**SLUGGER O’TOOLE THREAD**

**After almost 70 years, the murder of Patricia Curran casts a long shadow**

**korhomme on 25 March 2015 , 5:57 pm 37 Comments | 1,782 views**

**Magna est veritias et prevailabit**

**(Great is Truth and it will prevail)**

**—Cicero (?)**



(Photo: Belfast Telegraph, Patricia Curran at centre)

In the early hours of 12 November 1952 the body of Patricia Curran, the daughter of a judge, was ‘discovered’ by her brother, Desmond, just off the driveway to the family home at The Glen, Whiteabbey. She had been murdered by being stabbed 37 times. Desmond on lifting her up thought that she breathed; she was brought by the family solicitor, conveniently on the scene, to the local GP where she was pronounced dead. Rigor mortis was present. Though it had been raining all that evening her clothes were quite dry; her belongings were neatly stacked nearby. There was little or no blood at the scene.

In 1950s N Ireland was largely free of ‘normal’ crime, and the murder of the daughter of a judge, a member of the local establishment was shocking, a tragedy that featured on the front pages of the local papers for a long time afterwards; a mixture of lurid fascination and titillation.

What then followed was a grotesque parody of the legal process. The judge refused permission for the RUC to interview his family for four days; and it was only a week after the discovery of her body before the judge permitted the RUC access to the family home. Patricia’s bedroom had been freshly redecorated.

The RUC took some 40,000 witness statements, but could not discover the murderer; in desperation they turned to Chief Superintendent John Capstick of Scotland Yard. His suspicions rapidly hardened around Iain Hay Gordon, a young, gauche, naive, jejune, shy national serviceman then based nearby at Edenmore.

In his lurid (ghost written) memoir, Chapstick described his interrogation of Iain Hay Gordon, saying,

I had to make that boy tell me the truth about his private life and most secret thoughts. Only then could I begin to believe him she he began to tell the truth about Patricia Curran. I hated to use what might well seem to be ruthless measures. I was never sorrier for any criminal than for that unhappy, maladjusted youngster. But his mask had to be broken.

To translate: Capstick gave Iain Hay Gordon the ‘third degree’, questioning him about his sexual fantasies, and playing on Gordon’s fear that his mother might think him a homosexual (a criminal offence in those days); Capstick implanted ideas into Gordon’s head; Iain Hay Gordon was, in the words of a later expert opinion, ‘brainwashed’. Iain Hay Gordon ‘confessed’, and at Capstick’s dictation wrote a confession. He had, it said, ‘blacked out’.

At his trial before the Lord Chief Justice, Lord McDermott, Iain Hay Gordon was found ‘guilty but insane’. He subsequently spent seven years in a secure facility at Holywell. Not being insane, he was given no treatment for this imaginary condition. He was released on the orders of Brian Faulkner, who required that he return to his native Scotland under an assumed name, which he did.

After his retirement, Iain Hay Gordon began a legal process to clear his name. He applied to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, but was initially turned down; a verdict of ‘guilty but insane’ is, in legal technicality, an acquittal. Only after the law was changed could he appeal again. His case was heard in the NI Court of Appeal in 2000, during which Counsel for the Crown admitted,

Without that confession would the verdict be guilty? The answer is no.

The Court of three judges ruled that the ‘confession’ was inadmissible; it was the only evidence pointing to Iain Hay Gordon’s guilt.

What exactly happened to Patricia Curran may never be known with certainty. The case is much more complicated than the simplified version I’ve described, much of the ‘evidence’ remains unclear.

Commentators think that Patricia returned to the family home around 5.30 pm on the evening before her body was discovered. She, having a distinct fear of the rather overgrown and sinister driveway may have been accompanied towards the home. It has been suggested that Patricia’s mother, disapproving of her daughter’s lifestyle, entirely conventional if judged by todays’s standards, murdered her. Patricia had had a gap year, unusually at the time, before starting her Arts degree at QUB. Judge Curran was playing poker at the Ulster Reform Club, from where, around 7 pm, he was urgently summoned; Desmond arrived somewhat later.

Commentators agree that Iain Hay Gordon was a scapegoat in an establishment cover-up; and that his conviction as ‘guilty but insane’ was a legal manoeuvre to prevent him having the ultimate (capital) punishment being imposed.

There is much more detail about the murder of Patricia Curran here. The story of Iain Hay Gordon’s acquittal is retold in newspaper reports here. Patricia’s story has be retold as a novel and here. The website innocent.org.uk has collected several newspaper articles here.

