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New push to recognise tragic cases of 'forgotten dead' of the Troubles

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Over many years they have been the forgotten people.

They all died as they witnessed, became caught up in or were impacted by paramilitary shootings, bombings and attacks - usually as a result of heart attacks.

Some of them dropped dead instantly. But they have never been included or officially recognised as 'victims' of the Troubles.

Now, a new push is underway to include almost 30 cases of men and women who were largely forgotten.

They include Herbert Heathwood, who witnessed his son Peter being carried out of his Belfast home and immediately suffered a heart attack.

The tragic stories stretch back as far as the beginning of the Troubles in September 1969, when 49-year-old William King, a Protestant, died after being attacked by a nationalist crowd during street disturbances in Londonderry.

As recently as February 1997, a 79-year-old Catholic, Larry McCartan, died during an evacuation which included his home at Millar Park, Laurencetown, near Banbridge during a bomb alert.

Two women died within a few months of each other in 1972.

Minnie Malcolmson, a 48-year-old Protestant, died after arriving at the hospital bedside of her son, who was an RUC officer at Daisy Hill in Newry, and Catholic Margaret Cunningham (68) died during altercations with an Army patrol during a raid of her home at Norglen Road, Turf Lodge.

Now, though, their cases and others could be taken up by the Police Ombudsman or the proposed Historical Inquiries Unit (HIU), if the Stormont parties and British and Irish governments reach a deal on how to deal with the legacy of the Troubles.

The demand to include people who have been officially left off the list of Troubles-related deaths is being backed by the victims and survivors forum and other victims groups such as Wave.

The forum, which has met PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Drew Harris to debate the issue, has said existing lists should be extended "to cover those who died at the scene of an incident".

In a submission to the five main political parties involved in the stalled negotiations to restore Stormont - the DUP, Sinn Fein, SDLP, Ulster Unionists and Alliance - the forum, which has been refreshed with 23 new members, said proposals for dealing with the so-called legacy issues should be more "inclusive".

"There are many victims and survivors who have previously been excluded from the scope of legacy processes, including those who died as a result of heart attack at the scene of conflict incidents," they said.

"Giving the ageing population of victims and survivors, there should be consultation and clarity around the prioritisation of cases, particularly for investigatory processes."

Peter Heathwood, whose story is told below, said: "It is very hard to understand what was in the thinking.

"Why did these people not seem to count even as attempted murders?"

The youngest, and perhaps best known, of the heart attack victims was 43-year-old prisoner officer James Ferris, who was shot during an escape of IRA prisoners from the Maze prison in 1983.

And the eldest was 83-year-old Patrick McGoldrick, a Catholic who passed away while in the vicinity of an IRA bomb attack at Sion Mills in Co Tyrone.

One Catholic woman, Alice Kelly (66), passed away as a loyalist crowd threw missiles at her home in Rosebrook Avenue, Carrickfergus, while 65-year-old Protestant William Johnston died after being near an IRA mortar bomb attack on the Newtown Stewart RUC base in Co Tyrone in 1987.

Details of all the other cases - 28 in all - are included in the Northern Ireland conflict, politics and society website Cain.

Belfast Telegraph