

A 30-year-old murder. A macabre series of dark coincidences. And the

disturbing belief of officer who helped mastermind Falklands campaign

Why I, a former intelligence chief, believe sinking of Belgrano made MI5 murder my crusading aunt

By **Commander Robert Green**

IT IS nearly 30 years since my aunt, Hilda Murrell, was abducted, beaten, stabbed and left to die in a copse in the countryside outside Shrewsbury. Her murder has become a cause celebre, not just because of the shocking manner of her death, but because of the unanswered questions that refuse to go away.

Hilda, a 78-year-old rose-grower and anti-nuclear environmentalist, was a keeper of dangerous secrets. Involved in top-secret work at Bletchley Park in the Second World War, she was an independent, well-connected and informed opponent of Britain's plans for nuclear power and weapons.

Because of her close association with me, she was suspected of having sensitive information about the sinking of the Argentinian cruiser General Belgrano in the 1982 Falklands War. Someone wanted her silenced for this, or was it for even more politically damaging information?

The past three decades have seen a rising tide of evidence that the true perpetrators were the British security services.

Meanwhile a man is languishing in jail, wrongly convicted of a crime he did not commit.

Hilda was my close friend and mentor and I was her next of kin. I was a commander in Royal Navy Intelligence at the heart of the Falklands War, thus I fear it is more than possible that having me as her nephew sealed her fate.

The struggle to uncover what really happened goes on. Michael Mansfield QC has joined my campaign for a Commission of Inquiry. Austin Mitchell MP is gathering support in the House of Commons.

But standing up for the truth comes at a cost. Our home has been broken into several times, computers interfered with, possessions disturbed, yet nothing stolen. Our mail often arrives in our PO box late, damaged or even empty.

I still find my phone calls mysteriously disconnected mid-conversation. I do not own a mobile phone because they can be listened to. Following death threats in Britain – including calls to a friend saying 'tell Rob Green he's next' – I feel like a fugitive in my own country. Even after I emigrated to New Zealand, the harassment has continued.

Some UK-based security organisation with extraordinary persistence, reach and resources seems desperate to impede and frighten us. The most obvious motive is that, with the help of my wife Kate Dewes, I am getting too close to discovering who murdered my beloved aunt, friend and mentor – and why.

'THEY'VE rubbed her out.' It was my immediate thought, an involuntary conviction. At 2pm on Saturday, March 24, 1984, West Mercia Police rang to say they had found an old

woman's body. Hilda had been missing since the Wednesday. Her mutilated corpse had been discovered in a poplar copse six miles outside Shrewsbury, some 500 yards from her crashed Renault 5.

Sexually assaulted, stabbed through her upper right arm and with five shallow stab wounds in the abdomen, she was naked from the waist down. There were severe abrasions on the knees. She had defence cuts on each hand, the hyoid bone in her neck and her right collar bone were broken. Her face was bruised. A trail of her belongings led across a heavy clay field to her body. No valuables were missing, only £40-odd in cash.

Hilda was a remarkable woman. A 1927 Cambridge graduate, she had hoped for an academic career, but instead became director of her family's respected rose nursery. After retiring in 1970, she became an ardent anti-nuclear activist.

She was much more than my only aunt. We clicked: she the anti-nuclear campaigner, a Liberal voter; I an apolitical, typically Conservative naval Commander with nuclear weapons experience and a top-security clearance. In 1979, as Personal Staff Officer to the Assistant Chief

of Naval Staff (Policy) in the Ministry of Defence, I was a fly on the wall as the Admiralty debated replacing Britain's nuclear-armed Polaris submarines with Trident.

The meltdown of the US reactor at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania had endorsed Hilda's view that nuclear power was too hazardous for civil use. Margaret Thatcher was determined to introduce new nuclear plants of a similar design,

the first of which would be built at Sizewell in Suffolk. When Hilda was murdered, she had just been given approval to testify as an independent objector at the public inquiry. The Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Heseltine, responded to the growing anti-nuclear movement by setting up a propaganda unit in the Ministry of Defence. It had direct links with MI5 and according to whistleblowing agent Cathy Massiter its branch, dealing with 'domestic subversion', was expanded. In April 1982, Britain went to war with Argentina and I found myself working in the command bunker at Northwood in North-West London in charge of a 40-strong team providing round-the-clock intelligence support to the fleet. Later I took redundancy from the Navy and dropped out of the 'Establishment'. I was now earning my living thatching roofs but I knew about the Falklands and nuclear weapons. No wonder there was suspicion about my motives.

