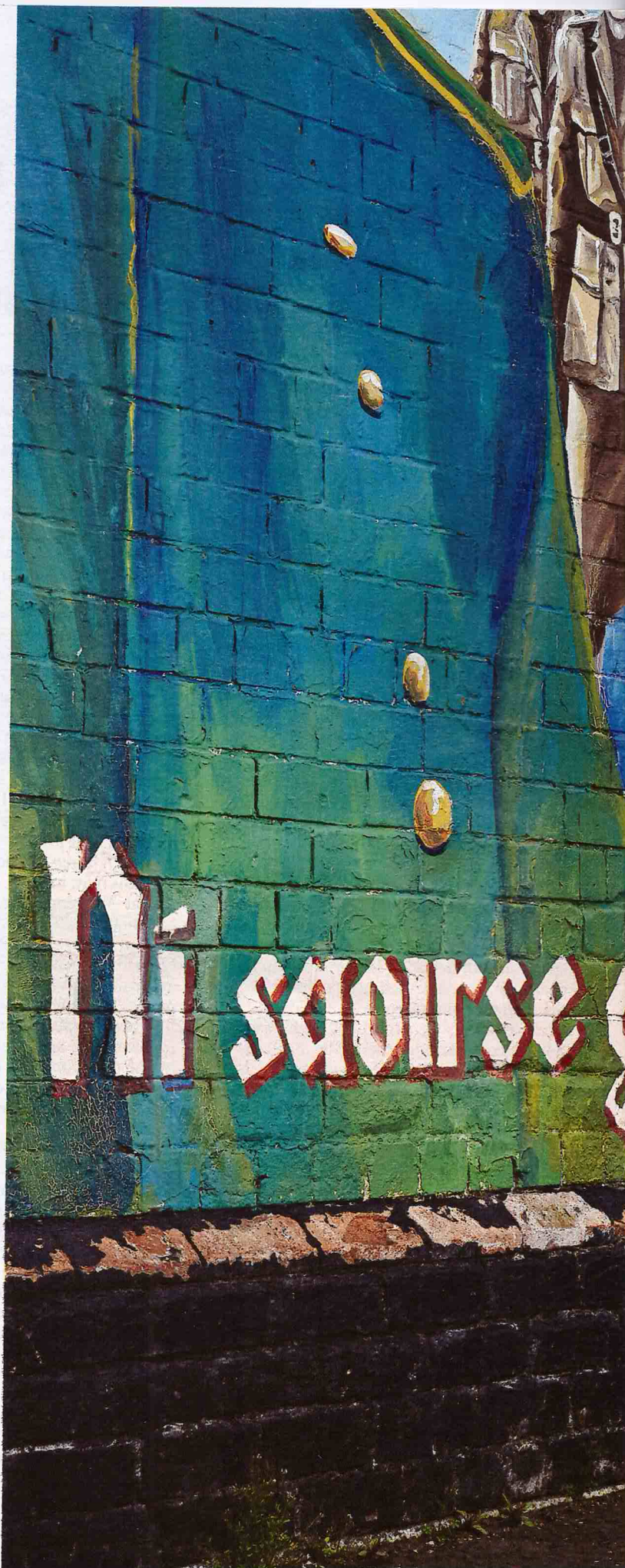


# WE WERE TORTURED OUT OF OUR MINDS

Northern Ireland, 1971. Fourteen IRA suspects are starved, hooded and beaten. The British Army says it was 'deep interrogation'; the men claim the methods used were 'torture'. Now, four decades on, secret documents have been discovered – and Amal Clooney is fighting their case. By Martin Fletcher





Francie McGuigan (left) and Kevin Hannaway, two of the surviving hooded men, photographed by an IRA mural in west Belfast. Opposite: Amal Clooney

PORTRAITS Jude Edginton

In 1971, British soldiers detained 14 IRA suspects. They were hooded, starved, beaten, deprived of sleep and blasted with noise. Francie McGuigan prayed for death. Kevin Hannaway and Joe Clarke were certain their ordeal would end in execution – “These people can’t let me tell the world what they’ve done to me,” Clarke remembers thinking. Paddy Joe McClean just wants to forget – “I try to put all that out of my head to give myself peace. I don’t want to be living there.”

