. I won't go into the reasons he claimed he had to tweet certain untruths about the book, as these are personal to him, but again, the subsequent call was accurately notated for posterity, should Parker renege again on words that were spoken to us as truth.

Richard Fry.

Two phone-calls were made to Mr Fry with regards his contribution to the book. One was an initial call in late 2016 to ask him if he'd be happy

to be involved in the project. This was made on my phone which did not have a voice recorder at the time. My co-author's phone was the one with the voice recorder that we used from late 2015 to early 2017, and once we made the initial call to potential contributors, an interview date would be set up ready for us to record.

Fry divulged much to us in the initial call which lasted a good half hour. We wrote down notes during the call -as I didn't have a recorder on my phone at the time - as I stated, we were only calling to ask if we could set up an interview at a later date. We rang him back the second time a few days later at an agreed time, in which the call was recorded for a proper interview.

The recorded call in our possession has three instances/statements Fry denies making on his now deleted YouTube video, despite the proof in our possession. He also met up with my co-author several times where he contributed further information, also recorded.

In his YouTube video, Fry did not read the Jonathan Medcraft quote correctly. We did not speak directly to Medcraft, despite trying to get hold of him. Medcraft was quoted in Melody Maker magazine in the late 1990s. The quotes are taken from there and this is made clear in our publication. We then asked those close to Richard who the boy Medcraft mentioned in the magazine could be, and they believed it to be Richard Fry. This was also confirmed when Fry told us in the first call about not having many friends (other than one person, who I shall not name - a 'rich kid' who hung around with him and Richard sometimes) and being grateful that Edwards sat next to him in Chemistry.

Benji Webbe –

It has come to our attention that Benji Webbe claims he was never interviewed for Withdrawn Traces, despite the fact we have e-mails propositioning him for interview, arranging our meeting, and a taped interview that took place in the Riverside Tavern, Newport on the 24th of January 2015. I ask for further clarity on this defamation from Mr Webbe, so that we can make some sense behind the intent and meaning of his statement.

WRITING THE BOOK 2.

The second reason the book was delayed once more was due to the fact that Penguin accidently left the Edwards family address on an item of

the archive, and understandably this had to be redacted before mass publication.

MANAGEMENT AND THE BAND - JAMES, NICK, AND SEAN.

'Re-read WithdrawnTraces after listening to the The Wire's latest album (Nicky Wire not THE WIRE. (sic) I do feel the authors (and Rachel??) were maybe holding back some information on the band's behaviour and antics after Richey due to how the three were portrayed so unfavourably in the book. I can't think of any other reason of why they were portrayed so negatively other than the authors weren't allowed to put everything in the book??' — Amazon Review of Withdrawn Traces.

To start from the beginning. I have been a fan of the band since I was fourteen. I grew up swaddling myself in their music, lyricism, interviews and admiring their early posturing and the outrageous nature in which they broke into the mainstream.

I began using the many different Manic Street Preacher forums available at the time, mimicking some of their more outlandish comments and creating somewhat of an obnoxious persona that those with a sharper eye saw as a pathetic attempt of parody/comedy. Pardon my pretence whilst I compare it to the Nietzsche analogy of that of the ticking clocks – *'And others are there who are likely eight-day clocks when wound up; they tick and want people to call ticking – virtue. Verily in those have I mine amusement: where I find such clocks I shall wind them up with my mockery, and they shall even whirr thereby!'*

The outrage from certain factions of the fandom was understandable to some extent, however we're talking of being part of a fanbase (myself included) of a band where one of the members, without provocation, publicly wished AIDS on an individual. The contentious, incendiary sentiments (and I'm including Richard's own) are well documented throughout their time in the industry.

The Manic Street Preachers have long taken pride in their hypocrisy, and with hypocrisy, what you get isn't always what you see. There is always room to question certain elements of such hypocrisy, not only publicly, but privately too.