Later I took redundancy from the Navy and dropped out of the 'Establishment'. I was now earning my living thatching roofs but I knew about the Falklands and nuclear weapons. No wonder there was suspicion about my motives.

Later I took redundancy from the Navy and dropped out of the 'Establishment'. I was now earning my living thatching roofs but I knew about the Falklands and nuclear weapons. No wonder there was suspicion about my motives.

Later I took redundancy from the Navy and dropped out of the 'Establishment'. I was now earning my living thatching roofs but I knew about the Falklands and nuclear weapons. No wonder there was suspicion about my motives.

Later I took redundancy from the Navy and dropped out of the 'Establishment'. I was now earning my living thatching roofs but I knew about the Falklands and nuclear weapons. No wonder there was suspicion about my motives.

Later I took redundancy from the Navy and dropped out of the 'Establishment'. I was now earning my living thatching roofs but I knew about the Falklands and nuclear weapons. No wonder there was suspicion about my motives.

to believe Hilda's murder was 'a burglary gone wrong'.

In June 2003, Andrew George, a 35-year-old local labourer, was arrested. The officer who gave me the news responded to my incredulity by saying: 'Yes, Rob – but we can make it fit the facts.'

He was asking me to believe that Hilda had been abducted and murdered by a truant from a foster home who could not drive. George had been aged only 16 in 1984.

In 2005 he was sentenced to 13 years. A 2006 appeal was rejected. His conviction stands as only one among many errors, omissions and distortions which bedevil the case. It seems incredible that 'burglary' remains the official reason why Hilda was murdered.

THE ASTONISHING POLICE MISTAKES

THE police account of Hilda's death was riven with anomalies, and so was the handling of the case. The police inspected Hilda's crashed car by sunset on the Wednesday. Yet they did not check her house

until the Friday evening. There is evidence of changes to her home while she was missing, including doors and windows open and shut, and lights switched on and off.

There were many reports of suspicious people and vehicles around the house and her crashed car. Yet the police ignored them all.

A white van was reported parked in her drive around the time of her abduction.

According to the owner of the copse, the body was not there on the Thursday when he was checking trees for felling. So was Hilda abducted to a safe house for interrogation before being left to be discovered on Saturday? The

JAILED: Andrew George was sentenced to 13 years for Hilda's murder

pathologist concluded that, despite her many injuries, Hilda had died of hypothermia. She had several superficial stab wounds, but a lack of blood. Were some of the wounds inflicted after death to simulate an attack? Was this to conceal that she had been murdered by breaking her neck before being carried into the copse and a false trail laid of her clothing plus boots, broken spectacles and kitchen knife?

Did the police know about the crime before the body was discovered? Who were the mysterious officers a witness saw 'on a murder hunt' on farmland near the abandoned car on the Friday? Why did two detectives visit a Shrewsbury sex counsellor on the Friday evening before the body was discovered asking if he knew of any man with sexual problems and a preference for violence to old ladies and interfering with their clothing?

WHAT DID SHE KNOW AND WHO CARED?

'IF THEY don't get me first, I want the world to know that at least one

old woman has seen through their lies.' That was what Hilda told ecologist and anti-nuclear campaigner Gerard Morgan-Grenville at the end of her last, agitated 30-minute call to him.

As well as preparing her Sizewell paper, she had been distributing his leaflets making sensitive allegations about nuclear weapons being deployed in British warships to the Falklands War and revealing that the Belgrano was sunk 59 miles outside the exclusion zone.

This information could only have come from an inside source, putting her link with me under suspicion (although I had never made any unauthorised disclosures.)

Morgan-Grenville was an Old Etonian friend of the maverick Labour MP Tam Dalyell, who was embarrassing Mrs Thatcher with other secret details. On Monday, March 19, 1984, Dalyell hand-delivered a letter to Mr Heseltine asking nine new questions about the Belgrano episode. Two days later, Hilda's house was searched and she was abducted.

Later that year, Dalyell announced in Parliament that 'British intelligence had been involved'.

Hilda had also conferred with dissident nuclear scientists, one of whom had discovered a serious flaw in the control rods of the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor.

It is possible that Hilda held still more damaging material. Several witnesses have come forward with information that Hilda was involved with Bletchley Park. One elderly woman, now dead, reported that Hilda was her supervisor.

There is strong circumstantial evidence that Hilda was trying to prevent some extremely sensitive documents from being stolen and suppressed.

