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'The report gave us a better insight into why our father died'

([Irish News](#))

Benny Moane was a hard-working sales representative for the Irish Bonding Company who was raising a family of six children in Belfast when he was shot dead in one of the most chilling murders of the Troubles.

Originally from Coonen in Co Fermanagh, halfway between Fivemiletown and Roslea, the nature of his work took him to public houses across republican and loyalist areas of Belfast.

His son, also called Bernard, who was 15 when his father was murdered, said he had "many friends from all walks of life".

"Generally speaking he was a very affable, very friendly, helpful, warm person, someone who was easy to speak to, who basically didn't have any enemies."

However, the Catholic man happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when his work took him to pubs in the loyalist heartland of the Shankill Road on May 17 1972.

He was abducted by three men from the area and taken to the Knockagh Monument, a 100ft obelisk war memorial perched 935ft up a hill near Greenisland in Co Antrim.

During Mr Moane's abduction, his captors sat and drank whiskey and beer they had taken from his car, warning visitors to the monument to stay away because they said he was an IRA man.

This allegation was subsequently refuted by the police.

The victim pleaded with his captors to save his life, explaining he was an innocent man with a wife and six children but he was shot dead.

"Daddy was a great family man and he worked long hours," his son said.

"There are six of us – I'm the oldest, I've a brother and four sisters – and we were leading a normal family life.

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"Then suddenly, our father was taken away from my mother and us and our family life was destroyed forever. We still miss him so much."

Bernard jnr recalled George Lavery, the managing director of the Irish Bonding Company, pulling up in front of their home in a Jaguar the day they were told the news.

"I knew then that there was something seriously wrong because my mother said to us, about a half an hour before George turned up, 'Say a prayer for your father as we are living in very dangerous times'.

"So we all said a decade of the Rosary and then I went outside to play football.

"When George arrived I knew it must be something pretty serious. Then, I remember my brother running out of my house screaming and crying his head off and saying that our daddy was dead. We immediately ran into the house.

"There was pandemonium, people arriving – the local priest, relatives, friends – and it just snowballed.

"My Daddy's funeral was massive."

In the years that followed, Mr Moane's widow Dorothea raised her children by taking whatever jobs she could manage, as the family struggled to come to terms with the naked act of sectarian violence.

"The day after daddy was killed, it was my youngest sister Patricia's seventh birthday," Bernard said.

"In advance of her birthday, Mummy had bought a card and presents but celebrating her birthday did not take place, for obvious reasons.

"My mummy later suffered from congestion of the lungs because she was working so hard cooking, doing the ironing, cleaning, trying to keep jobs down.

"I suppose we tried to cope with Daddy's death by quietly doing our own thing.

"When it was his anniversary, some would organise a Mass for dad's 'special intentions', some members of the family would visit his grave in Milltown Cemetery to clean it and place flowers on it, or some would say a few prayers for him.

"There was no formal combined approach to the whole thing

in terms of commemorating because it was too painful for everyone to express their feelings openly and collectively on his anniversary. This position remains the same today."

When the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) contacted the family last October, Bernard said his family had no hesitation about getting involved.

"I had no preconceived ideas of the HET," he said.

"I just took it they were there to reinvestigate my father's murder and we thought OK, maybe out of this we could gather some additional information we didn't have before.

"Indeed, that turned out to be the case. I sat with officers from the outset for an hour and a half on the initial meeting, asking a plethora of questions about my dad's murder.

"Questions such as: What happened on the day? Why did they take him out to Knockagh Monument? Bernard said his dad used to sit out there and have his lunch when he used to do his calls in Carrickfergus and Ballyclare. Did that have any tie-in?

"Who were the people who murdered him? What was their background? Was it pre-planned? Who else was involved? The usual questions.

"It was a matter of presenting questions to the HET that would be penetrative enough so they could find the answers to the questions which had been on our minds over the years.

"The final resolution report provided us with a greater understanding of why my father was killed on a particular day.

"He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Mr Moane said his father had been in a bar days after a Protestant teenager from the Shankill was murdered.

It is believed the perpetrators overheard a conversation between Benny and the owner saying he should leave as he was a Catholic and he did not want to cause any offence to mourners in the bar.

"In a sense we received some answers to our questions from the HET and the family got more from the reinvestigation than any publication or any newspaper article ever could have because it went into a deeper process.

"They investigated all avenues in the case and were able to

obtain copy transcript reports, interview notes from the officers who interviewed the murderers and spoke to detectives (now retired) who investigated the case.

"The report, as far as we were concerned, was comprehensive.

"It gave us as much information as it could and presented a greater understanding of why Benny was killed."

However, Bernard said only those responsible know all the facts and his family will never have all the information unless two of the three – one is now deceased – confess on their death beds.

"I have a sister in Wichita [USA] who wasn't involved in the process but knew it was going on.

"I've recently posted her a copy," he said.

"I've no hesitation in saying the HET exhausted every avenue to seek as much factual information as possible for us.

"There was no speculation – just factual information based on written documentary evidence."

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