For 44 years the so-called “hooded men” – most of them Irish Republicans – have sought justice and an admission that they were tortured by what they regard as an occupying power, and now their luck has turned. A cache of newly discovered documents supports their claims. At their behest, Ireland is taking Britain’s government back to court and Amal Clooney, human-rights lawyer and wife of Hollywood’s George, has embraced their cause.

I meet the men in Belfast to hear their version of events that happened four decades ago in Northern Ireland. They are genial, welcoming. McGuigan, 67 and silver-haired, is a retired businessman who drives a silver Mercedes and buys me lunch in the café of a country park beside Lough Neagh frequented by families enjoying Sunday outings. Accompanying him is Hannaway, 67, a small man with a shiny bald head, the face of a cartoon gangster and a conspicuously crooked nose.

Clarke, 63, is a big, garrulous bear of a man. He exudes bonhomie and can afford to. The former car mechanic won £10 million in the EuroMillions lottery two years ago, and receives me in his mansion in a gated Belfast community. His Maserati is parked on the drive, but the Ferrari is out of sight. By contrast, McClean, 82, a retired remedial teacher and teetotaler, lives modestly in rural County Tyrone with Annie, his wife for the past half-century. Pictures of their 12 children and 23 grandchildren adorn their sunny kitchen.

But in Northern Ireland bygones are never bygones. In 1978 the European Court of Human Rights may have ruled the men’s treatment did not amount to torture, but, now, in light of new evidence, the Irish government has asked the court to revise its judgment. When I talk to Darragh Mackin, the men’s solicitor, he invokes the torture of Iraqi prisoners by US soldiers in 2003. “This,” he declares, “is Britain’s Abu Ghraib.”

A Ministry of Defence spokesperson was more circumspect: “The MoD is aware that the Irish Government has asked the European Court of Human Rights to revise its 1978 judgment on the case of the hooded men, but we have not yet been notified by the court of what action they intend to take on the basis of that referral. It would be

An army patrol in Londonderry, August 1971



premature to speculate on the government’s response to a notification from the court that has not yet been received.”

Scroll back to the fuzzy black-and-white television footage of August 1971. There is mayhem on the streets of Belfast and Londonderry. The Provisional IRA is at war with the security forces. There have been 300 explosions and 320 shooting incidents in the year to date. Brian Faulkner, Northern

Ireland’s prime minister, persuades Edward Heath, his British counterpart, to introduce internment without trial. “The terrorist campaign continues at an unacceptable level,” Faulkner announces. “The ordinary law cannot deal comprehensively or quickly enough with such ruthless viciousness.”

Operation Demetrius begins at dawn on August 9. Troops go from home to home, arresting suspected IRA terrorists. In Jamaica Street in Belfast’s Ardoyne district McGuigan, 23, is woken by a soldier hitting him in the stomach with a rifle butt. In their terraced house on Merrion Street, off the Falls Road, Hannaway’s wife hurls a baby bottle at a soldier as her husband is dragged away. The soldier fires a live round straight past her and her infant. Clarke, 19 and a former altar boy at Clonard monastery, is seized by paratroopers from his parents’ home and warned, “If you try to escape you’ll be shot dead.” In the village of Beragh, near Omagh, McClean, a teacher, is taken away in front of his pregnant wife and their seven young children.

McGuigan, Hannaway and Clarke admit they were “active members of the Republican movement”. Numerous members of McGuigan’s family, including his mother, had been imprisoned for IRA activities and he had himself been arrested numerous times since his early teens. Hannaway was Gerry Adams’s cousin, and would later escort the repatriated bodies of the three IRA volunteers killed by the SAS in Gibraltar in 1988. But McClean had nothing to do with the IRA. He was chairman of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights

## HANNAWAY WAS KICKED AND BEATEN WITH BATONS. ‘I WAS PASSING BLOOD,’ HE SAYS



Kevin Hannaway and family following his release in 1975

## 'IT WAS TERRIFYING. THE HOOD SHUT OUT ALL THE LIGHT. NOISE WOULD DRIVE YOU INSANE'

seemed to go on and on and on and on. We lost all track of time. We didn't know if it was day or night – Monday, Wednesday or Friday. You hadn't a clue." Records found later suggest one man, Jim Auld, spent nearly 43 hours in the stress position.

