

Secret files link 'Gerry Adams linked to ruthless IRA death squad that murdered mother-of-ten they believed to be British spy'

By [Nic Robertson](#)

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Since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 much of Northern Ireland has returned to the bucolic calm for which the Emerald Isle is so romantically renowned.

But now, 14 years on from that decisive moment in the peace process, audio recordings locked inside a college library in the United States are raising the specter of The Troubles once more.

Their release could help solve an old murder mystery; but they could also damage a peace in Northern Ireland that remains fragile, as CNN senior international correspondent Nic Robertson (pictured right) writes here:

In December 1972, the widow Jean McConville, a Protestant who had married a Catholic, was taken from her home in West Belfast; taken from her 10 children.

McConville's daughter, Helen McKendry, who was then a teenager, remembers the moment vividly: 'They came about tea time and they dragged her out of the bathroom and dragged her out.'

For years McKendry was told that her mother was sent away to England – banished amid accusations that she was spying for the security forces. But the truth was far darker; she had been executed. In 2003 Jean McConville's remains were discovered on a remote beach in

County Louth, 50 miles outside Belfast.

In the four decades since her mother's disappearance, McKendry has been on a quest for answers. 'All I ever wanted was to know the reason why they killed my mother,' McKendry explains, and now she believes tapes locked away in Boston College's library may hold the real truth about her mother's fate.



Secret: Recordings of IRA terrorists, which could solve the murder of Jean McConville (left with three of her children) could be made public





Video: Helen McKendry (top) talks on film about the murder of her mother, while Anthony McIntyre (below) was an inmate who interviewed former comrades for the Boston Project

But there is more to the story of the tapes than this specific crime. Perhaps most significantly, there are fears that the tapes may cause embarrassment or worse for Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams.

The recordings were made as part of the Belfast Project, a collection of interviews conducted with former Northern Irish paramilitary fighters.

They provide an oral history of the decades of sectarian fighting that dogged Northern Ireland, and a revealing portrait of paramilitary activity and the inner workings of the Provisional IRA and the Loyalist Volunteer Force.

The interviews on the tapes were conducted by Anthony McIntyre, a former inmate at the notorious Maze Prison who was once a member of the IRA.

He talked with many of his former comrades about their activities during The Troubles and recorded them for a Boston College research project.

These ex-combatants believed that the recordings would be kept secret until their deaths.

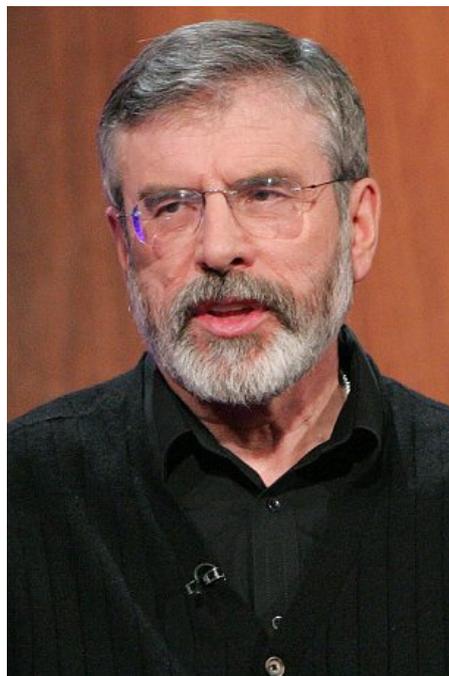


Voice from the past: Gerry Adams, pictured in the early Seventies with his one-time friend Brendan Hughes

But now, with many still alive, Northern Irish police are demanding the United States government hands over some of the tapes to help with investigations into terrorist activities during Northern Ireland's darkest days.

Police say they were alerted to the secret archive by the book, 'Voices from the Grave', written by Belfast Project archive manager Ed Moloney, and based on transcripts from two of the recorded interviews. One of those featured is Brendan Hughes, a now deceased former commander of the IRA.

Hughes told his interviewer: 'I have never, ever, ever admitted being a member of the IRA, ever. I've just done it here.'



