



Family Report/Narrative

A callous sectarian murder – Brendan McKenna



Brendan McKenna was born on 25 September 1964. He was a self-employed haulage contractor.

He was married and lived near Derrytrasna just outside Lurgan.

THE DAY OF THE MURDER

Brendan was collected by his brother early in the morning of 2nd June 1993. They travelled to their work at Mc Cleery's quarry on the Ballystockart Road Comber. He was pulling out of the quarry after lunchtime on the latter date when he was shot and fatally wounded. No one was ever made amenable for

this despicable act and the only legal proceedings were via the inquest at Newtownards Court in July 1994.

In his deposition at the Inquest an eye witness stated as follows:

'At approximately 2.50 pm I was driving my DAF lorry down the Ballystockart Road As I approached the junction I saw Brendan McKenna driving his lorry up the Hillhead Road. I stopped my lorry to enable Brendan to swing into the Ballystockart Road. I noticed a man wearing a DOE type yellow coat standing at the right hand side of the Ballystockart Road approximately 50 feet from the junction. I saw another man standing at the junction of the Ballystockart/Hillhead Road. He was also wearing a yellow type DOE coat. As Brendan began to turn into the Ballystockart Road the man on my right-hand side ran towards Brendan's lorry and fired a number of shots into Brendan's cab I saw Brendan jump out of his cab he ran onto the Hillhead Road and collapsed. (1)



BALLYSTOCKART ROAD.

The witness further confirmed that these two men fled the scene in a Ford Escort. The witness contacted the quarry to alert the emergency services.

Before the arrival of the emergency services a local GP came on the scene and assisted. She found his pulse to be weak and his breathing laboured but weak. She spoke to him but got no response. She did not see any signs of external bleeding. However, she noticed a bullet wound to his chest area and another one to his buttock.

Brendan was taken to the Ulster Hospital Dundonald where he was pronounced dead a short time later.



THE INVESTIGATION

Police in Newtownards Criminal Investigation Department were tasked with the investigation. The lead detective was a Detective Inspector. It did not prove possible to identify the terrorists and consequently no charges could be brought. As a result there was no formal report to access. Therefore reliance for detail is primarily based on the inquest papers.

In his deposition to the inquest the lead detective confirmed that on 2nd June 1993 a male using a recognised codeword phoned the BBC admitting responsibility for what was termed the attempted assassination of a Brian McKinley at Comber Quarry. This claim was made on behalf of the Ulster Freedom Fighters otherwise known as the UFF. A second claim was made

later that on behalf of said terrorist organisation. This time the caller stated that further to the earlier statement the intended target was Brendan McKenna from the Lurgan area and that he had been assassinated due to his membership of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. This time the caller stated that the intended target was not Brian McKinley and that anyone of this name had nothing to fear.

At the inquest hearing a handwritten note was added to the Detective's statement. It read as follows:

'The claim of responsibility is without foundation in alleging the Deceased was in PIRA. I believe he was picked at random. Most of the lorry drivers were Roman Catholic who were not from that area. I believe the motive for the murder was sectarian. A number of people have been arrested but no one has been prosecuted. He had no connection with any unlawful organisation". (2)

The INQUEST

The inquest on 5 July 1994 at Newtownards Court before Mr J L Leckey HM Coroner concluded that Brendan was struck by 2 or 3 bullets and that death was the result of a gunshot wound of the trunk. The Verdict also confirmed that the claim made by the terrorists about Brendan were false and that the guns used in the murder were two 9 mm calibre pistols which had no known history of previous use. (3)

BRENDAN AND THE MCKENNA FAMILY

Brendan was the middle child of five born to Sean and Eileen McKenna. He was educated in Portadown where the family initially lived. His other siblings were two brothers and two sisters. In 1979 the family sold their home and bought a farm near Derrytrasna. The move proved to be a great one for Brendan who was an enterprising young man. Unlike their previous home they had plenty of neighbours around them. Brendan soon made himself known to the neighbours by offering to do odd jobs for them. After a while he was so popular and busy that he had little time for anything else including school which he didn't like anyway.

On leaving school he took a job with a chemical supplies firm in Lurgan. This job involving sales enabled him to develop his interpersonal skills even further. He took a great interest in Gaelic Football and played for the local SARSFIELDS team. After accumulating money via his odd jobs and subsequent employment

he took the brave step to purchase a lorry. This enterprise went so well he was able to get a contract for regular work in the quarry at Comber. After his father gave him a site at home Brendan built a bungalow. He subsequently married however he and his wife had no family and Brendan often remarked that they would not start a family until the mortgage on the bungalow was cleared.

Brendan suffered the loss of two fingers in an accident involving a forklift truck. He was subsequently compensated and having received the money from the claim was able to announce that the mortgage would be paid off with the proceeds. Brendan had also purchased another lorry and intended to paint it in his preferred colours in the July holiday fortnight 1993. At this time in his life Brendan was supremely happy in his business and his marriage and looking forward to a great future. Sadly, this young man's life was cruelly cut short by Terrorists who compounded the family's grief by making totally unfounded accusations against him.



Brendan's mother Eileen's husband Sean died some while after the murder and she also lost her youngest daughter Joanne tragically and unexpectedly four years prior to the murder aged 18 years. His surviving sister now lives in England and another brother moved to Drogheda while primarily working in South Africa. One brother only remains locally. Eileen recalls Brendan as

someone uninterested in politics who enjoyed socialising and Gaelic Football. In terms of her own personal faith and beliefs Eileen finds consolation in her conviction that Brendan and Joanne are together now. As to her opinion of those involved in Brendan's murder she makes the point that she does not know them so cannot form an opinion as she reflects on a life well lived but cruelly cut short.

REFERENCES

- (1) Page 1 of statement of Detective.
- (2) Page 2 of statement of Detective Inspector Samuel Raymond Caskey.
- (3) Page 2 of Verdict on Inquest touching the death of Brendan McKenna, dated 5 July 1994.