

Eddie Gilfoyle is silenced as price of freedom

Eddie Gilfoyle
PA

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Eddie Gilfoyle PA

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Eddie Gilfoyle, who was convicted of murdering his wife, was released from prison yesterday after 18 years behind bars — on condition that he stops telling the world he is innocent.

The lifer, whose heavily pregnant wife Paula was found hanged in the garage of their home in 1992, was granted parole on his first application, but has been barred from communicating directly or indirectly with the media.

The Times has investigated his case over several years, raising doubts about the safety of his conviction, but a gagging restriction now prevents contact with him.

Gilfoyle, 49, was released from Sudbury open jail in Derbyshire yesterday. A simple statement was issued on his behalf explaining that he was unable to comment on his release or his case and would be asking a judge to overthrow the silencing order. His lawyers had already started a formal request for a fresh appeal to clear his name.

Lord Hunt of Wirral, the Conservative peer and Gilfoyle's former constituency MP who believes he is innocent, said that he too was covered by the gagging restriction. He wrote to the Parole Board asking that Gilfoyle and his supporters be allowed to speak freely.

Mrs Gilfoyle, 32, was found dead in the Merseyside village of Upton in 1992. A suicide note was found in her own handwriting but a jury accepted the prosecution's case that Gilfoyle dictated it as a trick, telling his wife that he needed it for a course as part of his job as a hospital orderly.

It appears that his family, solicitors and supporters cannot speak on his behalf for fear that he will be returned to prison for the rest of his days.

- *The Times* investigation found that: notes withheld from Gilfoyle's murder trial and not disclosed by police gave him a potential alibi because his wife's death was estimated at a time when he was known to be at his workplace;
- although experts believed at the time of the trial that pregnant women rarely killed themselves, later research showed that suicide was actually the main cause of maternal death, with late pregnancy a high-risk period and hanging the main method;
- a world authority on suicide who studied Mrs Gilfoyle's note concluded that it was either genuine or had been dictated by someone who had researched suicide notes.

Gilfoyle's statement yesterday said: "I am not able to provide a response because the Parole Board has imposed a condition on my life licence that prohibits me contacting the media either directly or indirectly whether this is regarding my release or my appeal.

"This is a matter that I will be challenging through the courts, but until that time I cannot comment."

His solicitors, Birnberg Peirce, said: "As his lawyers, it appears we are unable to comment on his case. We are in the process of challenging what is clearly an unlawful decision."

Lord Hunt, a solicitor, after being read Gilfoyle's statement by *The Times*, said that he too was covered by the gagging order since he indirectly spoke for Gilfoyle. "Oh dear, is there no end to this? That means me. Indirectly means I can't speak to the media on his behalf," he added.

"I wouldn't speak other than on behalf of someone I believe to be innocent. I want to know the reasons why and would vigorously challenge this restriction in every possible way I can.

"I am immediately writing to the chairman of the Parole Board to say, 'Is this true?' and I regard this as a continuation of the restrictions that have unfairly been imposed on someone who I strongly believe to be innocent."

A Parole Board spokesman, asked about the gagging order, said: "Such a condition is unusual. The only purpose of the licence conditions is to make sure that the offender doesn't reoffend. The only reason it could be in there is to reduce the chances of reoffending."

Victims have a right to be informed when a convicted murderer is freed and Mrs Gilfoyle's family were alerted in advance.

Notable public figures have expressed strong doubts about the evidence, including Desmond Browne, QC, the former Chairman of the Bar Council; Alison Halford, former Assistant Chief Constable of Merseyside; and David Canter, the pioneering criminal profiler who originally helped police in their investigation against Gilfoyle.

Gilfoyle had already been released temporarily on occasion as part of the process preparing him for rehabilitation into the community. His release does nothing to clear his name. He remains under life sentence and can be recalled if he fails to abide by the conditions of his licence.

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