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I make this plea to anyone who knows the present whereabouts of Desmond Curran, the only surviving actor of this ghastly tragedy; it’s rumoured that he lives in a monastery somewhere in N Ireland.

Surely the time has come for the truth of what happened to be told, time for the ghosts of the past to be slain, time to mourn your sister properly, and to remember the fate of Iain Hay Gordon.

Though no longer a registered medical practitioner, I am still beholden to the Hippocratic Oath, to which I am a subscriber, and which states,

Whatever, in the course of my practice, I may see or hear (even when not invited), whatever I may happen to obtain knowledge of, if it be not proper to repeat it, I will keep sacred and secret within my own breast.

I can be contacted at: Korhomme@gmail.com

Slugger’s archives[](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_9X5jaLPpcT/)

[Reader](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_9X5jaLPpcT/) • [3 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1930914578)

What a strange thread - a bit like online Cluedo.  
OK - my turn - "Hay Gordon, in the bedroom, with the knife"  
And the coverup was the family preferring that a different location should be reported.  
Less embarrassing, you see...

[Paddy Reilly](https://disqus.com/by/paddyreilly/) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929455352)

There is imho a failure here to apply the basic insights of criminology, the gossip instead veering off into unlikely accusations about scenarios found only in fiction.

Insight number one is that most women murdered in the UK etc are killed by their partner or ex-partner. I have the impression that the percentage rises to above 80%, but that is founded on a cursory inspection of the cases. The next commonest type of murderers seemed to be burglars, but that was predominantly with elderly victims.

Insight number two is that stabbing is a very intimate form of murder, indicating a close and tempestuous relationship, generally sexual. However it is also favoured by the insane. A complication we have is that if the female victim is young and good-looking, there may be males who think they are or should be the victim’s partner.

So I would suggest that the most likely assailant was someone the deceased was walking out with, possibly from a well-connected family, which facilitated the cover-up.

If there was no cover-up, then the murderer would be, if not Gordon, someone a bit like Gordon, a local youth possibly with a history of mental problems.

Mother and brother can be ruled out, unless in fact the mother was severely mentally ill. I don’t think a mother has killed a grown daughter in the history of Ireland. Equally, it is only among Muhammadans that brothers kill sisters, as honour killings.

[siphonophorest](https://disqus.com/by/siphonophorest/) [Paddy Reilly](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929455352) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929589658)

"Equally, it is only among Muhammadans that brothers kill sisters, as honour killings."

So do Hindus.

[Cosmo](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_W9VFTNrEXz/) [Paddy Reilly](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929455352) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929547326)

Motivation: why would all three members of the Curran family, all of whom seem to have been implicated in the cover-up, stay silent as to who they really thought killed their sister, if it was outside their family circle?  
Even if somehow the situation she was in made them think she was acting like a whore, and bringing shame on them - so, bringing, your reference in, making them complicit to 'an honour killing'.

[Paddy Reilly](https://disqus.com/by/paddyreilly/) [Paddy Reilly](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929455352) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929473055)

I don't know that there was a cover up, it may be just gossip. But assuming that there was such a thing, I would suggest that the young man responsible was someone very well connected.

However, if it could be clarified if any person in the Curran circle of family and friends did in fact suffer from severe mental disease, that would be another important suspect.

Honour killing is certainly common among Muslims: I have heard of it from Yazidis even: I cannot recall a case among Hindus, at least in the UK. I certainly don't expect it from Irish Protestants. Beside, the stabbing suggests something more frenzied, an act of a lunatic or ex-lover, which is often the same thing.

[Catcher in the Rye](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_PAxgSjblB1/) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928094140)

I live quite close to where the Curran murder took place. It's a popular story locally and there are a few theories about what happened. I think most people believe the mother was the real murderer although some believe the son was involved (which he obviously strenuously denies).

The version I know does not place the family solicitor conveniently on the scene, but says he was nearby and the only one with a car handy, so they called him to take Patricia's body (by then with rigor mortis very much established) to a doctor's surgery for examination.

That said, arguments about who was there or when are academic, as the entire story about the circumstances under which the body was found cannot be considered to be reliable testimony, coming as they do from the family of a powerful judge who were allowed four straight days to get their story straight and clean up the murder scene. The police officer who attended helped to move the body to the doctor's office, making him complicit in the crime and accordingly making his own version of the story unreliable.

The story is an example of exactly how powerful the unionist regime were. A family closely connected with that establishment were implicated in a murder. The government assisted in the cover up by failing to investigate Curran. They knew it would look bad if the murder went unsolved so they brought in outside help with instructions to secure a conviction at any price in order to protect them from further scrutiny.

