# DNA breakthrough solves Baby Callum murder after 25 years in Warrington



# The Heartbreaking Legacy of Baby Callum: A Case Solved After 25 Years

To the residents of Warrington, Baby Callum was never a mere statistic; he was a symbol of innocence lost and a tragedy that united a community. His story began on March 14, 1998, when his lifeless body was discovered, wrapped in bin bags, in a woodland near a local theme park. For over two decades, Callum's identity remained a painful mystery, and his death epitomised the heartbreak of unfulfilled potential and forgotten lives.

Through the years, the community mourned together. Schoolchildren emptied their piggy banks to assist in funding his funeral, while local mothers regularly tended his grave beneath a towering beech tree. Such gestures of love reflected a collective resolve to grant Callum the dignity and respect every life deserves. When his funeral was eventually held at St. Elphin's Church, around 150 mourners attended, including children who made heartfelt cards and laid them on his tiny coffin, which was carried to Eric Clapton's poignant "Tears In Heaven."

Decades of investigation marked the dedication of the Cheshire Constabulary. Detective Inspector Hannah Friend, who had just become a new mother herself at the time of the case reopening, recalled experiencing a unique connection to the tragedy. The initial investigation saw officers pursue hundreds of leads, including swabbing 300 teenage girls from local high schools, as the only evidence for Callum's identity lay in his DNA. Despite extensive efforts, the identity of Callum’s mother remained elusive until recent advancements in forensic science unfolded a new chapter in this tragic tale.

It was an email that fundamentally altered the course of this cold case — a breakthrough facilitated by a match found on the national DNA database. This led detectives to 28-year-old Matthew Sharkey, who was identified as Callum's full, older brother with an astonishing statistical probability of 36 billion to one. As the investigation unfolded, it was revealed that their mother, Joanne Sharkey, was in fact a married woman who concealed her pregnancy from her husband, Neil, and family.

The community was shocked to discover that Sharkey struggled with severe post-natal depression, a reality that had gone unnoticed and un addressed. She confessed to suffocating her newborn after giving birth alone in her bathroom, overwhelmed by her circumstances and mental health issues. Her sentencing this year came as she pleaded guilty to manslaughter due to diminished responsibility, a decision that has since stirred mixed emotions within the community. The judge, acknowledging her struggles, imposed a two-year prison term, suspended for two years, alongside a mandatory mental health treatment program.

Sharkey's story is not just one of tragic ends but also of profound pain and consequence. Her husband, Neil, stood by her side, sharing that while he and their first son had been supportive, the incident profoundly fractured their family dynamics. Some relatives, however, distanced themselves, unable to reconcile their memories of Joanne with the severity of the actions she took.

Community figures who were closely involved also reflected on the case. Reverend Nicky Lees, who officiated Callum’s funeral, shared how the entire community rallied to give the child a proper resting place, feeling helpless yet compelled to act. The event evoked deep emotional responses from various residents, many of whom were affected in personal ways. Shelley McCabe—who led fundraising efforts for Callum's funeral—said that many people felt a personal connection to the tragedy, providing inspiration for their support.

The case’s resolution has reopened wounds but has also sparked discussions about mental health, particularly among new mothers. It challenges previous assumptions that led investigators and community members to believe Sharkey was a frightened teenager, particularly considering the societal stigma surrounding teenage pregnancy. This revelation emphasizes the importance of mental health awareness and support, shedding light on the complexities that can lead to such tragic outcomes.

Detective Inspector Friend, reflecting on the nature of the case, admitted to the difficulties inherited from balancing her professional duty with her newfound role as a mother. “The aim for us was to find out who that little boy was, what had happened to him, who was involved, and bring them to justice — and we did that,” she stated. Yet she acknowledged that true justice in a situation of such tragedy remains complex, particularly given the lifelong repercussions for the families involved.