Three days before her abduction, she tried to leave documents with a friend. Less than an hour before she was abducted, she phoned a veteran peace activist from a callbox asking him to meet her at evening with a 'stout bag' for a large number of documents she wanted published. Though no one could prove any of

MURDER HUNT: Police stopping cars on the road near the wood where Hilda's body was dumped in 1984

CRUCIAL EVIDENCE OF A HIT SQUAD

Hilda's papers were taken, her document satchel and handbag were not found.

SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SILENCED

ANDREW George, the man convicted of the murder, told a fellow prisoner who was a key prosecution witness at his trial that he had been encouraged to burgle Hilda's house by a strange woman who told him she had 'friends in a white van who would clear up after him'.

While on remand, George apparently confessed to his dying father that, on entering Hilda's house, two men held guns to his head and threatened to kill him, but promised him £60,000 if he kept his mouth shut.

There is no doubt George was there: his DNA was found in semen on Hilda's underslip and clothing and his fingerprints were in her house. But what had he been forced to do, and why?

There is also crucial unexamined evidence showing male DNA under Hilda's fingernails on both hands, and semen on her cardigan, that could not have come from George. The fingernail DNA established Hilda had fought with another man. Why was this ignored by both prosecution and defence?

And why did the Forensic Science Service 'lose' the body sheet and crucial body parts associated with toxicology tests, including Hilda's brain, liver, stomach contents, bile and urine?

DID THE KILLERS USE A DECOY?

AN affidavit from Trina Guthrie, treated by Hilda as an adopted niece, set out an account of Hilda's death from a former convict.

He had been told the following: that Hilda had died at the hands of a team despatched to search for copies of secret signals relating to the Belgrano sinking.

The man had shared a cell in a prison near York with another inmate serving 15 years for armed robbery, who claimed to have led a team of three men and a woman hired by a 'secret intelligence department' to do freelance work.

The team leader allegedly reported to the Cabinet Office via an MI5 liaison officer.

The female team member, wearing Hilda's hat and coat, was driven in her car by one of the other men through town and out to near the copse as a decoy.

Witnesses reported apparently seeing 'Hilda', obscured by a wide-brimmed floppy brown hat, slumped in the passenger seat of her own car on the day of her disappearance.

Meanwhile the real Hilda was allegedly taken to a safe house where she was subjected to further interrogation under torture with a

knife. Two nights later she was dumped in the copse and left to die.

The use of a decoy is reminiscent of tactics from Northern Ireland at the time, where suspects were abducted by snatch squads, sometimes criminals in the pay of the security services.

WHY have those involved in attempting to find the truth been met with threats, harassment or harm? Philip Griffiths, whose mother was one of Hilda's friends, allegedly overheard three men in a Brighton pub bragging how they killed her. He was later found drugged with morphine and beaten to death in a park. Someone had emptied his flat.

Cecil Woolf, publishers of Graham Smith's book *Death Of A Rose-Grower* and several books by Dalyell criticising the Thatcher Government, experienced a mysterious break-in.

Judith Cook, author of *Who Killed Hilda Murrell?*, was harassed. Lady Dora Russell, a 91-year-old who wrote a letter to the newspapers supporting Cook, was beaten up by an intruder. A postcard followed: 'We broke into Hilda Murrell, we broke into the Woolf's ... and we'll break in wherever we want to ...'

And then there are the break-ins at our Christchurch home and more than 20 years of mail interference: letters opened, letters slashed, contents stolen.

If Andrew George abducted and murdered Hilda, why are we and key witnesses still being harassed and intimidated?

WHERE to from here? First, there is the urgent need to release Andrew George – a petty thief never previously imprisoned. DNA evidence in possession of the police and forensic service would probably establish beyond reasonable doubt that at least one other man, whom Hilda had scratched, and possibly another man whose semen was on her cardigan, were involved in her murder.

Having reopened the case, there has to be a proper Commission of Inquiry similar to the Hillsborough Independent Panel, led by a distinguished independent person with no links to the security apparatus.

Only such an investigation can recommend how to prevent further corrupt, politicised abuse of the British justice system.

Finally, I hope my pursuit of the truth about how and why Hilda died so violently will encourage others suspected of suffering injustice at the hands of the security authorities to come forward.

● *A Thorn In Their Side*, by Robert Green, is published by John Blake, priced £7.99. To order your copy for £7.49 including P&P, call 0844 472 4157 or visit mailbookshop.co.uk.

