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Apology casts new doubt over Eddie Gilfoyle's conviction for wife murder

[Dominic Kennedy](#)

[RECOMMEND? \(2\)](#)

Dominic Grieve, the Attorney-General, has apologised after Parliament was given wrong information about a prisoner who has spent 18 years denying that he murdered his wife and faked her suicide.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has also given an apology to Vera Baird, the former Solicitor-General, for drafting a deficient answer when she told MPs about Eddie Gilfoyle.

Gilfoyle is serving a life sentence for the murder of his pregnant wife, Paula, who died in Upton, Wirral, in June 1992. At his trial the prosecution said that he hanged her after dictating a suicide note.

Doubts about his conviction were raised when a long investigation by *The Times* revealed:

- police notes that were not disclosed at the trial showed that the estimated time of death gave him a potential alibi — he was at work.
- new research had contradicted advice at the time of the trial that pregnant women rarely committed suicide. In fact, the research showed that suicide was the main cause of maternal death in pregnancy and after childbirth, hanging was the main method chosen and late pregnancy was a peak time for suicides.
- international suicide experts who examined Mrs Gilfoyle's suicide note concluded that it was genuine although prosecutors told the jury that it had been dictated by her husband.

Alison Halford, the Merseyside Assistant Chief Constable at the time, and Desmond Browne, QC, the former Bar Council chairman, are among those who believe the conviction to be unsafe.

In a new revelation, the Government has now disclosed that police withheld, even from prosecution lawyers at the trial, an internal report into blunders made by officers at the scene.

A key question has been why Gilfoyle's defence team was not made aware of this report at the time of his trial. The report showed that evidence was lost or destroyed, that no photographs were taken and that the noose was discarded. It might have helped Gilfoyle to clear his name at Liverpool Crown Court in 1993 and his supporters want to know who took the decisions to withhold it.

The Times previously asked police for notes of interviews with the officers at the scene but was told that they did not exist. However, the newspaper discovered the notes, which revealed that Mrs Gilfoyle was estimated to have died while her husband was at work.

Although the Information Commissioner cleared the police of intentionally withholding the documents, he is investigating whether the force should have released more information.

New doubts about the way in which the case has been handled have been raised after it was discovered that Merseyside CPS had given unreliable information to the Solicitor-General about when it first received the report.

Last year the Liberal Democrat MP Chris Huhne asked Vera Baird, who was then Solicitor-General, to disclose when the CPS had received the report. Mrs Baird told Parliament in a written answer that it was received in July 1995.

The Times was then leaked an internal letter from Merseyside CPS dated September 1994 referring to the report, implying that it had the document earlier than Mrs Baird had stated.

The newspaper contacted the Attorney-General's Office, which, without contacting Mrs Baird, issued a statement on her behalf saying that the material held in 1994 was not the complete report. A subsequent leak showed that it was the full report. Mr Grieve has now written to Mr Huhne, admitting that Mrs Baird's answer was "open to misinterpretation" but denied that she had misled Parliament.

The CPS has released a chronology to be placed in the Commons library. This shows that prosecutors became aware of the internal police inquiry only in July 1994, more than two years after the death. Even then, the information came from the Police Complaints Authority, which was looking into the case, rather than the Merseyside force.

Mrs Baird, who lost her seat at the election, said: "I have never, ever, ever knowingly misled Parliament."

Lord Hunt, Gilfoyle's former MP, said that he would write to Kenneth Clarke, the Lord Chancellor. Lord Hunt said: "We really do need to explore and discover the truth of what happened and ensure that Eddie Gilfoyle at last receives the close attention that his case deserves to help him prove his innocence."

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