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Search on for remains of 'disappeared' man

GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

FORENSIC EXPERTS charged with trying to find the remains of the "disappeared" victims of the Troubles are examining a site in the Republic where one anonymous source suggested that the body of Gerry Evans is located.

Mr Evans, a 24-year-old from Crossmaglen in south Armagh, went missing in March 1979. He was last seen hitching a lift near Castleblayney in Co Monaghan. No organisation has admitted responsibility for his disappearance, although the IRA in south Armagh has been accused of his murder.

The experts working for the Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains began their work after an anonymous letter was sent to the Evans family that also contained a map of the site where Gerry Evans may be buried.

The note, which was sent to the family around the anniversary of his disappearance, stated: "This is where I believe Gerry to be buried. I hope this helps and God bless you all." The information was given to gardai, who in turn notified the commission. Examination of the site began promptly, although word of the new information only became public yesterday.

Forensic experts, who are also examining a number of other sites in the Republic, have been continuing their work at this site, which they are keeping secret pending a decision to launch a proper dig.

The experts have been checking the site for soil movement and examining old maps and photographs to check whether there has been any change in the topography of the area. Similar work is taking place at other sites.

The commission has decided it will not instigate any new digs until it has established that there is a reasonable chance of recovering remains of the disappeared.

Mr Evans is one of about a dozen people who are believed to have been killed during the Troubles, who became known as the

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"disappeared". In 1999 the IRA provided a list of nine people it had abducted and killed, one of whom was Jean McConville, whose body was eventually located. In all, four bodies were recovered.

Mr Evans was not on this list, and neither was his close neighbour in Crossmaglen, Charles Armstrong, who went missing in 1981. It is nonetheless believed the IRA killed both men, but that they were not on the list because the IRA in south Armagh would not co-operate with the IRA leadership over the issue.

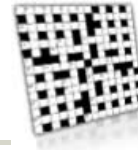
Local SDLP Assembly member Dominic Bradley said the Evans family, like all the families of the disappeared, had suffered terribly. "One can only hope and pray their long wait is nearing its conclusion and that the news they have received will help bring some closure to decades of waiting," he said.

SDLP councillor Geraldine Donnelly, from Crossmaglen, hoped that the new information would lead to the recovery of Mr Evans's body so that he could have a Christian burial.

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