Implicated: Gerry Adams

But he admitted more than just membership of the paramilitary organisation; he also talked

about Jean McConville's murder, stating: 'I knew she was being executed. I knew that. I didn't know she was going to be buried, or disappeared as they call them now.'

Hughes, who died in 2008, also said he regretted what happened: 'Looking back on it now, what happened to the woman was wrong.'

More sensationally, however, Hughes went on to allege Gerry Adams was involved in McConville's execution: 'The special squad was brought into the operation then, called The Unknowns. You know when anyone needed to be taken away they normally done it.

'I had no control over this squad. Gerry had control over this particular squad.'

Gerry Adams refused to be interviewed by CNN for this story. But he has always maintained that he was never in the IRA, and has insisted that he was never involved in the death of Jean McConville.

The tapes reveal that Adams' denial of IRA membership angers his old comrades. In Hughes' recording the now-dead paramilitary says: 'It means that people like myself had to carry the responsibility of all those deaths. Gerry was a major, major player in the war and yet he's standing there denying it.'

In his first television interview on the subject, the British government's most senior politician on Northern Ireland, Owen Paterson, told CNN that no one person is above the law: 'There can be no concept on amnesty, so we have to support the police to have complete operational independence in pursuing every line of inquiry in bringing those who committed crimes to justice.'

Northern Irish police are vowing to follow the material in the Boston Archives 'all way to court' if that's where it takes them. They insist that detectives have a legal responsibility to investigate murders, and to follow 'all lines of inquiry'. It is a vow that is causing disquiet on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Boston archive manager, Ed Moloney, is furious with Boston College for initially giving in too quickly to subpoena's demanding they hand over some of the tapes to a US Judge. He maintains that the subpoena puts lives in danger, and damages the future of truth recovery, oral histories, and academic research.



Grim task: Helen McKendry pictured on a beach in County Louth in 2000 during a police search for her missing mother

Moloney, who is appealing to prevent the handover of the tapes to Northern Ireland's police, says that Boston College 'is no longer a fit and proper place to keep these interviews'.

He says that the archives should be closed down, and that 'the interviews should be returned to the people who gave them, because they're not safe'.

Right now, there seems to be little chance of that happening. Boston College's spokesman Jack Dunn lays the blame for this squarely with Moloney: 'From the beginning we said to the project organizer who approached us with this idea that there were limitations regarding the assurances of confidentiality under American law.'



Interviews: Dolours Price is also said to have spoken to The Belfast Project

But Moloney's other sense of alarm concerns what might happen to the rest of the archive. If police acquire tapes relating to Jean McConville's murder they could quickly find other crimes to investigate, he believes – crimes that could implicate other political leaders – and the police could soon be demanding to listen to all the tapes in the archive.

Because his central role in silencing IRA guns and delivering peace mean Adams is regarded

by many as virtually immune from prosecution, and in part because the tapes alone cannot secure a conviction, few believe an investigation will be successful in getting the Sinn Fein leader to court. But it is possible his enduring popularity may suffer. For a politician of his stature that could be crippling, a fact that is causing some to question the motivation of police in chasing the Boston archive tapes.

Former IRA man Richard O'Rawe also recorded a statement for the Boston College archives. He insists that lawyers assure him the tapes are no use in court. 'I find it just imponderable, why the police are going down this road when they must know that there is no chance of obtaining any convictions at the end of this,' he says.

In common with many other Catholics, O'Rawe believes that the police are biased against them. He thinks they are simply trying to settle old scores and bring Adams and others down.



Research: The Belfast Project interviewed 26 former IRA members between 2001 and 2006

But for Helen McKendry, herself a Catholic, gaining access to the tapes is about much more than sectarianism and politics. McKendry is not only seeking justice, but also release from the pain of never knowing the truth. 'I've lived all my life in fear', she says. 'They destroyed my mother's life, my family life. And they tried to destroy what life I have now. They are the people who committed the crimes in this country. They should be worried.' For now, all eyes are on the U.S. courts, waiting to see if the subpoenas will be upheld. Whatever happens, the full stories of Jean McConville's death and so many others may remain untold. Indeed, some secrets may have already gone to the grave.