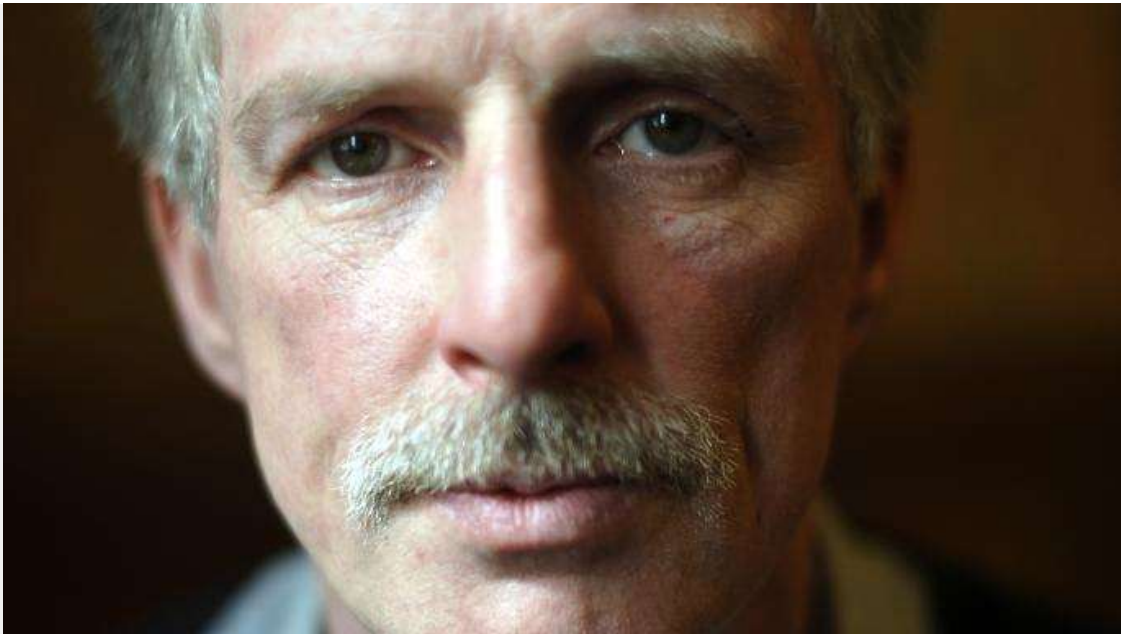


The Times Online:

Analysis: how system closed ranks to uphold 20-year injustice

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Eddie Gilfoyle on his release in 2011. He is on licence but remains convicted of the murder of his wife - CHRIS HARRIS/THE TIMES

Has a more tangled web ever been weaved by British police than that around the case of Eddie Gilfoyle? His family, former police officers, journalists, academics, campaigners and lawyers have all raised questions.

They have been met with untruths, half-truths and misleading statements as the criminal justice system has closed ranks.