And then there was the relentless, piercing noise. McGuigan compares it to the screech of a microphone when first turned on – "It went in through the top of your head and out through your toes via every nerve and sinew in your body," he says. "It just overpowered your whole being, this merciless noise that never stopped," Hannaway recalls. "It would drive you insane," McClean adds.

Eventually, the men collapsed or lost consciousness. They woke in another room, still hooded, lying on the bare floor and chained to a steel water pipe. Utterly disoriented, they were taken to an interrogation room. "The interrogations were like something from the Second World War," Hannaway says. Their hoods were lifted. Their arms were tied behind a chair. Their questioners – RUC Special Branch and army intelligence officers – hid behind blinding lights. They were grilled for one hour, two. "You did this bombing, that shooting. Who do you know in the IRA? Where are the weapons, you murdering IRA bastard?" McGuigan remembers their spittle landing on his face.

He was told Jamaica Street in north Belfast had been destroyed by a massive bomb and 70 people were dead. He was told his colleagues had cracked; that he would never see his family again; that, "You're not getting out of here till we get answers. You've seen nothing yet. We haven't started yet."

The men were held for seven or eight days. They were denied sleep – "Your only sleep was when you were unconscious," Clarke says. They were once given cold stew, otherwise just a little dry bread and water. They had to urinate and defecate in their boiler suits. Clarke once "lost the plot. I ran around the room until I got one of the guards and started beating him." He says he came to handcuffed with his feet tied behind his thighs as guards dropped him on his knees.

McGuigan spent hours trying to work his hood up his face using his nose, tongue and chin, only to have an invisible hand tug it down again. Hannaway focused on his family – to the point, he says, that he felt they were in the room with him. McClean adopted a policy of passive resistance, going limp and refusing to speak. "The more I didn't speak, the angrier they



Paddy Joe McClean pictured, above, today and, right, with his wife, Annie, and one of his 12 children in 1972

of US soldiers pushing Vietnamese prisoners out of helicopters flying over the sea. At that moment he was himself pushed out. He thought he was in mid-air, but hit the ground almost instantly. The same happened to McGuigan, though he was caught by soldiers. "I thought that was the end. I felt pure panic," he says.

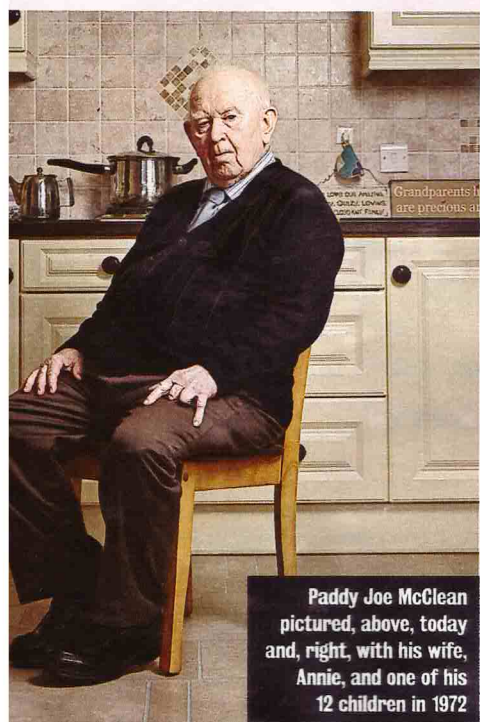
The helicopters landed at Ballykelly, a military base in County Londonderry. The men were stripped, numbered, given a cursory medical examination and put in boiler suits. Still hooded, they were taken to what they came to know as the "music room". There they were made to stand in the stress position – spread-eagled, legs apart, back arched inwards, fingertips against the wall.

They were left like that for hours. The pain became excruciating. If they placed their palms against the wall, their hands were beaten. If they rested their heads against the wall, an unseen hand rammed their faces against it – hence Hannaway's crooked nose. "The only way to get off the wall was to fall. As soon as you did that, they battered the living daylight out of you and put you back against the wall," McGuigan says.

The guards said nothing. The hooded men had no idea where the next blow was coming from, where they were or whether they were alone. "Those periods against the wall

REFER TO	REFER TO	REFER TO
NAME	NAME	NAME
DATE	DATE	DATE

One of the documents in the National Archives at Kew that has prompted the re-examination of the case



Association, which supported the Catholic community but decried the armed struggle. "I was on the same side as the British Army at that time. I was as much opposed to violence as they were," he protests.