Regarding the son, Desmond. Iain Hay Gordon was acquainted with him; he ran some new-age religious meeting groups and Gordon went along, and they struck up a friendship. In the period after the murder, Michael converted to Catholicism and became a missionary in Africa. Someone tracked him down a couple of years ago, I think it was in Kenya or somewhere, and asked him if either he or his mother were the murderer. He dismissed this out of hand and repeated that he thought Gordon was the killer.

It's news to me that Desmond Curran has returned to Ireland and I would be very surprised if it was true. Maybe, when approaching the end of his life, he will feel compelled to release what else he knows; but I think it's more likely that, like his father and mother, he will take any secrets he has to the grave with him.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Catcher in the Rye](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928094140) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928134181)

When you refer to 'Michael' you mean Desmond. There was, according to various sources, that Patricia had a younger brother who wasn't present at the time of her murder (sources are very confusing about this). Likewise, newspaper reports say that Desmond, after a career ministering in S Africa, has returned to N I; I do not know if these reports are accurate.

[Catcher in the Rye](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_PAxgSjblB1/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928134181) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928145775)

Thanks for the correction, my silly mistake is now fixed.

The only actors in the story as I have heard it are Patricia, Desmond and their parents.

Whereever Desmond is, he must be well into his 80s at this point. You'd like to think he's being looked after somewhere.

[John Mooney](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_aoEbxLZ5ax/) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927923188)

I remember as a teen a Sunday outing beyond North Belfast..circa 1967...with my family.  
My recollection is going up a long drive near a deserted house. It was I think the Curran house.  
My mother was quite curious about it all but my father did not seem to want to talk too much about it.  
Many years later, if the subject came up...he would suggest that there was a lot of innuendo, some of it from people with an agenda.  
I saw the documentary on Hay a few years ago.  
He seemed to be an unlikey member of a social circle.  
And he seemed an even more unlikely killer.  
An injustice was done to him....and while the judiciary, legal profession, police may not have covered themselves in glory...the same might be said of journalists and medical proffession.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [John Mooney](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927923188) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928109902)

John, it was you, I think, who sent me an email about this; mysteriously it, and my (provisional) reply disappeared before I could respond. I wanted to refer this this column, referencing Sir Ludovic Kennedy's aborted documentary, referenced here:

[http://www.independent.co.uk/a...](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/denied-justice-by-a-form-of-words-1170074.html)

And there are many, many reports available on a Google search, such as,

[http://www.heraldscotland.com/...](http://www.heraldscotland.com/sport/spl/aberdeen/the-boy-who-fitted-the-bill-1.690600)

To my mind, it seems clear that Patricia's murder was covered up by her father and her brother, and that a scapegoat was framed, and that the family knew this and connived with it. Is it not tine that the souls of our brothers and sisters hereby departed should find repose?

[John Mooney](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_aoEbxLZ5ax/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928109902) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928167751)

I presume you are talking years ago because I certainly have not sent any email recently and I dont think I would ever have known enough about the case to send any email ever.  
It would not be something I would normally do.  
All I know is what I saw that day, what I have read subsequently and my fathers reticence every time it came up. He was a man who would happily talk about the 1930s, the Years 1939-45 but oddly never really wanted to talk about that case.  
He perhaps had his own ideas but he never shared them with me.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [John Mooney](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928167751) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928194562)

John, I unreservedly apologise for any confusion with my email correspondent; you both (apparently) made similar comments.

[John Mooney](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_aoEbxLZ5ax/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928194562) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928280065)

Absolutely no need to apologise.  
It has intrigued me since that summer Sunday.  
Thinking about it tonight, there were occasional references in my early working career in 1970s when people older than me might voice their theory and/or prejudice.

[Catcher in the Rye](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_PAxgSjblB1/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928109902) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928133784)

To add to John's point I should say that a pathologist examined Curran at 5AM on the morning following the discovery of her body and put time of death at approximately 12 hours earlier, ie around 6-7PM on the evening (shortly after Curran had stepped off the bus from Belfast).

This report wasn't heard in court, along with a lot of other evidence that ran counter to the prosecution case.

