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George Seawright 'could have followed the same path as McGuinness', says son

5-6 minutes



George Seawright pictured after removing a tricolour from display in Belfast, 1985

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Firebrand politician-cum-paramilitary George Seawright could have gone on to have a “positive impact” on the peace process like men such as Martin McGuinness, according to his

son.

Craig Seawright was speaking to the News Letter almost 30 years to the day after the death of his father, who died after being shot by republicans in the Shankill area of Belfast.

Formerly a member of the DUP and later independent, he sat on Belfast council for around six years up to his death on December 3, 1987. He was also secretly a member of the UVF.

During the course of his short political career, he had been expelled from the DUP for his sectarian views.

For example, he had been widely quoted as saying that officials should buy an incinerator to burn Roman Catholics and their priests in 1984; he reportedly got a six-month suspended sentence for the remark.

The book *Lost Lives* states that as well as being “known for extreme statements”, he had brandished a gun during an attempt to remove a tricolour flying in the Whiterock district of west Belfast.

And following the killing of UVF chief John Bingham, the book said Seawright had called for “revenge”.

It goes on to add: “A Catholic man, Raymond Mooney, was killed by the UVF shortly after his remarks.”

The Conflict Archive on the Internet (a compendium of Troubles information run by the University of Ulster) states that in 1985 the secretary of state for Northern Ireland “was physically attacked by loyalist protestors as he arrived for a function at Belfast City Hall”.

It adds that Seawright “was jailed for nine months in October 1986 for his part in this protest”.

Nevertheless, among the mourners at his funeral was Ian Paisley, plus North Belfast UUP MP Cecil Walker and UUP Lord Mayor Dixie Gilmore, according to Lost Lives.

Seawright's name first appears in the online archive of council elections called ark.ac.uk in 1981. At that time, he came third in the east Belfast district as a DUP candidate.

In the 1985 election he stood in the Court district in the north of the city, this time as a "Protestant unionist", and topped the poll there with 2,970 votes.

His wife Elizabeth Seawright took up his seat after his death, but lost it in 1993.

In 2006, the UVF released a roll of its members who had been killed during the Troubles.

George Seawright was on it.

Craig Seawright, 40 and married with two children, is today the pastor of Urban Grace Ministries, a church in north Belfast which has established in just the last few years.

He describes the church as neither Protestant nor Catholic, but as non-denominational.

He said: "Hindsight has been a wonderful thing for so many. Probably my only regret is that we'll never know if my father would have changed like so many people did.

"I suppose you could look at people like Martin McGuinness and stuff as an example, who for me have made a positive impact on the peace process.

"You could never say never.

“I think for me the main thing is that that context is never created again. I think context was a powerful thing in those days in that it pulled ordinary working-class men [from] Protestant and Catholic communities into beliefs, actions, words and opinions that maybe they'd never have had.”

He added: “I remember him as a daddy – it's as simple as that. A person who took me to football games, to the park. That's how I remember him. Obviously he was a passionate man, but I primarily remember him as a daddy. That's the part that I think some people don't see behind the public face...

“That's the way I choose best to remember him.”

Asked if he forgives the people who shot him, he said: “I do. I do. 100%. For me, forgiveness is something God's helped me to do. For me, the grace of God teaches that every man is worthy and deserves forgiveness.

“That's always my mindset and approach towards that.”