

Opening the

Thirty years ago Hilda Murrell was murdered. DAVID BURROWS examines the controversy that still surrounds the case.



FOR years it was one of Britain's most notorious unsolved murders and now – 30 years later – it is the case that refuses to go away.

On March 21, 1984, renowned rose grower Hilda Murrell was abducted from her Shrewsbury home. Three days later, her body was discovered in a copse in the shadow of Haughmond Hill, near Shrewsbury.

The 78-year-old's had been repeatedly stabbed, although a post mortem concluded she died of hypothermia.

The case would go unsolved for 21 years. It was not until June 2003 that police had their first genuine suspect.

Builders labourer Andrew George was arrested at his home in Meadow Farm Drive, Shrewsbury, and subsequently charged with Miss Murrell's murder.

He had been linked to the crime after a cold case review found fingerprint and DNA evidence tying him to the killing.

But while police favoured a "burglary gone wrong" theory, there were allegations that Miss Murrell's murder was something a lot more sinister.

Some believed she had been killed by forces working for the state.

What may today seem like a far-fetched flight of fancy is given more weight by the political mood in the 1980s and the fact that Miss Murrell was much more than just a rose grower.

Campaigner

A vehement anti-nuclear campaigner, she had carried out meticulous work to expose perceived risks at the planned Sizewell nuclear reactor and was also suspected of having evidence relating to the sinking of Argentine cruiser General Belgrano in the Falklands War.

At that time her nephew, Robert Green, was working in Navy intelligence.

George, a 16-year-old living at Besford House children's home in Belle Vue, Shrewsbury, at the time of the killing, was convicted after a 20-day trial at Stafford Crown Court.

But Mr Green remains convinced George did not murder his aunt.

The Hilda Murrell murder story started on March 21, 1984, when a farmer from Hunkington, Upton Magna, near Shrewsbury, reported that a white Renault 5 car – Miss Murrell's – had been left in a ditch in a lane near his home.

A rural beat officer checked out the car but it was not until two days later that he visited her large detached house in Sutton Road.

Finding an open door, he even took a few steps inside, but saw nothing to arouse his suspicions, assuming the occupants had simply popped out to the shops.

It was not until the next morning – March 24 – that another officer went to Hunkington and searched a copse at the foot of Haughmond Hill with the help of a local gamekeeper's wife and her two dogs.

They found Miss Murrell's partly-clothed body in a slight hollow.

She had been stabbed several times to the abdomen, hands and arm and had multiple bruises to her face. But the actual cause of death was hypothermia.

An examination of Miss Murrell's home revealed a struggle and systematic search had taken place. Forensic evidence led police to announce that although there was no sign of any sexual assault on Miss Murrell, she had been subjected to "some form



Renowned rose grower Hilda Murrell was killed 30 years ago



Andrew George was convicted of murder

FACING THE FACTS OF THE MURRELL MURDER

- Hilda Murrell was a rose grower, a naturalist and campaigner against nuclear energy and weapons.
- Miss Murrell was found dead in a field in March 1984, aged 78, three days after being abducted from her home.
- Miss Murrell had been stabbed several times, suffering multiple injuries, and had

been left to die from hypothermia.

- Andrew George was arrested in June 2003 after a cold case review and sentenced to life imprisonment.
- In 1984 Miss Murrell submitted a paper to a planning inquiry into the Sizewell B Nuclear Reactor. She was about to present the paper when she was murdered.

of sexual activity". A vast inquiry including thousands of interviews and even a criminal personality profile by the FBI was carried out.

But as time went on with no murderer found, Miss Murrell's friends and family started speculating about a possible political motive.

There was also criticism of tardy police action and the family's solicitors were unhappy at the refusal of Shrewsbury coroner Mr David Crawford Clarke to let them have copies of the post mortem reports.

The political killing theories fall into two categories: nuclear power and the Falklands War.

Miss Murrell was working on a paper on the management of nuclear waste to be read at the Sizewell B inquiry that summer.

One school of thought suggests her murderers were hired by the nuclear industry to burgle her home in a bid to find out what her paper would say.

The other theory is that they were working for MI5 which feared she had access to information about the Falklands War and

the sinking of the Belgrano. Mr Green was engaged on highly sensitive intelligence work during the conflict. Soon after he took early retirement and has always denied leaking anything to his aunt.

In 2011 Mr Green wrote a book about the case – *A Thorn In Their Side*.

In the latest edition, recently published in the UK, he claims to have uncovered evidence which points towards Miss Murrell being held at Sundorne Territorial Army Centre before her body was dumped in the copse in Hunkington.

He has also uncovered evidence linking her to work at the World War II code-breaking headquarters at Bletchley Park.

But now Mr Green is planning to step back from the case after being diagnosed with cancer. He will undergo surgery next month.

Speaking today from his home in New Zealand, he said: "My decision at the moment is that I feel I've done all I can. In light of my diagnosis with cancer I have had to step back for a while and hope that others will pick up the torch from here on in."

Murrell files



Miss Murrell's car was abandoned in a ditch. Her body was found in a nearby copse.