McClean was rounded up because the army was using an outdated list of suspects provided by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Of the 342 men seized that day, a third were quickly released. One target had been dead four years. Another was in his eighties and had been inactive since the 1916 Easter Rising. Many, like McClean, were civil rights activists. Most of the IRA leaders had been tipped off and vanished.

The army took the men to one of three military holding centres. Many were treated roughly – beaten, insulted, forced to do humiliating exercises and to urinate in a hole in the ground while military policemen jeered. Hannaway claims he was dragged by his feet through a gauntlet of soldiers who kicked him and beat him with batons. A fellow detainee had to disentangle his lips from his teeth. "I was p\*\*\*ing blood," he says.

But 14 were singled out for what was euphemistically termed "interrogation in depth". Their heads were covered in thick, suffocating hoods that hung down to their shoulders. "Never would I forget that. It was terrifying. It shut out all the light. You lost your eyesight. You didn't know where you were," McClean recalls. They were then bundled into helicopters and flown away.

Clarke remembers being asked after 40 minutes or so whether he had seen pictures

became. They shouted, screamed, insulted me. They said, "This effer will not speak. We will make him."

The men began hallucinating. McClean believed he was a farmer from Enniskillen. Clarke thought he was a bodyguard of James Callaghan, the British politician. Pat Shivers, another of the hooded men, tried to tear his fingernails out. Auld tried to kill himself by cracking his head against a water pipe. They drifted in and out of consciousness, unable to remember being moved from one room to the next. McGuigan was no longer able to spell his name. None believed they would be allowed to leave alive. "I'm going to end up in a ditch," McGuigan thought.

And then it was over. The men were marched out to helicopters, though McClean says he could no longer walk unaided. Before boarding, they were told not to look backwards and then had their hoods removed. They had never seen their tormentors.

The men arrived at Belfast's Crumlin Road prison in dire condition. Most had lost a stone or more. For a while, Clarke let only his father and uncle visit him in the prison because he was so badly beaten. Hannaway's face was so mangled, two brothers did not recognise him. The hair of another prisoner, Sean McKenna, had turned white. McClean was "a terrible mess", says his wife. None of the men's families had been told where they were. "We thought he could be dead. It was just an awful week," Annie McClean recalls.

But the men's ordeal did not end there. They were moved to Long Kesh, later renamed the Maze prison, where they were interned without trial for up to four years - none was ever charged with a terrorist offence. And they continued to suffer mentally and physically from their treatment at the Ballykelly military base, some for the rest of their lives.

They had nightmares, flashbacks, paranoia and depression. Clarke saw a psychiatrist for three years, and told me that the night after our interview he could not sleep because he had unleashed his "demons". McClean required skin grafts, had a malignant growth removed from the back of his leg where he had been severely beaten, and to this day cannot endure noise - not even a bedside clock. Even quite recently, McGuigan has found himself hiding in his attic or wardrobe.

Sean McKenna and Pat Shivers died early: McKenna of a heart attack in 1975, aged 45, Shivers of stomach cancer in 1985, aged 54. His wife, Betty, told the Irish TV station RTÉ, "It just took over his mind and his life, what happened to him. He went through the motions, but he was frightened and you could see the fear in his eyes and the horror of it, and that's how Pat lived until he died."

Joe Clarke, now a lottery winner, at home in Belfast



## THE HOODED MEN BEGAN HALLUCINATING. ONE OF THEM TRIED TO TEAR HIS OWN FINGERNAILS OUT

Looking back, Hannaway says, "I don't believe any word in any language or any dictionary could describe what we went through. We were tortured out of our minds." Clarke says, "You wouldn't treat a dog the way we were treated." When I suggest the IRA were hardly angels, he replies, "The British are supposed to be a government. They're supposed to be above terrorising and torturing people."

As Irish Republicans, of course, Hannaway, Clarke and McGuigan have a vested interest in exaggerating what was done to them, but years later the British government would be proved guilty - at the very least - of cruel and inhuman conduct. Privately, it would admit to even worse.

