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Member of Real IRA found shot dead in churchyard

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- [Henry McDonald](#), Ireland correspondent
 - [The Guardian](#), Thursday, February 14 2008
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This article appeared in [the Guardian](#) on [Thursday February 14 2008](#) on p16 of the [UK news](#) section. It was last updated at 00:15 on February 14 2008.

Police are investigating the death of a man who is believed to be the first victim of a Republican terrorist murder in Northern Ireland for six years.

The body of Andrew Burns was found wrapped in a red blanket in a churchyard in the Irish Republic on Tuesday evening. Security sources told the Guardian yesterday that Burns, 27, had been a member of the Real IRA, the dissident republican terror group opposed to the peace process.

They said it was unclear whether he had been targeted because the Real IRA regarded him as an informer or as a result of a feud with another paramilitary organisation.

Burns, from Clady, near Strabane, was still alive when he was taken out of a car near the church in Doneyloop, Castlefin, a small village in County Donegal.

Locals reported hearing at least two shots and the police believe the victim was killed in the church graveyard. A nurse who rushed from a nearby youth club to the scene tried to resuscitate him but he died a short time later.

Father Brian McGoldrick, the parish priest at St Columba's church, prayed over the dying man's body. "I am simply appalled by it," he said yesterday. "It is just a sad reflection on things that are happening in Ireland at the moment. It is just an appalling crime and there is nothing you can do but condemn it in the strongest terms."

The car used to transport Burns to the murder scene was later found burned at Coshquinn, outside Derry city. McGoldrick said four teenagers had been among the first to discover the body.

A local priest, Father Declan Boland, said yesterday that the Burns family were "crushed and broken" by the death. "I want to condemn this as a most heinous, immoral and depraved act," he said.

Last night a source close to the Irish National Liberation Army, which has a strong base in Strabane, contacted the Guardian to dissociate itself from the killing. "There have been rumours flying about Strabane that the INLA was behind this because we have a presence in Strabane but there is no way this organisation was involved in this. It's either a falling out among other anti-Good Friday agreement republican organisations or the Real IRA based up in Derry believed this man was an informer," the INLA source said.

He added that abandoning the car near Derry indicated that those responsible had come from the city, where the Real IRA has a growing presence.

The Real IRA last night denied it had been involved in the murder of Burns, who had been injured in a previous shooting blamed on dissident republicans.

All republican organisations, both the on-ceasefire IRA and the dissident groupings, are gripped with paranoia over informers within their ranks. Last weekend one of Gerry Adams's chauffeurs, longstanding IRA man Roy McShane, was unmasked as an MI5 agent. McShane was moved out of Northern Ireland for his own safety last Friday by the security services after they learned the IRA had concluded he was a long-term British agent.

Dissident terror groups have also been carrying out internal investigations after a string of security force successes against them at home and abroad.

Burns is the second person to have been killed by dissident republican paramilitaries in six years.

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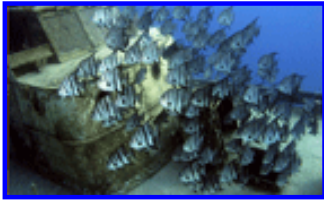
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