

Manchester Arena attack victims accused of acting by online trolls as conspiracy theorist filmed them to 'see if injuries were real'

The new phenomena which has largely been seen in the US has been branded 'deeply worrying' by Andy Burnham



 Comments 93

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<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/manchester-arena-attack-victims-accused-25398368>

Over five years on from the terrorist attack which took the lives of 22 people at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, **Martin Hibbert's** daughter, Eve, still spends two days a week in hospital.

Mr Hibbert, 45, **was standing with Eve, then 14, when a suicide bomber detonated** his explosive vest shortly after 10pm on May 22, 2017 in the foyer of the Manchester Arena.

He suffered 22 shrapnel wounds, including one that severed his spinal cord, as he attempted to shield Eve from the blast. But one bolt struck her in the head, causing a significant brain injury that he compared to 'being shot in the head.'

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Martin requires the use of a wheelchair and Eve, who has just turned 20, has a complex range of injuries which mean she still has to visit Salford Royal Hospital regularly. At one point, **it wasn't clear if either of them would live.**

Like many people who witnessed the atrocity that night, Martin and his daughter have spent years attempting to overcome the emotional impact of the blast - something which is now being undermined by a phenomenon thought to have been isolated to the US.

Victims like Martin say they have now come under attack from conspiracy theorists who claim that UK terror attacks, such as the Manchester arena bombing, were in fact staged. It comes after [a BBC investigation](#) which revealed how one theorist, based in Wales, had even visited victims' homes, setting up cameras in an attempt to prove they had lied about their injuries.

According to a Panorama report, which will air tonight, a man named Richard D Hall described how he physically tracked down survivors of the attack - including Martin's daughter Eve - to determine if it was faked.

In a video posted on his website, Mr Hall admitted spying on Eve from a vehicle parked outside her home, and said he had made 'door to door enquiries' to peddle his theory.

A survey, which has been branded 'deeply worrying' by Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, highlighted how some members of the public believed some of the theories being pushed by trolls.

Research carried out by King's College London revealed that out of 4,000 people, weighted to be representative of the UK population, 14 per cent believe the 2017 Manchester Arena attack probably involved 'crisis actors' who pretended to be injured.

Speaking to the M.E.N, Mr Hibbert said claims that he had faked his injuries were not new to him, but that the situation escalated last year when he was notified by police about one conspiracy theorist in particular.

"I have known about this guy for about four years - I think he has taken a liking to me when I have been on the TV," Martin said. "He says things like I'm not disabled and that I wasn't actually in the attack.

"I didn't take him seriously until last year when police said they were going to see Eve and they asked me if I knew a man called Richard Hall. I didn't know his name at the time.

"He had posted a video saying he had set up cameras outside her house. That's when I took it a bit seriously. I wondered how far he was willing to go to back up this story."

In a video defending his actions, Mr Hall said he did not hide or install a camera outside anyone's home, but admitted leaving a camera rolling in his vehicle 'while parked in a public place.'

On his website, there is an option to donate via card or Bitcoin. He also reportedly has a market stall where he sells his book and film about his "investigation" into the Manchester Arena attack. Mr Hibbert, who featured in the BBC investigation, says he has instructed his legal team to bring libel action against Mr Hall, and has vowed to 'shut him down.'

"I am all for freedom of speech but when you start door stopping people asking to see people's disabilities and injuries it goes too far," he said. "He is profiting from other people's suffering and I won't have it.

"He can say what he wants about me but when it comes after my daughter and those people who have lost loved ones it's too far. We have enough to deal with just getting through day to day life without him.

"Eve is now 20-years-old and is still in and out of hospital because of complications with her injuries. How dare someone say she was acting. She has really bad PTSD and depression and things like this can set her off so we try not to talk about it because we don't want to scare her."

But Martin says he wants to draw attention to the actions of these conspiracy theorists, as he believes people in Manchester would be shocked to find out it's happening here.

The latest investigation comes after an American conspiracy theorist was ordered to pay millions of pounds in damages after falsely claiming the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting was a hoax.

Alex Jones will pay \$965m (£869m) to the families of eight victims and an FBI agent who responded to the attack - which left twenty children and six adults dead - following a defamation trial in Connecticut.

"The main thing for me is to raise awareness of this," Mr Hibbert said. "A lot of people think this just happens in America and I think they'd be shocked to find out it's happening in Manchester.

"Online abuse is everywhere on every platform and they have got to do more. Until they take it seriously I don't think the world will take it seriously. When they cross the line like this there has to be a penalty."

Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham, said he was deeply concerned by the findings of the BBC investigation as he called for laws preventing people from denying 'historical events.'

"I find it really troubling and can only imagine how it has affected those involved in the arena attack," he said. "It is unbelievably cruel that anyone would do this. Immediately people come back defending freedom of speech but this is not about opinion, it is written in fact.

"People can't be free to deny historical incidents and retraumatise victims of these events. I think people here would be furious that this is happening but sadly it's a growing phenomenon. We have seen the same in Sandy Hook where the victims have been forced to prove it happened.

"I think this should be a criminal offence. It is not about freedom of speech to deny historical events that caused serious harm. In parliament this needs to be addressed before this goes further."

The BBC investigation also found that Mr Hall had documented his attempt to prove that Lisa Bridgett, who lost her finger in the atrocity, was not injured either - and took a camera to her work.

She said: "It makes you feel very security conscious, because you just don't know who's out there and who might be lurking in a garden or standing round a corner with a hidden camera on."

Solicitor, Neil Hudgell said: "A number of our clients, including Martin Hibbert, have instructed us to issue proceedings against a named individual for defamation and harassment, including a claim in damages as well as for restraining injunctions.

"These relate to outlandish claims following the Manchester Arena atrocity that our clients are not genuine and did not suffer the life changing injuries they did.

"Several of our clients have had this man on their doorstep, taking photographs, invading their privacy in the most intrusive way. Martin and others are determined to stop this individual from continuing with his repugnant behaviour."

What Richard D Hall says

As a disclaimer on Mr Hall's website, he states that "all the conclusions and assertions made concerning whether individuals have lied or have been untruthful are expressed purely as opinions.

"It is perfectly legal to have an opinion about whether somebody is telling the truth. And it is perfectly legal to express that opinion."

In a video addressing the claims made by the BBC Panorama investigation, Mr Hall added: "My opinion is that to my knowledge there has been no satisfactory evidence presented to the public which proves the Manchester incident was not staged.

"I have made some polite door to door enquiries in order to gather evidence which is a perfectly legitimate activity. I did not hide cameras or install a camera outside someone's home.

"I did consider placing a camera in a public place in order to gather evidence which is portrayed in my film, however I decided against it and instead I left a camera rolling in my own vehicle which was parked in a public place.

"I have not accused anyone of lying. It is my opinion that some of the people involved have made some false statements in their media interviews. This is an opinion not an accusation.

"I am easy to contact via my website and to date have not received any direct contact by any Manchester victim to complain about my actions. I have carried out polite enquiries which have been within the law.

"I appealed for further information from the public from witnesses who saw what happened, this does not make me responsible for hateful messages by people who I don't know to anyone that was involved."

The M.E.N has approached Mr Hall for comment.