This was a stitch up organized by the Curran family with the full connivance of the courts and the legal profession who played along (including Gordon's own defense counsel). The police were either afraid to cross a judge (who was also the Attorney General as well as an MP) or they were ordered not to do so by the government. I wouldn't blame the doctors here.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Catcher in the Rye](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928133784) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928184479)

See here: [https://books.google.co.uk/boo...](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-3ItAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA27&dq=jack+crane+patricia+curran&hl=en&sa=X&ei=uzETVeaiLMH7apSYgMAK&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=jack%20crane%20patricia%20curran&f=false)

[Seamuscamp](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_bNNJfQwwRb/) • [a day ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1934665294)

I can remember this case from my youth. I can also remember that there   
were as many theories about the actualite as there were people in the   
discussion of it. Almost everyone attached to the story was someone's secret   
perpetrator ... or someone's judas goat ...or someone's persecuted   
innocent. It seems likely that there was a successful coverup; and that   
it will continue in its success. Perhaps if someone has a group portrait  
in the attic with a big black arrow pointing to the miscreant, we may   
oneday know the truth. Indeed one contributor to the debate wouldn't need  
a black arrow, eh Cosmo?

[Framer](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_kDwSao4vL4/) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929570621)

It is likely, but hard to prove, that the whole Unionist cabinet was involved in the murder or the cover up, or both.  
What is accepted by most conspiracy theorists however is that this was like Murder on the Orient Express, and that each member of the family stabbed Patricia in turn.

[MainlandUlsterman](https://disqus.com/by/MainlandUlsterman/) [Framer](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929570621) • [a day ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1934329237)

I wonder if each member of the unionist Cabinet came in and stabbed her in turn? That would be a nice twist ;-)

[Cosmo](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_W9VFTNrEXz/) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929412526)

the fond grip, the pretty daughter - and the contextual puzzle as to what great shock and rage could bring the mother to stab her own daughter.  
....And, more flippantly, the awful double-breasted jacket.

[Cosmo](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_W9VFTNrEXz/) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929320642)

This legal establishment cover-up and miscarriage of justice, reminds me of the Scottish case of Oscar Slater, wrongly imprisoned, for a murder which was actually probably carried out by a relative to the Procurator Fiscal or high ranking judge.  
Meanwhile, looking at that photograph, you've just got to wonder if the daughter had been trying to tell Mummie, something unacceptable about Daddy's behaviour to her - something Mummie really could not bear to hear.  
It seems the brother continued with hiding from (family) truths in religiosity. I shudder to think of the unaccountability of clergy behaviour, in Africa at that time.

[BronzeEchoTwoFive](https://disqus.com/by/BronzeEchoTwoFive/) [Cosmo](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929320642) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929342294)

"looking at that photograph, you've just got to wonder if the daughter had been trying to tell Mummie, something unacceptable about Daddy's behaviour to her...."

What do you see in the photograph that drives you to question the father's behaviour?

[Cosmo](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_W9VFTNrEXz/) [BronzeEchoTwoFive](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929342294) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929428065)

well, the fond grip, the pretty daughter, and the contextual puzzle of what great shock could drive the mother to stab her daughter to death.  
Didn't the mother end up in Purdysburn, or equivalent?

[BronzeEchoTwoFive](https://disqus.com/by/BronzeEchoTwoFive/) [Cosmo](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929428065) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929479321)

"well, the fond grip, the pretty daughter"

Eh? All that from a photograph Hercule?

Your mind must be an interesting place to rummage around in :-(

[MainlandUlsterman](https://disqus.com/by/MainlandUlsterman/) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1929085955)

Did anyone see the BBC NI drama a few years ago about it? That's my only knowledge of the case and I have no idea if the writers got it right or not: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/nor...](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8321185.stm)  
Personally interesting for me, partly because I had the Northern Ireland reception bit of my wedding at Glenavna, which is now no more. (Anticipating my Slugger moniker, we celebrated our wedding on both sides of the Irish Sea). A mate of mine used to work in the bar there, the bar manager was a total p\*\*\*head and they used to have long after-hours lock-ins. Ah the good old days.

The development of that wee area is another example of appalling NI dendrophobia - one of the worst things about the Province. Leave the f\*\*\*ing trees alone, people. And plant some more.

[Reader](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_9X5jaLPpcT/) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927728921)

Hippocratic oath: "... in the course of my practice..." & "... if it not be proper to repeat it..."  
  
Well, there are your two get-out clauses. If you hear anything relevant to a murder case you can repeat it.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Reader](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927728921) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927930296)

No. A priest, having heard the confession of a communicant, will not be required to reveal what he has heard before a court; the secrecy of the confession will be respected. A medical practitioner, on the other hand, will be required, under pain of a contempt of court sentence, to disclose what has been said to him (her).

