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# THE TIMES

## Guildford pub bombing: Police ‘shun new investigation’ into IRA attack

Force says new law putting an end to Troubles-era cases means it can’t start fresh inquiry into 1974 atrocity – even though new evidence has emerged

Mario Ledwith

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Surrey police have been accused of shunning a fresh investigation into the IRA Guildford pub bombings that killed five people 50 years ago despite admitting the existence of new evidence.

Families of the four soldiers and a civilian who died in the attack were recently informed by the force that a “potential forensic line of inquiry” had been identified.

Amid a decades-long quest for justice by victims’ relatives, the force told one family that the next steps “would be a new criminal investigation” into the 1974 atrocity. But a senior officer said police were unable to open a new case due to controversial new legislation that will put an end to all Troubles-related legal cases.

The family of Ann Hamilton, a 19-year-old private who was killed, questioned the timing of the revelation given that police began reassessing evidence in 2019 in conjunction with a resumed inquest.

Police forces have until the start of May this year to continue Troubles investigations under the provisions of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, which came into effect in September last year.

Serious investigative failures into the 1974 bombing contributed to what is regarded as one of Britain’s biggest miscarriages of justice. A group of 11 people — the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven — were wrongly jailed in connection with the bombing.

Their convictions were quashed in 1989, years after a member of an active IRA service unit known as the Balcombe Street Gang admitted they planted the bombs.

The attack on the Horse and Groom pub in Guildford, Surrey, on October 5, 1974 marked the start of what would become a year-long bombing campaign by the IRA. Hamilton’s fellow servicemen and women, Caroline Slater, 18, William Forsyth, 18 and John Hunter, 17, died in the bomb alongside Paul Craig, a 21-year-old plasterer. Sixty-five people were injured and a separate pub was evacuated before another bomb detonated.

Inquests into the deaths were not held at the time because of the wrongful convictions. But a resumed inquest concluded in 2022 that the victims were unlawfully killed by “a powerful time-bomb planted by Provisional Irish Republican Army terrorists”.

Hamilton’s sister, Cassandra Hamilton, said that the new evidence should be investigated by the force, pointing to dissatisfaction with the inquest at which her family was denied legal aid. KRW Law, acting on behalf of Hamilton’s family, is now seeking clarification on the nature of the new evidence, such as whether it involves a fingerprint or DNA profile.

The firm has also asked Surrey police to clarify how long it has known about the evidence and whether it could lead to arrests. Hamilton said that the new legislation, which can give immunity to those associated with Troubles-related crimes, had provided “Surrey police with another reason not to do anything”.

Surrey police’s deputy chief constable Nev Kemp told Hamilton in a letter that the force had made a “detailed and thorough” assessment of evidence. He said officers, working alongside Counter Terrorism Policing, decided to investigate a potential forensic line of inquiry in November 2022.

Kemp wrote: “The work undertaken in respect of this matter has been complex, painstaking, and as such has taken some time to complete.”

A further meeting to discuss the forensic findings took place in October 2023 and a letter was sent to the home secretary about the investigation that same month. Hamilton questioned how there was not enough time to investigate any forensic leads if the matter was being discussed last October, seven months before the investigatory cut-off under the new laws.

In the letter, Kemp said that the force did not have enough time to conclude a reinvestigation before May 1. He suggested the case could instead be investigated by a new body created in conjunction with the legacy laws to provide information about Troubles-related deaths.

Barry O’Donnell, a solicitor at KRW, said: “The timing by Surrey police in this matter raises too many questions which the family of Ann Hamilton want answered.”

Since receiving royal assent, the legacy legislation has faced widespread opposition from political parties and victims’ organisations in Northern Ireland. The government is appealing against a Belfast High Court ruling that said parts of the law did not comply with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Irish government is also bringing a legal case against the UK under the ECHR.

Kemp confirmed on Thursday that forensic results were received in August last year. He said the timing was “unfortunate”.

He said the force remained “committed to facilitating justice” for the families.

Kemp said that the force continued to submit items for forensic analysis in recent years despite the police work coinciding with the emergence of the draft legislation.

He said the force would notify the Northern Ireland secretary of the findings of the forensic assessment once it has received further guidance on the process for how to act under the new legal regime.

“Our priority now is to preserve the significant amount of work that has been done to date, and to ensure we do not jeopardise any course of action that could be available to the families through the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery,” he said.

#### Related Images



(Clockwise from top left) Paul Craig, 21, Caroline Slater, 18, John Hunter, 17, William Forsyth, 18, and Ann Hamilton, 19, died in an explosion at the Horse and Groom pub



The Horse and Groom in Guildford on the night of the attack

PA



Gerry Conlon, one of the Guildford Four, leaves the Old Bailey with his sisters after his sentence was quashed in 1989

Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images



**Roy Jenkins, the home secretary, leaves the wrecked Horse and Groom pub in Guildford two days after the bombing**

Hulton Archive/central press/Getty



**Members of the Guildford Four stand outside parliament in 2005 after hearing a public apology from Tony Blair, the then prime minister, for their wrongful convictions**

Times Newspapers Ltd



**Nev Kemp, deputy chief constable of Surrey police**

Alamy

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