Today, Baby Callum rests peacefully, his grave adorned with heartfelt tokens from a grieving community that has sought solace through shared compassion. Though the resolution of this case offers a semblance of closure, it also invites an introspective examination of mental health, family dynamics, and the collective responsibility to support those who may be silently suffering.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/06/woman-pleads-guilty-to-killing-newborn-baby-found-in-warrington-in-1998)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgrw01xnzxyo)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.cheshire.police.uk/news/cheshire/news/articles/2025/3/mother-pleads-guilty-to-manslaughter-of-her-baby-almost-30-years-ago/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2025-03-06/mother-pleads-guilty-to-manslaughter-of-baby-boy-almost-30-years-ago)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/17/man-and-woman-arrested-on-suspicion-of-killing-baby-callum-cheshire-1998)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/06/woman-pleads-guilty-to-killing-newborn-baby-found-in-warrington-in-1998)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/baby-callum-warrington-joanne-sharkey-b2710128.html)
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* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/17/man-and-woman-arrested-on-suspicion-of-killing-baby-callum-cheshire-1998)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14688531/Solved-25-years-Baby-Callum-Cheshire.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/06/woman-pleads-guilty-to-killing-newborn-baby-found-in-warrington-in-1998> - Joanne Sharkey, 55, pleaded guilty to manslaughter by diminished responsibility for the death of her newborn son, Baby Callum, whose body was found in Warrington in 1998. The case remained unsolved for nearly 27 years until DNA analysis led to Sharkey's identification. She concealed her pregnancy, gave birth at home, and caused the baby's death shortly after birth. Sharkey was sentenced to a two-year prison term, suspended for two years, and ordered to undergo mental health treatment. The case has deeply affected the local community, which had long sought justice for Baby Callum.
3. <https://www.cheshire.police.uk/news/cheshire/news/articles/2025/3/mother-pleads-guilty-to-manslaughter-of-her-baby-almost-30-years-ago/> - Joanne Sharkey, 55, pleaded guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility and attempting to conceal the birth of her child. The baby, named Callum after the Callands district where he was found, was discovered in 1998. Advances in DNA analysis led to Sharkey's identification nearly 27 years later. She concealed her pregnancy, gave birth at home, and caused the baby's death shortly after birth. Sharkey was sentenced to a two-year prison term, suspended for two years, and ordered to undergo mental health treatment. The case has deeply affected the local community, which had long sought justice for Baby Callum.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2025-03-06/mother-pleads-guilty-to-manslaughter-of-baby-boy-almost-30-years-ago> - Joanne Sharkey, 55, pleaded guilty to manslaughter by diminished responsibility for the death of her newborn son, Baby Callum, whose body was found in Warrington in 1998. The case remained unsolved for nearly 27 years until DNA analysis led to Sharkey's identification. She concealed her pregnancy, gave birth at home, and caused the baby's death shortly after birth. Sharkey was sentenced to a two-year prison term, suspended for two years, and ordered to undergo mental health treatment. The case has deeply affected the local community, which had long sought justice for Baby Callum.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgrw01xnzxyo> - Joanne Sharkey, 54, appeared at Liverpool Crown Court charged with murder and concealment of the birth of a child between 1 March and 14 March 1998. A provisional date for a trial has been set for January 2025. The baby, named Callum after the Callands district of Warrington where he was found, was discovered in a bin bag close to the Gulliver’s World theme park in Warrington, Cheshire, in March 1998. A burial and funeral service were arranged by local residents, and he was buried in Warrington Cemetery a few months later.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/17/man-and-woman-arrested-on-suspicion-of-killing-baby-callum-cheshire-1998> - A man and woman from Liverpool were arrested in connection with the murder of Baby Callum in Warrington, Cheshire, more than 25 years ago. The baby, named Callum after the Callands area of the town where he was found, was discovered in a bin bag near Gulliver’s World theme park in March 1998. The arrests were made in July 2023, and both individuals were released on conditional bail. Detective Inspector Hannah Friend stated that inquiries remain ongoing and no further information would be released at that time.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/baby-callum-warrington-joanne-sharkey-b2710128.html> - Joanne Sharkey, 55, admitted the manslaughter of her baby, Baby Callum, whose body was discovered in a bin bag in woodland 27 years ago. The baby boy’s body was found close to Gulliver’s World theme park in Warrington, Cheshire, on March 14, 1998, by a dog walker. Sharkey was arrested on July 28, 2023, on suspicion of murder. Police say Sharkey had concealed her pregnancy, given birth at her home address, and caused the death of the baby, who was found to have wads of tissue in his mouth and throat, in the following hours.