[Catcher in the Rye](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_PAxgSjblB1/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927930296) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928059871)

*A priest, having heard the confession of a communicant, will not be required to reveal what he has heard before a court; the secrecy of the confession will be respected.*

You are saying that priests are above the law and cannot be compelled to give evidence to a court like any other citizen. It's very unlikely that this is true.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Catcher in the Rye](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928059871) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928078612)

Believe me, it is so.

[Catcher in the Rye](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_PAxgSjblB1/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928078612) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928096811)

Priests are above the law ? In a non-Catholic country ? I can't accept that.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Catcher in the Rye](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928096811) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928159906)

Tough. It is so.

[Tochais Siorai](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_rpBlrKhlJD/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928159906) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928859125)

Korhomme, Not sure about that. It's not part of UK law, certainly English law anyway since the reformation. It is under Irish law though has come under pressure recently with the child abuse scandals. In the US, it depends on the state but I think more accepted than not.   
It appears more to be a general practice throughout western society that priests are not called upon to give evidence because the court accepts they cannot break the so called 'seal of the confessional'

Anyway, the whole confession malarkey is an interesting subject in itself and the catholic church claims all kinds of theological writings in support of the practice. But of course there was always another reason why they've been so keen - the local priest via the confession box knew all the dirty little secrets in the parish and that, my friends, is power.

[](https://disqus.com/by/gerry_lynch/)

[Gerry Lynch](https://disqus.com/by/gerry_lynch/) [Tochais Siorai](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928859125) • [a day ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1934984823)

Actually, neither of you is quite right here. The Church of England retained provision for auricular confession at the Reformation - use of the facility has ebbed and flowed over the centuries, but would have reached a peak during the heyday of Anglo-Catholicism between around 1850 and 1970. Absolution, following corporate and general rather than specific and personal confession, is pronounced at the start of every Anglican Communion service and many non-Eucharistic services.

Whether or not the seal of the confessional retains legal force in England is something of a grey area, resting largely on whether pre-Reformation common law on the subject still retains validity, something never put formally to the test. There were two particularly important test cases relating to mid-Victorian murders, R v Griffin and the Constance Hay case. In both cases, the courts leaned against any attempt to force clergy to reveal secrets confided in them. Regardless of the situation in criminal law, a priest of the Church of England remains bound to respect the seal of the confessional under Canon Law (can't speak about other Anglican Provinces).

There are currently proposals from some in the Church of England to end the duty to respect the Seal of the Confessional in the case of sexual abuse (see, e.g., [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/new...](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2763640/Church-England-axe-400-year-old-sacred-law-let-clergy-report-sex-attackers.html%29). That debate is likely to be contentious although it is worth noting that the Anglican Church in Australia now expects its priests to report crimes reported in during Confession.

Wikipedia has two articles on the subject which are well researched and considerably more digestible and easy to link to than anything else I could put up here.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priest%E2%80%93penitent_privilege_in_England#Confession_and_the_Anglican_Church)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seal_of_the_Confessional_and_the_Anglican_Church)

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Tochais Siorai](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928859125) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928867451)

Indeed, it's about power. And in Ireland, to succeed, it's said that:

It's not what you know,  
It's not who you know,  
It's what you know about who you know.

[Catcher in the Rye](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_PAxgSjblB1/) [Korhomme](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928159906) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928841448)

Got any evidence or sample case law ?

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Catcher in the Rye](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928841448) • [4 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1928860565)

As I understand it, a priest in the witness box will not be required to break the seal of confession, even under the threat of imprisonment for contempt of court.

The rest of us face a choice of imprisonment, or divulging what we have learned. Journalists have been so imprisoned for refusing to name their sources—though it's also said that, as they had invented their stories, they clearly couldn't.

In NI, medics are required by law to report patients who have been shot. In every case that I dealt with, the cops were present in the A&E department, making this onus unnecessary. The law also requires the notification of patients with certain infectious diseases.

See also:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priest%E2%80%93penitent_privilege)

and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priest%E2%80%93penitent_privilege_in_England)

[](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_6d0vjXjs1Z/)

[Julius](https://disqus.com/by/disqus_6d0vjXjs1Z/) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927693879)

I thought Desmond had emigrated to South Africa? He was interviewed there some years ago for a tv documentary about the murder.

[Korhomme](https://disqus.com/by/korhomme/) [Julius](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927693879) • [5 days ago](http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/25/after-almost-70-years-the-murder-of-patricia-curran-casts-a-long-shadow/#comment-1927788700)

He did. Where he is, at present, is uncertain.