

DEATH OF MARK BLANCO

Running scared?

JUST weeks after *Eye* 1644 questioned Scotland Yard's reluctance to consider compelling new evidence around the mysterious death of aspiring playwright Mark Blanco at a 2006 gathering attended by singer Pete Doherty, detectives closed the case.

Mark's mother, Sheila Blanco, believes the timing was no coincidence, but she hopes the "disgraceful" decision has at least opened new avenues in her quest for answers.

"The Met has clearly been stringing me along for 19 years, hoping I will go away," she said. "Once *Private Eye* shone a spotlight back on it, they realised that wasn't going to happen and are running scared. There are still many new and important lines of inquiry they have not explored, and that can only be because it would highlight their multiple failures and cover-ups. This is not an end; it just moves our campaign on to a different footing."

Mark, a Cambridge graduate (pictured), had rowed with Doherty and his "bodyguard" Johnny

"Headlock" Jeanneval at a flat in east London just before he plunged from a balcony.

Moments later, Doherty, Jeanneval and a female friend were captured on CCTV running past and leaving him for dead in the street below. Mark was still alive but later died of his head injuries. Doherty admitted that was cruel but has never apologised or given a full account of what happened, saying his memory from that drug-addled time is not "crystal clear".

The first officers on the scene discounted foul play and did nothing to preserve the potential crime scene. Sheila said they seemed distracted by Doherty's celebrity. One passed her a lens from Mark's broken spectacles in the street where he had landed as a "keepsake".

The coroner ruled out suicide and called for police to reopen the investigation in 2007. In the near two decades since, the Met has poked at the case without any real commitment, refusing to comment on it and saying only that it was "ongoing".

After the *Eye*'s article, the Met wrote to Sheila saying it had closed the case, having examined all evidence and concluded Mark's death was not suspicious. Detective chief superintendent Neil Cochlin said: "We understand this news

is upsetting to Ms Blanco. Although we are no longer actively investigating his death, if further information comes to light, it will be assessed to see if there are any viable new lines of enquiry."

However, her lawyer Mike Schwarz said: "The Met is misleading in saying it has properly considered all the evidence. Police seem to have decided some time ago not to investigate Mark's death and the letter is an effort, after the event, to justify that decision, a decision which is flawed."

Sheila's MP, Zöe Franklin, has now written to home secretary Yvette Cooper asking for a meeting to discuss the case. Sheila plans to challenge the decision under the Victims' Right to Review Scheme and is awaiting the ruling of a detailed complaint to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. She called on Doherty – who is not considered a suspect – to finally clear up what he remembers of her son's final moments.

During a recent *Sunday Times* interview, the former Libertines frontman became agitated and threatened to tip a glass of water over the journalist when asked about it. He said he would one day tell his young daughter what happened, because he knew "more about it than anyone else".

Sheila said: "If he does, then why won't he tell us all?"



CHINOOK CRASH

Dark secrets

FAMILIES of the intelligence personnel and helicopter crew killed in the 1994 Chinook crash on the Mull of Kintyre have launched a fresh legal bid for a proper inquiry into the incident, pleading for the Ministry of Defence to unseal documents locked away for 100 years.

Mostly small children at the time of the tragedy, the new Chinook Justice campaign group includes Esme and Lucy Sparks (daughters of Maj Gary Sparks), Matt and Andy Tobias (sons of Lt Col John Tobias), Joel Hornby and Jenni Balmer Hornby (the children of Maj Anthony Hornby) and Patricia Conroy (daughter of Det Chief Superintendent Desmond Conroy), who together recorded a video for Fathers' Day,

asking the government to give them answers after three decades of secrecy over the incident.

Their fathers were among the 25 army, police and security services staff aboard the helicopter flight from RAF Aldergrove in Northern Ireland, heading to a conference at Fort George near Inverness.

In 2000 the MoD was accused by MPs of "unwarrantable arrogance" over the crash, and over the department's willingness to accept an RAF board of inquiry that blamed the pilots for flying into a cloud-covered hillside (*Eye* 1017). At the same time, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who was defence secretary at the time of the crash, called for an independent inquiry, saying it was "disturbing" that he had apparently been kept in the dark about airworthiness issues with the aircraft.

It was another 10 years before the Lord Philip Review of that board of inquiry concluded that "the finding that the pilots were negligent to a gross degree should be set aside". The then defence secretary Liam Fox offered an apology to the pilots' families. The review also noted that due to the limited evidence available, the true cause of the crash "is likely never to be known".

However, documentary makers from Belfast-based Fine Point Films revealed last year that there is actually more evidence about the crash in the government archives, currently sealed until 2094.



KILLED ON KINTYRE: The 1994 crash site

CRYPTO SCAMS

Withdrawal symptoms

YET more reasons to beware the crypto-scammers, as victims of one giant crypto fraud are asked to cough up again for money they never had.

In 2020 South African cryptocurrency trading platform Mirror Trading International (MTI) collapsed. Its founder, Johann Steynberg, did a flit and its AI-driven trading bot, supposedly generating quick returns for investors, turned out to be just another Ponzi scheme that ripped them off to the tune of more than \$1bn.

Now the company liquidators are coming for anything they can get, including, in the

case of one London-based victim of the scam, 4.2 bitcoin (which would now cost more than £300,000) that he withdrew from the scheme. As the liquidators' lawyers from Farrer & Co put it: "MTI was a sham enterprise and, consequently, the joint liquidators have a claim against you to the extent you received assets from MTI as a result of its fraudulent activities."

However, alongside the withdrawn 4.2 bitcoin, our investor also deposited 7.3 bitcoin before the scheme collapsed – so overall he paid into the scam 3.1 bitcoin, which would now be worth £240,000. But still the liquidators want the gross withdrawn amount.

Unsurprisingly, the investor doesn't have the bitcoin or £300,000 the lawyers demand. And failing to cough up, they threaten, will mean enforcement from the liquidators and "substantial" legal costs. Welcome to the brave new world of crypto financial freedom.

GREEN EYE

Bog standard



ON World Heritage Day in April, the National Lottery highlighted its sizeable contribution to the restoration of the ancient landscape at Lindow Moss in Cheshire, after it was ravaged by decades of commercial peat extraction. Now two housing developments, totalling more than 200 homes, have been proposed for the area.

Best known as the place where the Iron Age Lindow Man bog body (now in the British Museum, above) was found in 1984, the extensive peatland landscape, near Wilmslow, includes England's best "moss room" – a landscape patterned by historic peat harvesting – and is teeming with wildlife.

In its presentation on the conservation work of Professor John Handley from the Lindow Moss Landscape Partnership, the National Lottery notes: "In the middle of Lindow Moss a vast open space reveals where the landscape was scarred by commercial peat cutting... It looks like a perfect place to shoot a dystopian sci-fi film, yet John seems entirely optimistic. "Natural recovery is beginning to take place."

The area of countryside earmarked for the new developments by Bellway Homes and Anwyll Homes was designated as suitable for housing by Cheshire East council more than a decade ago, prior to new research that identified it as being part of the peat landscape. Local campaigners are calling on the council to treat it as protected, given its environmental importance.

Concerns over the lack of protection for Lindow Moss go back decades. In 2013, the Local Government Ombudsman found the council guilty of maladministration because conditions on the peat extraction company, including protection of watercourses and water vole habitats, weren't being enforced. Owners of older properties around the edge of the peat bog have also reported subsidence; research suggested the entire landscape was rapidly sinking due to de-watering caused by peat extraction. In 2018, Croghan Peat was given permission for a small housing development at the south edge of the bog, in return for agreeing to end peat extraction, which it had a legal right to continue until 2042.