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Police cover-up exposed 23 years after husband's murder trial

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Eddie Gilfoyle served 18 years in prison for murder
CHRIS HARRIS/THE TIMES

A police force covered up evidence of flaws in its investigation into a convicted wife-murderer who has spent almost a quarter of a century fighting to clear his name.

Newly uncovered documents about Eddie Gilfoyle, who was given a life sentence in 1993 for killing his pregnant wife Paula, show how Merseyside police officers deliberately withheld an internal report from his defence team.

The report recorded serious institutional failings by the force at the scene of Mrs Gilfoyle's death. Officers failed to seal off the area, resulting in potential forensic evidence being lost. The force also repeatedly misled the Police Complaints Authority when it tried to uncover errors in the murder investigation.

Gilfoyle's wife, who was 32, was found hanged in the garage of their home in Upton, on the Wirral, in 1992. She was eight-and-a-half months pregnant and had left a handwritten suicide note.

Prosecutors convinced a jury that her husband, a hospital orderly, tricked her into writing the letter and hanged her. Gilfoyle served almost 18 years of a life sentence before being released on licence. Now 54, he remains a convicted murderer.

The suppressed report of the inquiry by Chief Superintendent Ted Humphreys details how the force flagrantly breached its own rulebook at the scene of the death, with even basic instructions ignored. No photographs were taken of the body or garage. Instead of sealing the scene, officers were said to have trampled through sand, destroying potential footprint evidence.

A record has now emerged suggesting that it was the head of Merseyside CID, Detective Chief Superintendent Tom Baxter, who decided to withhold these findings from the defence. He had been involved with the Gilfoyle case.

Shortly before the trial in 1993, a lawyer for Gilfoyle asked police for the internal report. According to a force record written by another officer, Mr Baxter “felt it inappropriate to supply a copy of the report, and that the defence were on a fishing expedition and if they wanted a copy of the report they would have to apply for a production order”.

Observers suggest the suitable procedure would have been for police to give the document to the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether the defence should receive it. Mr Baxter, now retired, told *The Times*: “I have got no recollection of it so I can’t really comment.”

He pointed out that he had not been the senior investigating officer. After Gilfoyle was convicted, his relatives made a formal complaint about the handling of the investigation. The PCA sent Detective Superintendent Graham Gooch from Lancashire police to look into the investigation. Mr Gooch was alarmed by the mistakes made by Merseyside and became convinced that Mrs Gilfoyle took her own life.

In a statement provided to the defence three weeks ago, Mr Gooch outlined the obstacles put in his path. At first the force denied the existence of the Humphreys report. When it finally provided him with a copy, it wrongly denied that any notes from the inquiry existed. The notes came to light only after he finished his investigation.

Many errors arose because the local coroner’s officer took charge of the death scene. Mr Gooch was never told by the force that this was a policy peculiar to the Wirral division of Merseyside. Unknown to the Gilfoyle family, an officer who had enforced this policy was handling their complaint.

Freshly uncovered documents show that the officer in charge of the murder investigation, Detective Chief Inspector Paul Baines, continued to have access to sensitive material after the family had lodged their complaint. He collected an

envelope containing the Humphreys notes although he has stressed he never viewed its contents.

Merseyside police said that it had provided all its documentation to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. A spokeswoman said: "The matter is still being considered by the CCRC as a result of the concerns put forward by Mr Gilfoyle's representatives and therefore it would not be appropriate to comment further at this stage."

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