Internment was a disaster. Nationalists were incensed by what they regarded as a communal punishment and humiliation - no loyalists were detained as a result of Operation Demetrius. Riots erupted across the province. Cars were hijacked, buildings burnt. Two dozen people were killed or fatally wounded, 17 by the army, in 4 days. Joe Cahill, the IRA leader, rubbed salt in the wound by giving a press conference

to show the IRA was still very much alive. Indeed, internment acted as a powerful recruitment tool.

The violence continued to escalate - especially after the fate of the hooded men was revealed. McClean persuaded a prison warden to deliver his written account of their treatment to Cardinal William Conway, the Catholic Primate of All Ireland, who gave the story to *The Times*. In the final 4 months of 1971, 109 people were killed in Northern Ireland, compared with 28 in the first 7 months. In January 1972, British soldiers shot 13 civilians during an anti-internment march in Londonderry on Bloody Sunday. That March Edward Heath suspended the Stormont government and imposed direct rule from London.

The authorities denied abusing the hooded men. Faulkner insisted there had been "no brutality of any kind". Reginald Maudling, the home secretary, insisted there had been "no permanent lasting injury whatever, physical or mental, to any of the men concerned". Peter (later Lord) Carrington, the defence secretary, dismissed them as "thugs and murderers".

Heath sought to assuage the anger by asking Sir Edmund Compton, a senior civil servant, to conduct an inquiry, but his report was widely dismissed as a whitewash. It concluded that while those detained suffered some "hardship" and "ill-treatment", there had been no brutality, adding, "In the present circumstances of Northern Ireland ... it is imperative to obtain all available evidence in order to save the lives of civilians and members of the security services."

Heath rejected even that mild rebuke, calling it "one of the most unbalanced, ill-judged reports I have ever read", and complained that "they seem to have gone to endless lengths to show that anyone not given three-star hotel facilities suffered hardship and ill-treatment".

A second inquiry in 1972, although split 2-1, concluded that "interrogation in depth" was morally justifiable. Heath nonetheless announced that he was banning use of the so-called "five techniques" - hooding, the stress position, white noise, sleep deprivation and withholding food and water - which Britain had developed in places such as Kenya, Malaya and Palestine. (McGuigan contends that there were actually six techniques: "The sixth was simply to knock the b\*\*\*\*cks off you.")

The government also began compensating the hooded men - a process that involved making payments of between £10,000 and £25,000 to men it regarded as IRA terrorists. None was more astonished than McGuigan, who received £11,750 while a fugitive in the Irish Republic. In 1972, by disguising himself as a priest, he had become the first prisoner to escape from Long Kesh. ➔

The Irish government was not placated, however. It filed an unprecedented state-versus-state case against Britain with the European Commission of Human Rights. In 1976 the commission unanimously concluded that the “five techniques” amounted to “a modern system of torture” designed to “break or even eliminate the will”. Britain had breached the European Convention on Human Rights.

Seeking to turn the commission’s opinion into a binding judgment, and ignoring intense diplomatic pressure from London, the Irish government then went to the European Court of Human Rights. The British government chose not to contest the commission’s finding on the grounds that it had forsworn the “five techniques” and compensated the victims – a tactic that meant that no ministers, soldiers or police had to testify.

Unlike the commission, the court did not hear evidence from the hooded men either. Instead, it considered the technical issue of whether the “five techniques” constituted torture. In 1978, it reversed the commission’s opinion. It agreed that the techniques “undoubtedly amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment”, but ruled by 13 votes to 4 that “they did not occasion suffering of the particular intensity and cruelty implied by the word torture”.

Twenty-five years later, the Bush administration invoked that ruling to justify the infamous methods it adopted while interrogating al-Qaeda suspects in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. One of the infamous “torture memos” produced by the US Justice Department stated that the European Court of Human Rights had “recognised a wide array of acts that didn’t amount to torture, thus appearing to permit, under international law, an aggressive interpretation”.

In 2013, 35 years after the European Court ruling, the men’s quest for justice was unexpectedly resurrected. Human rights activists from Northern Ireland’s Pat Finucane Centre stumbled across government documents concerning the hooded men in the National Archives at Kew. They alerted RTÉ’s investigations unit in Dublin, which uncovered thousands more incriminating documents.

