


[HOME](#)
[History](#)
[NewsoftheIrish](#)
[Book Reviews
& Book Forum](#)
[Search / Archive](#)
[Back to 10/96](#)
[Papers](#)
[Reference](#)
[About](#)
[Contact](#)

Paisley needs to address one man's innocence in particular

(Susan McKay, [Irish News](#))

Vera McVeigh died last week at the age of 82, a terribly disappointed woman.

After her 19-year-old son, Columba, disappeared in 1975, she spent 23 long years waiting for him to come home. Her husband Paddy died in 1997, his heart broken.

People who knew the truth must have seen the agony of the McVeigh family but they did nothing to ease it.

One local IRA man used to serve Communion to Vera. In 1999, she learned, from reading it in a newspaper, that Columba had been taken by the IRA, murdered and his body dumped in a bog.

Devastated, she spent the last eight years pleading for information which would allow his body to be found so that she could give him a funeral and bury him in the family grave in Co Tyrone.

Inadequate information given to the commission for the location of victim's remains led to harrowing searches of Brackagh Bog on the Monaghan/Tyrone border. The body was not found. Meanwhile, the whispered lie, that Columba was an informer, was allowed to fester.

Vera McVeigh's death was especially poignant coming as it did in the week that saw Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley grinning from ear to ear at the restoration of devolution at Stormont.

The Troubles are officially over. As the priest pointed out at Vera's funeral, she was born in 1925, the year the boundary commission drew up the border.

Sir James Craig fought the election that year on the slogan, 'Not an inch'.

Paisley, who is just a year younger than Vera was, looked set to see out his political life holding to that old intransigent line. Last week he made a joke of it, quoting it as he moved

This article appears thanks to the *Irish News*.
Subscribe to the [Irish News](#)



his chair when asked to, so that the camera crews could get shots of the first executive meeting.

In their inaugural speeches both Paisley and McGuinness referred to the victims of the Troubles. "Today we salute Ulster's honoured and unaging dead. The innocent victims of the terrible conflict – we hail their gallantry and heroism," Paisley said. He spoke of the need for healing. McGuinness spoke of "those in our community [who] have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of our difficult and painful past". He said that we must "look to the future to find the means to help them heal".

The healing has begun. It is too late for Vera and Paddy McVeigh and for many, many others. However, there is still time for those now in power to bring a measure of comfort and closure to some of those whose lives have been dominated by grief and by the struggle to get some sort of justice for loved ones who were killed.

This is important for all victims with outstanding questions and there are many. The British in particular must be pushed to release vital information on security force issues. It is a matter of urgency for the generation of old people who lost children and other relatives in the early days of the Troubles and have lived through the whole bloody business.

Take the case of Sadie Reavey who is 84 and in poor health. She survived the murder in 1976 of three of her sons, John Martin (24), Brian (22) and Anthony (17), only to be subjected to persistent sectarian harassment by the security forces and a poisonous rumour mill that put it about that her sons were in the IRA.

Just last year, the Historical Enquiries Team wrote to apologise to her and to state that her sons were "entirely innocent victims of senseless sectarian violence".

Her family welcomed this.

However, there is an untruth that needs to be addressed and Paisley is its author.

In 1999 he used parliamentary privilege to name Sadie's son, Eugene Reavey, as one of the IRA gang that carried out the Kingsmill's massacre of 10 Protestants the day after the murders of his brothers.

The then chief constable of the RUC, Ronnie Flanagan, stated that the police had no reason to suspect Eugene Reavey of any crime whatsoever.

Paisley refused to retract or to identify the source of the disinformation.

Paisley is an old man well aware of mortality. He said last week that this is a time for peace. Last year he tried to help Vera McVeigh, calling on those with information about the whereabouts of Columba's body to come forward. Let him now, immediately, ease the pain of another elderly mother and give Sadie Reavey the apology she deserves for wrongly calling her son, Eugene, a mass murderer.

May 16, 2007

This article appeared first in the May 15, 2007 edition of the [Irish News](#).

[BACK TO TOP](#)

[About](#)

[Home](#)

[History](#)

[NewsoftheIrish](#)

[Books](#)

[Bookstore](#)

[Contact](#)