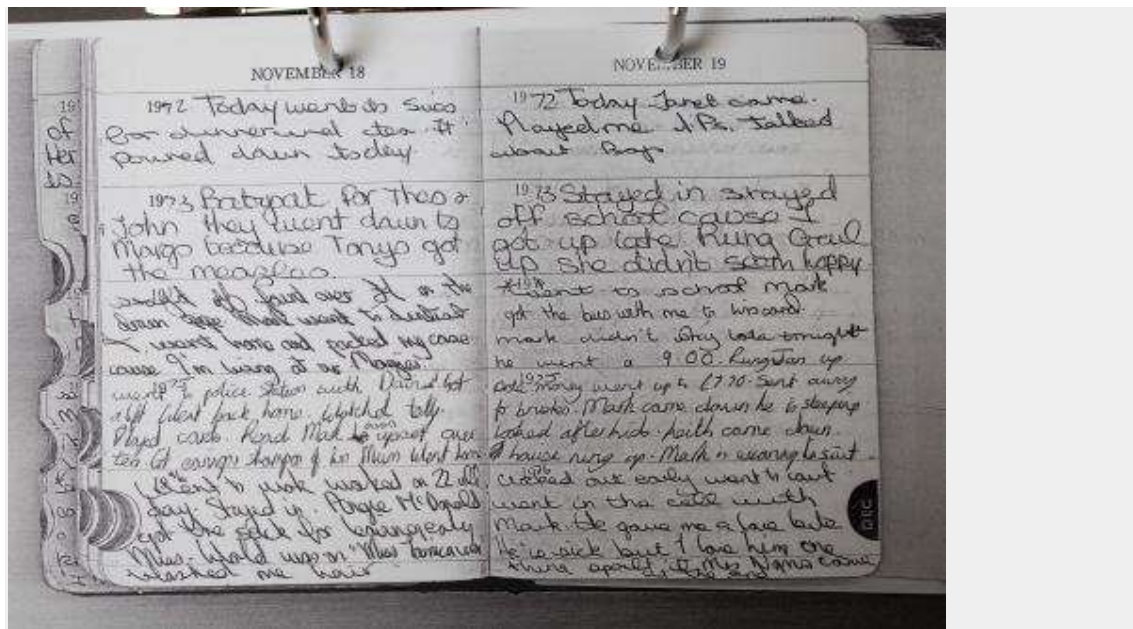
When *The Times* asked Merseyside police, under the Freedom of Information Act, for notes of an internal inquiry into police blunders at the death scene, the force wrote back: “There are no notes.”

The newspaper discovered the notes through a different route, and found that they contained a potential alibi for Gilfoyle.

The papers had been withheld by the force from the prosecution, judge and jury at the trial.

Chris Huhne, who was then a Liberal Democrat MP, tabled a parliamentary question to Vera Baird, the solicitor general, in 2009 seeking details about the handling of the crucial police report.

The Crown Prosecution Service, without contacting her, fed the wrong information to parliament. Dominic Grieve, who was then the attorney general, apologised to MPs; the CPS said sorry to Ms Baird.



Paula Gilfoyle's diaries showed she had attempted suicide before - THE TIMES

When *The Times* complained to Christopher Graham, the Information Commissioner, about Merseyside police's conduct, he accused the force of "seeking to question the authority of the commissioner to conduct this investigation and repeated lengthy delays in responding to correspondence from the commissioner's office, the lengthiest of which was several months".

The newspaper then overturned a key assumption at Gilfoyle's murder trial: that pregnant women hardly ever take their own lives, especially in the later stages of pregnancy. That conclusion was based on the evidence available at the time. However, a study of official British statistics by *The Times* showed that suicide is the main cause of deaths of pregnant women, hanging is the favoured method and the period of late pregnancy is as dangerous as early motherhood.

The Parole Board, in an unprecedented move, gagged Gilfoyle and his supporters when it finally released him on licence after 18 years in custody. It imposed a condition that neither he nor anyone on his behalf could protest his innocence. The Parole Board eventually reversed its ban.

After a 20-year delay, Mrs Gilfoyle's diaries were released to his lawyers for the first time. Shockingly, they showed that she had previously attempted suicide and that two of her former boyfriends threatened suicide. Until her last day she kept close to her a suicide note, one of which contained similar words to those in her last missive, which prosecutors claimed that Gilfoyle had dictated to her.

Q&A

What mistakes were made in the murder investigation?

Nine early blunders were made: control room called out the coroner's officer and police surgeon before the Criminal Investigation Department; stepladders used to hang Paula Gilfoyle were moved; sand was trampled removing possible footprint evidence; the body was cut down before detectives arrived; no photographs were taken; wrong information passed between officers; the noose was destroyed; Eddie Gilfoyle was allowed to leave the scene; Mrs Gilfoyle's advanced state of pregnancy failed to ring alarm bells.

Did Eddie Gilfoyle dictate the suicide note that was found in his wife's handwriting?

David Canter, a pioneering criminal profiler, said research into real and faked suicide notes showed Mrs Gilfoyle's had all the hallmarks of being genuine.

Has anyone been punished for shortcomings in the investigation?

Merseyside police held a disciplinary hearing in 1998, which cleared two officers of misconduct. A third had retired. No further action has since been taken.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/analysis-how-system-closed-ranks-to-uphold-20-year-injustice-nx263zx3s>