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Relatives of murdered teens deserve the truth

Susan McKay

By Susan McKay

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In the year 2000, loyalists armed with knives brutally stabbed and tried to behead teenagers David McIlwaine and Andrew Robb from Portadown. Their slaughtered bodies were left lying on a country road near Tandragee, where they were found by a woman driving her children to a dance class.

David was a student, a promising graphic artist with no interest in politics. Andrew was on the fringes of Billy

Wright's Loyalist Volunteer Force, though he wasn't a member. He was just a boy heading to the bad in a town in which 'King Rat' was a cult figure. The boys had been at a nightclub in Tandragee.

Several years earlier the LVF had broken away from the Ulster Volunteer Force to back the Orange Order in its stand at Drumcree. The LVF and the UVF were engaged in a feud. Richard Jameson had just been murdered. Despite being a local UVF commander, he was a builder with valuable Ministry of Defence contracts and carried a legally held gun.

David's father, Paul McIlwaine, went into Belfast's Crown Court last Friday hoping that at long last he was on the verge of finding out the truth about the murder of his beloved son. He wanted to know everything. Who drove the cars that brought the boys to the lonely place their lives ended. Who wielded the knives. Who ordered the horrific crime. Who covered it up. Why the authorities have seemed so reluctant to investigate it.

Instead he learned that one of those accused of the murder was to give evidence against the other in return for a reduced charge of causing grievous bodily harm. When it was announced in February that new legislation was to be used to enable this to happen Mr McIlwaine welcomed the news – because he believed it would lead to the disclosure of vital information about others involved in the murder gang and would lead to further prosecutions.

However, it is now possible that Mark Burcombe's evidence will solely incriminate Steven Leslie Brown, formerly known as Steven Revels.

Revels was originally charged with the murders in 2000. A PSNI officer told Mr McIlwaine then that there was intelligence that the UVF was to take revenge on two local LVF drug dealers but that they had escaped and the innocent boys had been taken instead. He said there was ample forensic and witness evidence.

However, later that year the charges were dropped by the Public Prosecution Service.

In 2002 Mr McIlwaine asked that the proposed inquest be made compliant with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This would have enabled the discovery of documents including intelligence material.

This was opposed by the chief constable, Hugh Orde, who said the state had no involvement in the murders and threatened to use a Public Interest Immunity certificate to prevent it.

The High Court, however, ruled that some files – not including intelligence – should be handed over to Mr McIlwaine's lawyers.

In 2005, after he was contacted by Mr McIlwaine, Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, briefed Tony Blair on the

case. There was a Crimewatch reenactment of the murders.

The investigation was taken over by another PSNI officer, who confirmed to Mr McIlwaine that the original investigation had produced substantial evidence. Burcombe and Revels were charged but others were not.

British Irish Rights Watch has expressed concern at recent developments.

Paul McIlwaine has been vilified

by the DUP for seeking the support of nationalist and republican politicians and the victims group Relatives for Justice.

He is not a vengeful man. He told a meeting in Derry last year that if the killers came to him and asked his forgiveness he would give it. But he is angry. His life has been taken over by this battle to honour the memory of his son by finding out the truth. There is no possible justification for denying him.


s.mckay@irishnews.com

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