

Relief after killer's conviction

The detective who led the 1994 inquiry into the murder of Shirley Leach has spoken of his relief that her killer has finally been caught.

Ian O'Callaghan, 38, has been jailed for life for sexually assaulting, murdering and then mutilating the 66-year-old in a toilet at Bury bus station.

The case was the only unsolved murder Det Supt Bill Roberts worked on before he retired from the force in 2000.

He said the "horrendous killing", which sent shockwaves through the community, had regularly preyed on his mind during the past 12 years.

"Every time I have seen a murder or an incident in Bury I have thought about Shirley and her family," said Mr Roberts.

"To commit an horrendous offence like this and then not re-offend for more than a decade is extremely unusual.

"I honestly believed that Shirley's murderer was dead or had left the country."

I know that Shirley's family will have found the grieving process extremely difficult...
Det Supt Bill Roberts, retired

Greater Manchester Police launched a huge investigation after the discovery of Mrs Leach's body on 7 January 1994.

The grandmother was last seen alive at about 2115 GMT the previous evening, a time when the bus station was packed with people.

The initial investigation focussed on tracing everyone who had used the bus station on that evening.

An appeal was made on the BBC's Crimewatch programme but, despite an excellent response, it was actually a drop of blood found on the door of the toilet cubicle that provided the breakthrough, Mr Roberts revealed.

"We quickly established that it didn't belong to Shirley. The blood was later found to match the DNA profile of saliva found on Shirley's body.

"From this point on, we always believed that this DNA belonged to Shirley's killer."



In 1994, the national DNA database did not exist in its current form and officers could only compare samples to known suspects.

A mass screening of men in Bury took place and investigators eliminated more than 800 men.

It was 12 years later, when Ian O'Callaghan was arrested on suspicion of drink-driving, that detectives were given a breakthrough - much to the relief of the retired detective.

"Shirley's murder was the only homicide that I ever worked on that remained unsolved when I retired in 2000 and it has played on my mind ever since," he said.

"When I got the call to tell me that O'Callaghan had been arrested I was very, very surprised."

Mr Roberts said he hoped the conviction of O'Callaghan would help Mrs Leach's family move on.

"I know that Shirley's family will have found the grieving process extremely difficult, knowing that her killer had not been caught," he added.

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