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An article on Martin McGuinness which shows just a little of the terrorism he espoused

Martin McGuinness's remarkable transformation – and his brutal past

(Suzanne Breen, Irish Mail on Sunday)

Peggy McGuinness was worried about her son. It was 1972, and she had found an IRA beret and belt in his bedroom. Martin had just given up his job and the newspapers were describing him as the officer commanding the Provos' Derry brigade.

'His father is a welder, his brothers are at the bricklaying and carpentry but what will become of Martin?' she fretted. Mrs -McGuinness needn't have worried. Her son will today be officially unveiled as Sinn Féin's candidate for the presidency.

And, if the electorate agrees, the boy from the Bogside could soon be ensconced in the luxury of the Áras. It's been a remarkable journey. The alleged chief-of-staff of the illegal Óglaigh na hÉireann – as the Provos called themselves – Mr McGuinness could end up supreme commander of the legitimate one

Career-wise, he's already done well. As Deputy First Minister, he's the second most powerful politician in the North. Unionists initially hated him – branding him the 'Butcher of the Bogside' because of IRA atrocities during his time as a commander.

But at Stormont and in meetings with ordinary people in the community, Mr McGuinness won the sceptics over. He charmed Ian Paisley and even hardline Protestant civil-servants. 'Call me Martin!' he declared when other cabinet colleagues insisted on 'minister'.

He told last weekend's Sinn Féin ard fheis that unionists should be 'loved and cherished'. Addressing the conference, Presbyterian minister David Latimer hailed Mr McGuinness as 'one of the great leaders of modern times'. It set the scene nicely for his Áras bid.

After the Real IRA murdered two British soldiers in Co. Antrim two years ago, Mr McGuinness's reputation rose with unionists. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with then PSNI chief constable, Hugh Orde, and DUP leader Peter Robinson, he denounced the dissidents as 'traitors to the island of Ireland'.

But his own murky -paramilitary past still hovers over him. So who is the real Martin McGuinness? I've met him many times. He has an easy, engaging manner and a great sense of humour. He is warmer, more down-to-earth and outgoing than Gerry Adams. Colleagues say he'd 'talk to a stray dog'.

But one point on which some old security force opponents and, surprisingly, many former IRA colleagues agree, is that beneath that easy charm, history shows a ruthless man. On the face of it, Mr McGuinness has been more honest about his past than Mr Adams, ad-



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mitting he was an IRA member. In 1973, appearing before Dublin's Special Criminal Court after being arrested by gardaí, he declared: 'I'm a member of the Derry Brigade of the IRA and I'm very, very proud of it.'

But Mr McGuinness's admission of a military role in the conflict, has meant the detail of his involvement hasn't been forensically examined. Mr Adams has been haunted by Jean McConville, the mother of 10 he allegedly had killed and secretly buried.

Mr McGuinness has his own ghost. In 1986, Frank Hegarty fled to England after his cover as a British agent in the Derry IRA was blown. But he missed home and regularly rang his widowed mother, Rose.

Mr McGuinness started calling at the house and spoke to Hegarty several times on the phone, promising he'd be safe if he came back to Derry. Disastrously, Hegarty believed him. Tapes exist of one conversation between the informer and Mr McGuinness.

After his return, Hegarty was asked to meet the Provos to 'straighten things out'. Mr McGuinness assured his mother he was safe. Hegarty was discovered on a roadside with his hands tied behind his back and his eyes taped, shot in the head. Mr McGuinness denied any involvement in the murder or misleading the family.

Yet on his anniversary, the dead man's mother placed a newspaper notice denouncing 'the Judas' who betrayed her son. In the presidential campaign, Frank Hegarty could become Mr McGuinness's Jean McConville.

The man who condemned Massereene wasn't always so protective of human life. As Derry IRA commander, he claimed civilian casualties were inevitable. He said: 'We've always given ample warnings. Anybody hurt was hurt through their own fault: being too nosy, sticking around the place where the bomb was after they were told to get clear.'

It's hard to reconcile this Martin McGuinness with the one who charmingly chats about everyday topics. I was the first journalist to interview him after he became Deputy First Minister.

Sitting in his office in Stormont, he stressed how determined he was to build a strong relationship with then first minister Ian Paisley, who had once demanded that the Sinn Féin leader be hanged. 'I've called him a sectarian bigot, I think he's called me worse but I'll not repeat it!' Mr McGuinness joked.

The two old enemies clicked instantly. Both were conservative family men who liked the simple things in life. 'Although, I'm not quite as religious as Ian,' he quipped. Both detested what Paisley called 'the devil's buttermilk'. 'I've a glass of wine at Christmas dinner but never more than two. I'd rather sit in the house with a mug of tea,' Mr McGuinness said.