Typewritten on fading paper, most stamped “Secret” or “Confidential”, they revealed what successive British governments – Tory and Labour – were really thinking behind their wall of silence. They showed that the “deep interrogations” were carefully planned; that British ministers knew the hooded men were tortured but tried to conceal it because they did not want to lose a propaganda war with the IRA; and that the effects on the victims were far worse than they admitted.

The “smoking gun” was a letter written by Merlyn Rees, home secretary at the time, to James Callaghan, the Labour prime minister, in 1977, when Dublin was demanding the interrogators be prosecuted.

“It is my view (confirmed by Brian Faulkner before his death) that the decision to use methods of torture in Northern Ireland in 1971/72 was taken by Ministers – in particular Lord Carrington,” Rees wrote. “If at any time methods of torture are used in Northern Ireland contrary to the view of the Government of the day I would agree that individual policemen or soldiers should be prosecuted or disciplined; but in the particular situation of 1971/72 a political decision was taken.”

Several documents show how the compensation payments were supposed to prevent what happened spilling into the public domain. One talks of the need to

## DOCUMENTS SHOWED THAT BRITISH MINISTERS KNEW THE HOODED MEN WERE TORTURED BUT TRIED TO CONCEAL IT

settle on terms “which allow us to argue that while liability in law is admitted, no admission is made as to detailed allegations of torture”. Another, written by the head of the army department at the Ministry of Defence in 1974, states: “Every effort must be made to continue to prevent the cases coming into court. Neither on the conspiracy issue nor on any of the other issues do our legal advisers consider that there’s any hope of a successful defence.”

Other documents suggest British medical experts misled the European Commission when they said that the men’s psychiatric problems were “minor and their persistence was the result of everyday life in Northern Ireland”.

One talks of a growing medical consensus “that persons subjected to maximum stress and psychiatric trauma, as in deep interrogation, become more liable to physical illness of a malignant nature at a later stage, and that mental breakdown can take place many years after deep interrogation”.

A 1974 memo to Roy Mason, defence secretary at the time, records: “In the case of Shivers there was substantial medical evidence of lasting psychiatric damage.” A medical consultant to the British army reveals that he had examined McKenna in 1974 and found him anxious, sobbing,

suicidal and complaining of many psychiatric conditions. He did not tell the European Commission that.

The same expert later told the crown solicitor that, “McKenna was suffering from angina before he was interrogated and I think it would be hard to show a) that it was wise to proceed with the interrogation, and b) that interrogation didn’t have the effect of worsening the angina.” McKenna died of a heart attack just days after this letter was written.

One British official who did address the charges publicly was General Harry Tuzo, the army commander in Northern Ireland in 1971. He told an interviewer in 1982: “You have to choose between inflicting active discomfort and humiliation ... on a few people in order probably to save life and safeguard the wellbeing of a million people. It sounds terribly utilitarian and terribly heartless to say that [the hooded men] were well compensated and looked after. I cannot of course say what permanent scars have been left, and if there are any I can sympathise with the people concerned, but I personally would have thought they had got over it by now.”

In the decades that followed their release from Long Kesh the men lost touch with each other, but in 2011 an amateur historian named Jim McMurray organised a reunion at his home in Lurgan. “It was one of the most emotional days I have ever witnessed,” he said. “I saw men crying, hugging. Two men held each other in front of me and neither could speak. There were a lot of tears, and at the end of the day a lot of laughter.”

Since then they have met often – bound by an experience only they can fully understand. They attended Clarke’s wedding in 2013, presenting him with a brass plaque inscribed “To Joe and Marie from the Hooded Men”. They attended McClean’s 80th birthday party and, in March this year, Gerry McKerr’s funeral.

The ten survivors are now united in their efforts to get the European Court to revise its 1978 judgment in light of the evidence they say Britain suppressed. They insist they do not want further compensation. Nor do they necessarily seek prosecutions of any officials still alive. “We want a declaration that this was torture pursued by government agencies and will no longer take place,” McClean says.

Amal Clooney is expected to meet them soon. They have discovered that their interrogations were recorded and 400 hours of tapes may still exist. They believe their long quest for justice is nearly over. “The British told lies to the European Court and the whole world,” Hannaway says. “But they can’t deny their own papers.” ■