

Hilda Murrell was murdered in March 1984. Who killed her - and why - has already been the subject of books, plays and films, and the conviction of a man for her abduction and murder in 2005 failed to answer many of the questions surrounding her death.

The reasons for this enduring enquiry are exposed at length in *A Thorn In Their Side*, a book being [launched this week](#) to mark the 28th anniversary of her death. The author is Hilda's nephew, Robert Green, with whom she had a close relationship and who was a commander in naval intelligence during the Falklands war. He has followed and chronicled the case meticulously.

Was this just a random, bungled burglary by a lone 16-year-old - as the police would have it - or was it an operation involving several individuals on behalf of a government agency, namely the security services?

The book cannot definitively answer this question, but it raises serious and substantial doubts about the criminal investigations to date. The accumulated concerns make an overwhelming argument for these to be reopened by an independent police force unconnected with any previous enquiries, or by an independent commission of inquiry.

"Nuclear disaster is both avoidable and inevitable. Nuclear technologies have too many inherent risks and widespread consequences to be a sensible choice for energy production." The words are those of [Rebecca Johnson](#), a former senior advisor to the Blix commission on weapons of mass destruction, writing about the disaster at Fukushima earlier this month. Back in 1984, this was exactly Hilda Murrell's position.

Murrell was a respected horticulturist: a rose was named after her shortly before she was murdered at the age of 78. She was a committed environmentalist and regarded Margaret Thatcher's [nuclear power](#) policy as utterly misguided. She began campaigning against it, accumulating high quality information about the risks from scientists and activists, and intended to provide it in person to the Sizewell B public inquiry, where she had been accredited as a witness. She was an outstanding and outspoken independent voice. The murder occurred before she could be heard. Her nephew's book chillingly reveals the threats, fears and surveillance she reported to others before she died.

A central theme of her research was the hazardous nature of radioactive waste and the difficulty in managing it. This still besets the nuclear industry, to the extent that the US currently has a moratorium on new reactors in some states. Murrell was also acutely aware of the [Three Mile Island](#) disaster in 1979. Her critique embraced [nuclear weapons](#) as well.

At which point we pan across to Commander Rob Green. The Argentinian cruiser, the *General Belgrano*, was sunk in 1982 during the Falklands war by HMS *Conqueror*, a nuclear submarine. Green was in naval intelligence. The truth about where the *Belgrano* was whether it was really necessary to sink her became a very hot political potato. A great deal of speculation and information entered the public domain that undermined the government's position. Although entirely without foundation, there must have been at least a suspicion that Green might in some way have been connected with the supposed leaks. Ultimately, the MP Tam Dalyell, who had been asking questions about the *Belgrano*'s sinking just before her disappearance, was driven to tell the Commons that British intelligence lay behind Murrell's murder in their search for material they thought she may have secreted at her home.

In the official version of her murder, Murrell was the victim of a demeaning and callous assault, abduction and murder by a young adolescent, on his own, without obvious motivation. The police version of the sequence of events is bizarre. On one and the same day, Hilda - having been assaulted in her home - is forced into her own car, driven through Shrewsbury in broad daylight past the police station and a number of witnesses, to a country lane some miles away. The car crashes into a verge with the driver's door jammed. The

driver then exits via the passenger seat and takes Hilda with him, but not before she has retrieved the car keys and put them in her pocket. He assaults her again in a field, where she loses her hat and spectacles. She is then either dragged or pushed across a ploughed field over a fence into a copse where she is stabbed, although not fatally, and left to die of hypothermia. Her body was not found for two days.

While DNA from the convicted man shows he was in Hilda's house, there are a huge number of other evidential matters that Rob Green has assembled which challenge the manner of this killing. Although many of them are not new, most have not been assembled in an intelligible format until now, and some have never been presented in court proceedings.

A few of the features which tend to undermine the idea that only one person was involved are:

- a) DNA discovered in relation to Hilda is not from the man convicted, but from at least two others;
- b) Photographs of Hilda's body in the copse show that she was clearly visible, and confirm the striking evidence of a local landowner. Ian Scott took his dogs for a walk the day after the murder in the very area where the body was supposed to have been left. He saw nothing and has always maintained he would have done had she been there because he was carefully identifying trees for felling.
- c) The 16-year-old could not drive and the descriptions given by witnesses of the driver do not fit him;
- d) Changes at her house over the days of her disappearance.

Until an independent inquiry takes place, the reader must be the judge.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/2012/mar/20/who-killed-hilda-murrell>