He's often been appalled at some republicans' drinking. Addressing a St Patrick's Day parade, he thundered: 'We will never free Ireland with an Armalite in one hand and a tin of



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beer in the other.'

Although he's more liberal now, Mr McGuinness once viewed homosexuality very negatively. Addressing an Easter rally on the 75th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, he denounced me – in front of thousands of republicans – for suggesting in an article that Patrick Pearse or Roger Casement may have been gay.

Mr McGuinness still lives in the Bogside with his wife, Bernie Canning, who owns a local café. They married in 1974, a week after he was released from jail in the Republic where he'd served a short sentence for IRA membership. The couple spent their honeymoon in Dublin. Bernie herself was once charged and found not guilty of possessing guns.

Not all her family are Sinn Féin supporters. Her brother, Marvin Canning, regularly attends dissident republican protests. In June, he was charged after an Easter rally in Derry at which a masked Real IRA man appeared.

Bernie and Martin McGuinness have four grown-up children: two daughters and two sons. If elected President, he will miss his native city. As Deputy First Minister, he makes a 240km daily round trip commute to Derry, rather than staying in Belfast during the week. 'I believe in going home every night. I rise at 6am. I can survive on very little sleep,' he said.

Despite being a home bird, Mr McGuinness discovered the joys of travel late in life. He fell in love with Paris five years ago. 'I took my grandson there when Derry City played Paris St Germain. As we walked by Notre Dame, I thought, "This is the first time I've been out of Ireland for myself. All the other times, I was travelling for Sinn Féin".'

Mr McGuinness's knowledge of the Republic is limited, although he spent part of his childhood – and later time in the early Seventies when on the run – in Co. Donegal. His mother was born just outside Bunrana.

'I spent summers in a small thatched cottage,' he told me. 'I'd have tears in my eyes going back to the city. I never understood why Donegal was divided from Derry. I didn't accept the partition of this island then and I still don't.'

He was extremely close to his mother who died three years ago. When I asked Mr McGuinness to name his favourite food, he replied: 'Anything à la Peggy!' He disclosed he was a decent cook himself, although when his daughters were teenagers they would complain that he used too much garlic, which caused problems when they met their boyfriends later. He relaxes by watching the very English Last Of The Summer Wine and Match Of The Day. 'I've supported Manchester

At 61, he looks well for his years. He told me that at a dinner in Boston, a stranger asked if he was David Letterman: 'I said, "No, I'm Martin McGuinness but a lot of people in Ireland think I look like Art Garfunkel – I only wish I could sing like him!'

As an IRA leader, he knew 'stardom' of a different kind. He was portrayed as Derry's Che



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Guevara. 'Martin has more time for guns than girls,' declared a 1972 newspaper headline about 'the boy who rules Free Derry'.

Celebrities came calling, including American novelist, Leon Uris. Mr McGuinness boasted that life on the run was exciting, travelling around in a stolen Ford Avenger.

Unlike other republicans at the coalface of the war, he emerged relatively unscathed. There have been no lengthy jail sentences – he has served 14 months in prison in the Republic on two separate IRA membership charges – no vicious beatings by the security forces, and no serious attempts on his life.

Charges against him in the North were controversially dropped in the mid-Seventies. In 1983, an offer to testify against him by supergrass Raymond Gilmour was refused by the authorities. Ten years later, detectives investigating his IRA links questioned the decision not to prosecute him despite three witnesses willing to give evidence.

Ex-British intelligence officer Ian Hurst has said it's remarkable that someone who spent three decades at the top of the republican movement had never been convicted in the North. 'This man has been so lucky, he should be buying lottery tickets,' he said.

He claimed Mr McGuinness was a long-standing British agent known as 'J118'. Mr McGuinness dismissed the allegation as 'a load of hooey'. While the claim hasn't been proven, neither can it be easily dismissed – Hurst was the person who outed senior IRA man Freddie Scappaticci as the British agent 'Stakeknife'.

The greatest criticism he now faces is from former comrades who allege he's abandoned republican principles for power. They say he has fooled the grassroots and point to his claim in 2003 that there would be a united Ireland by 2016.

Veteran Derry republican Mickey Donnelly, one of the 'hooded men' on whom the British carried out horrific experiments during internment in 1971, said: 'As someone who knew McGuinness well from the start, I did not trust him and always questioned his reputation as a great military strategist. He has betrayed everything in which he ever claimed to believe. He is a traitor to Irish republicanism.'

Mr McGuinness doesn't attend receptions for British royal visitors to the North. But sources say that position would shift and he would welcome the Windsors were he in the Áras.

No one can dispute that he has changed. 'We don't believe winning elections will bring freedom, it will be the cutting edge of the IRA,' he declared in 1985. It's not a statement he's likely to repeat during the presidential campaign.

September 19, 2011