It pains me to say, that there is no smoke without fire regarding how the band were portrayed in the publication. Whilst it seemed unnecessary or downright petty to include what was documented in the book, rest

assured that the most cruel, offensive and inflammatory actions and words were omitted to spare a more sensationalist aspect to the book, or to appear as a smear campaign against the band and management, as we inspired for *Withdrawn Traces* to be more than that.

Again, this isn't my story to tell but I can assure you with one hundred percent of my being, some of the actions of the remaining band members have gone beyond questionable and into the deliberately offensive, often acting with little compassion - behind the scenes - where it really mattered. I am at a loss however as to why a certain number of those in fandom refuse to believe the remaining three's distance from Richard towards his end of the time with the band, when there is so much evidence outside of the book about this time in their career. I suppose after two decades of hearing one side of the story, it becomes embedded in the consciousness, a locked in narrative, and any evidence challenging that is hard to accept, despite the contrary.

Once more, this is not my story to tell and I consider the subject closed when it comes to my own opinion on the band. Should those close to Richard wish to speak, that is their prerogative and it's something I will always support. I do wish some of the fandom would not deny Richard's sister, or his partner Jo their rights to their feelings at the time, or doubt the validity of their own experiences with the band and management that came after the 1st of February, 1995.

PUBLICATION.

If I could co-write the book all over again, would I? When it comes to certain aforementioned elements, absolutely. Many fans have expressed their desire for a 'non-biased' author, despite the negativity levelled at Rob Jovanovic's biography of 'Richard *A Version of Reason*' - who once attempted to do just that. It was hard as an author not to be heartfelt and have the utmost sympathy and admiration for Rachel and her family after hearing the complete, unabridged truth of their experiences when it came to Richard, his life and his tragic vanishing - in terms of content that did not make the book. I would not say I was biased, as more in possession of the facts, as highfalutin as that may sound.

Withdrawn Traces has also been compared to Simon Price's biography of the Manic Street Preachers '*Everything*' – a book in which *Withdrawn Traces* shared the same brilliant editor who had nothing but praise for both publications. However, I cannot fail to mention that Price's book (despite being somewhat entertaining) is that of speculation and mostly

newspaper/magazine copy and interviews within the media, without the cooperation of those around Richard or the band. Nick himself also drew back after agreeing to write the *Everything's* foreword due to Price's take being so subjective. I only wish to draw this comparison to show the difference between the two books, as they are both continually and unfairly compared in tandem online.

The published version of *Withdrawn Traces* was admittedly somewhat disjointed. Due to stringent wordcount pressures - certain explanatory passages and sections were edited out for the final cut. Some whole chapters were pulled (as explained below), whilst other passages were added in, late on, to help bridge subsequent gaps. The end product was lacking and less satisfactory than the fuller more complete version intended.

The resulting book was something of a compromise. Some readers have noticed that the '*search*' culminated in nothing resembling a satisfactory end result. Neither author was overly happy with the final version upon which deviated from the premise of a search that would access every conceivable angle promised to us.

Editors requested an episodic investigation type approach, building narrative tension as findings were uncovered. But as research began the authors soon got a taste of the sapping frustration the Edwards family had experienced over many years. Doors were deliberately shut in our faces; earlier promises of interviews retracted, including those of important contacts. Music industry personnel who were approached by the authors and Rachel Edwards, often blanked us (something of an answer to certain fans, who questioned why so few industry interviews. We did really try.) An initial commitment from various Police forces, to allow Rachel and the authors to view Richard's casefile for the publication, was reneged upon. Police files were intermittently missing, then found, and lost again, depending which officer was speaking with us.

One complaint from a small number of fans also suggests that *Withdrawn Traces* delved too far into hypothesising along the lines of rock mythology, various texts name-dropped by Richard, and all at the expense of what should have been a simple biography. Although the latter does indeed form a substantial part of the book: (Richard as a family member, friend, and a real person in the recognisable everyday world) the accusation is that Edward's mental health was dealt with

insufficiently seriously, and that the book dwelt too long in the mythical and speculative. I do acknowledge this, albeit with some qualifications.