Campaigners – Miss Murrell's nephew Robert Green with his partner Kate Dewes



How the Shropshire Star reported Miss Murrell's murder in March 1984

Major dates in the case

KEY dates in killing of rose grower Hilda Murrell:

- March 21, 1984 – Hilda Murrell last seen alive by a neighbour. A farmer from Upton Magna reported Miss Murrell's white Renault 5 car had been left in a ditch.
- March 23, 1984 – A rural beat officer visited Miss Murrell's home but after going through an open door, found no signs of disturbance.
- March 24, 1984 – Miss Murrell's body found.
- November 9, 1984 – A freelance writer investigating the death suggests there might be a political motive for the murder. Judith Cook speculated she had been killed by an intruder who was looking for a paper which she was due to present into the construction of the Sizewell B nuclear power station.
- December, 1984 – Labour MP Tam Dalyell puts forward the theory Miss Murrell had been killed by "men of the British intelligence" who were looking for documents concerning the Belgrano.
- January 8, 1985 – A professional burglar became a prime suspect in the investigation but no arrest made.
- March, 1994 – The 10th anniversary of Miss Murrell's death and West Mercia Police again rule out any security service involvement in the murder.
- March 31, 2000 – West Mercia police announce they are following new line of inquiry.
- April 18, 2000 – Forensic experts start new DNA tests.
- August 25, 2000 – The Government declines to reveal whether there is any new progress in the Hilda Murrell murder investigation.
- January, 2002 – West Mercia police mount new review of the case.
- January, 2003 – Hilda Murrell's nephew Rob Green returns to Britain to help West Mercia Police carry out a full review of the case.
- June 6, 2003 – West Mercia police announces a man has been arrested.
- June 10, 2003 – Builders' labourer Andrew George appears at Telford Magistrates Court accused of Miss Murrell's murder.
- April 8, 2005 – Andrew George's trial begins at Stafford Crown Court.
- May 6, 2005 – George is found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison.
- June 9, 2006 – George loses an appeal against his conviction.
- July 2013 – MPs call for a Hillsborough-style inquiry into Miss Murrell's death, claiming there are "serious and substantial doubts about the criminal investigations".

"I am satisfied that the new UK edition of the book is out with the new penultimate chapter. It is good to know that the book is available.

"I now need to encourage people to read the book and need people who can do something about it to come forward.

"What I have always felt is that I will never know who killed Hilda and, probably, the person who did it is now dead but what is clear to me is that Andrew George did not do it.

"He was involved and he is a key witness. "I would very much like to get him in a position of safety so he could tell us the real story of what happened.

"It is clear to me that he has more to tell us but he wants to stay alive.

"We do know that there are people that have more information about this and they need to go to Andrew George's solicitor, or Michael Mansfield, or to the police with the information they have."

George, who is serving a life sentence at the category B Garth Prison in Lancashire, admits being in Miss Murrell's home, but

denies carrying out the murder, insisting there was somebody else in the house with him.

During his 2005 trial he blamed his older brother Steven, although police found no evidence to link him to the house.

In his book, Mr Green says forensic evidence was recovered from Miss Murrell's fingernails, which the report said "could not have come from Messrs Harold, Steven, Andrew or Adrian George".

He says the evidence was not put before the jury because it was "only partial" and "probably contaminated".

Frustration

Mr Green said the 30th anniversary left him with feelings of frustration that he had gone three decades without answers.

He said: "We now have got to a position where quite clearly we have established a scenario which points to official security forces involvement in Hilda's death.

"This looks to be a planned operation and not a botch.

"It was made to look like a bit of a botch.

"That is a very sinister way to go in what is meant to be the mother of democracy.

"I am really saddened and outraged at the betrayal by the British state I served for 20 years.

"I believe I am a true patriot and I believe Hilda was a true patriot.

"She loved her country very much."

Andrew George's solicitor, Adrian Roberts said his client maintained his innocence but, for the time being, there was no justification in reopening the case.

He said: "There is no fresh evidence that has come to light to justify an appeal but he knows, I know and the police know that the case against Andrew George does not stack up to the evidence they have got.

"My instruction from Andrew George are that he didn't do it."

The police, however, are convinced that they got the right man and that nobody else was involved in Miss Murrell's murder.

Superintendent James Tozer, the police commander for Shropshire, said: "West Mercia Police is satisfied with the policing and judicial processes which led to Andrew

George being charged and subsequently given a life sentence for murder.

"The situation has not changed – there are currently no new grounds for a further police investigation."

But Mr Green will take more convincing. He had a deeply close relationship with his aunt, particularly after the death of his mother in 1964, when Mr Green was just 19.

He said: "I will never forget Hilda. "She filled a void when my mother died when I was young.

"She became a close friend and mentor. "I had to recalibrate my feelings towards her since this new information came out.

"She was very discreet.

"She knew so much more than I thought she knew.

"I have great respect for her but she was also tremendous fun and she was always thinking about the future – looking after the planet and the British Isles which she loved so truly.

That's why she spoke out and she paid with her life for that."