

This article appeared in the Irish Sun on Sunday 31 August 2014

For one group of families in Northern Ireland the almost unbearable pain and grief of losing a loved one during Northern Ireland's 'Troubles' has been immeasurably compounded.

They have had no funeral to attend, no coffin to carry, no grave to tend. They are the families of the Disappeared.

Fifteen men and one woman, Jean McConville, were abducted, murdered and secretly buried.

All were Catholic, fifteen 'disappeared' by the IRA and one, Seamus Ruddy from Newry who was teaching in Paris in 1985, murdered by the INLA.

In seeking a settlement in Northern Ireland both the British and Irish Governments recognised that the Disappeared was a specific issue that needed to be addressed.

So did the Republican movement which has continued to work to resolve it. Legislation passed in 1999 set up the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains. It is an organisation that is unique in these islands with cast-iron protections for those who provide information that could lead to the recovery of the remains of the Disappeared.

Any information given to the ICLVR is absolutely guaranteed in law to be kept completely confidential and will never be shared with any other state agency.

To date the remains of seven individuals have been recovered through the Commission's efforts.

Over the years the ICLVR has built up vast experience.

The work is complex and difficult not least because of the remoteness of the locations and changes in the terrain over the decades since the Disappeared were buried.

Just this week the ICLVR has a team of geophysicists with ground penetrating radar combing a half acre site of bog in Oristown Co. Meath. It is thought that the remains of Brendan Megraw, 23, abducted from his home in Belfast in 1978 lie somewhere in that desolate place.

If the analysis of the survey indicates that further investigation is needed forensic archeologists will come in to try to find him.

Geoff Knupfer, the ICLVR's lead forensic scientist and investigator, is convinced that with the right information the ICLVR can find Brendan. The significance to the families of the return of their loved ones cannot be overestimated.

Margaret McKinney's son Brian disappeared in May 1978.

In 1998 she met then US President Bill Clinton with a group from the WAVE Trauma Centre in Belfast which has supported the families of the Disappeared since 1995.

She told her story and there were tears in the White House that day.

She met Clinton again this year in Belfast. Margaret is more frail now but less haunted by the past. She thanked him for his support and showed him a photograph that is very dear to her.

It's of Brian's grave. There were more tears that day.

This is the fourth time since 1999 that the bog at Oristown has been searched and the ICLVR have returned because they have fresh information. Accurate information is the key to finding the remains of the Disappeared.

There are people out there, perhaps reading the Irish Sun today, who know something that could end the misery of families like the Megraws but they have to come forward.

Even if they are outside the Republican movement, 20 years on from the IRA ceasefire, this is the time to do it.

- Dennis Godfrey, Adviser to the ICLVR

Anyone with information on the Disappeared should contact the ICLVR on 00800 555 85500, by writing to ICLVR, PO Box 10827, Dublin 2. or via www.iclvr.ie