Naturally, in a book aiming to search for the truth about what happened to Richard, we wanted to look into the possibility that he may actually have had a plan to survive and live on in obscurity. The popular narrative is that it was likely that Richard 'left his car at the service station and ended his life on the bridge' – and whilst this theory may indeed describe Edward's actual fate (which we also speculate upon in the book), we were also obligated to look more into other possible outcomes - including a consideration for Edwards making an effort to survive and live on in obscurity. Luckily, with regards the latter angle, we were in good company – namely from the later output of the three remaining band members.

Prior to early 1995, Richard shared various cultural tropes on exile, vanishing, and starting a new life away from his home. The authors were aware that the Manic Street Preachers had commented upon Richard's disappearance in terms of 'rock mythology', apparently somewhat overlooking Edward's mental health situation in those last known months. In this regard, they seemed to be relying on the narrative that Richard has vanished into the territory of rock mythology, and often dealt with the disappearance on that level.

Subsequently, Withdrawn Traces tried to look into what mythological material was there, to support such a notion. It was about speculating on already spoken ideas by not only the public, but again, by the band, themselves. Including the record executive and close friend of the band Rob Stringer – who, himself, said Richard was obsessed with the perfect disappearance, Of course this was something we felt we had to look into, but strangely, Stringer refused to speak with Rachel Edwards, when she contacted him for a personal chat about her brother - which I may add was totally separate from the book itself to discuss his aforementioned claim and to enquire about Richard's last days in January 1995, spent with him and the band.

Edwards was apparently inviting such thinking right until the very end, including handing out copies exile-related texts to those in close proximity. Withdrawn Traces made some effort to delve into this material, rather than neglected it out of some kind of misplaced 'respect' for his relatives. Richard's own sister was not po-faced in this regard, and therefore, nor were the authors.

Not that Edward's literary and other cultural references all pointed squarely at exile and survival; many 'exile'-themed books had the dual aspect of suicide-vs-exile. Not a shock to anyone who knows - that particular theme had been a central thread running through much of existential and modern literature. In going beyond the commonplace theory that Richard had simply already died, *Withdrawn Traces* chose not to ignore the disappearance aspect; something that had yet to be fleshed out and explored in any depth.

We wanted the book to have some balance between memories of Edwards as a close-up person, and his constructed persona in the culture. We couldn't get the full picture of Richard, without looking at his desire to join the ranks of the great names in rock mythology. I fully agree, it could have taken a more humanist slant, with a tempering of some of the sensationalizing chapters. We wanted to add statistics, information about mental health conditions like Edward's borderline diagnosis – but this came at the cost of the search angle. Had we a higher word count, we would have liked to expand on the statistics related to various mental health diagnoses, their treatment and outcomes.

EPILOGUE.

There have been the worst accusations levelled at me, cruel words on forums, threats of violence in my social media inboxes, and a prevailing idea that Rachel Edwards was somehow 'manipulated' into this project by myself. I first wrote a piece on Richard back in 2010 in which I debunked a certain psychic (I won't name her and thereby give her the much-needed oxygen she desires) and our friendship grew from there. It was over five years later that the idea of a documentary or a book came to the fore, a project which Rachel and Richard's Mother Sherry supported at the time of writing the book.

I never wrote this book for fame, vainglory or money. I received £12k for three years work (less than a yearly minimum wage per annum), along with our agent taking his cut. I turned down numerous interviews on BBC Breakfast, and ITV, amongst other opportunities to promote the book. I turned down documentary, and film requests from as far afield as Hollywood, because once more, this is not my story to tell.

There are some regrets, but I know in myself that I have no regret when it comes to my intentions, which were always pure and done with affection, despite some of the errors attributed to the publication above.

Excuse the cliché when I say it was a labour of love above all else.
Nothing is lost that is born of the heart.

I hope that this retrospective clears up some of the misconceptions
around Withdrawn Traces, and the need for any further defamation
when it comes to the aforementioned points above.

Thank you once more for reading.