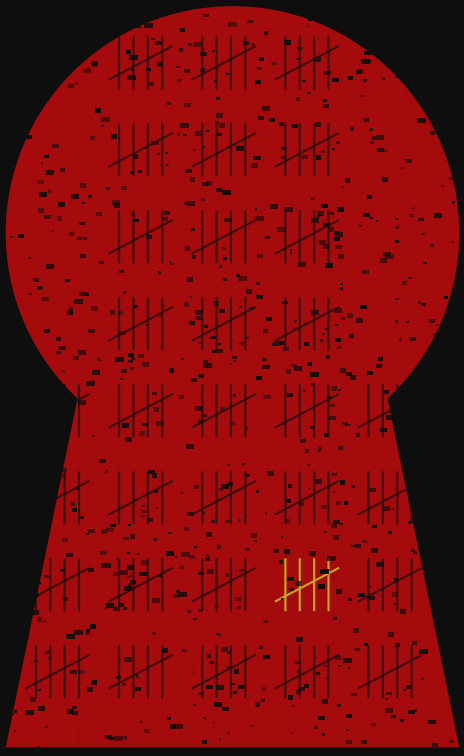


THE LONG WAIT

12 BRITISH COLD CASES SOLVED DECADES LATE, AND THE FAILURES THAT LET KILLERS WALK

CRIME NOIR

EDITION 1 · 28 NOVEMBER 2026

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EDITION

First edition. Information current to 28 November 2026.

NOTICE

This book is based on public records and published sources current to 28 November 2026. It is not legal advice. Court outcomes and investigations can change. If you find an error, write to sufimiah.pro@gmail.com.

SOURCES

Every factual statement is linked to a numbered source at the end of its chapter. Annex 3 lists all 38 sources, with their addresses and the date each was retrieved. Criticism of police or courts is reported only where a court, public inquiry, watchdog or other official body made it.

QUOTATIONS

Quotations from judgments, sentencing remarks and official reports are reproduced exactly and briefly, for the purposes of reporting and review, with the source cited.

IMAGES

No photographs of victims, defendants, crime scenes or people whose convictions were quashed appear in this book. All graphics are drawn in vector form.

ONLINE

https://www.youtube.com/@CrimeNoirUK

TYPOGRAPHY

Set in Oswald, Source Serif 4, Inter and IBM Plex Mono.

ISBN: none assigned · PDF build 28 November 2026

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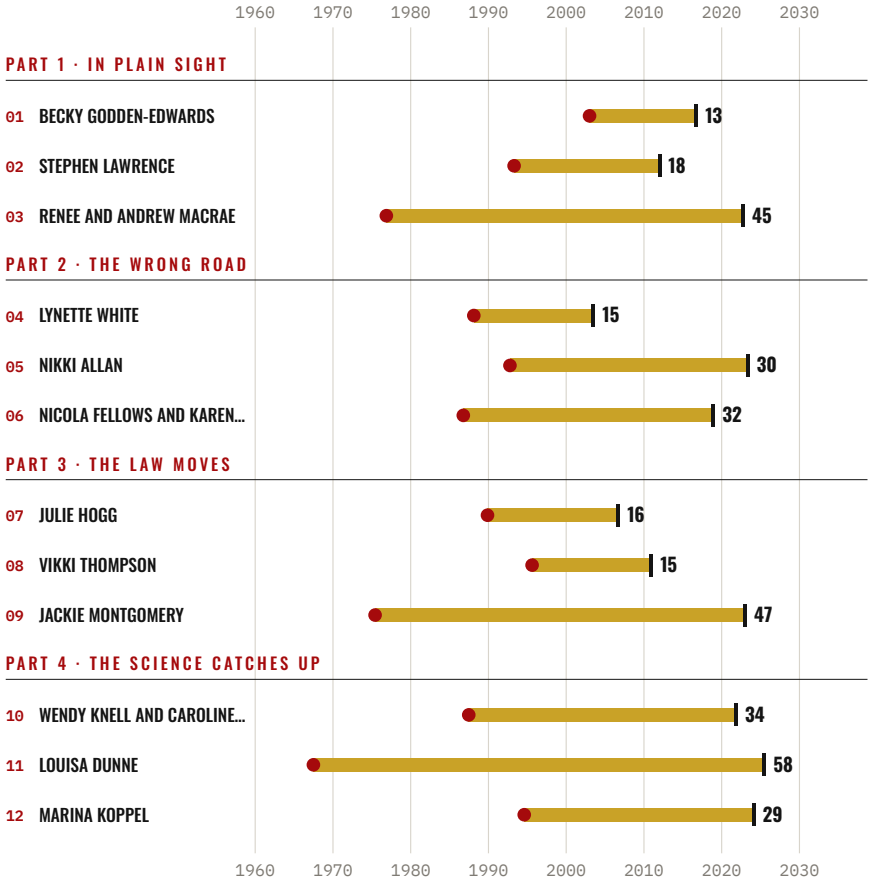
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BEFORE THE FILES

THE 12 WAITS AT A GLANCE

Each bar runs from the date of the crime (red dot) to the date of conviction (black mark). The number is the wait in whole years, calculated from the dates in each case file.



COMBINED
352 YEARS

LONGEST
58 YEARS · FILE 11

SHORTEST
13 YEARS · FILE 01



PART 1 OF 4

1

IN PLAIN SIGHT

The suspect was close from the start. The conviction came years later.

FILE 01	BECKY GODDEN-EDWARDS	13 YRS
FILE 02	STEPHEN LAWRENCE	18 YRS
FILE 03	RENEE AND ANDREW MACRAE	45 YRS

KNOWN FROM THE START

In each of the three cases in this part, investigators knew who they were looking at long before a jury convicted him. In one, he confessed and led the police to the body; in another, his name was in the first anonymous calls and letters; in the third, he was questioned in the first weeks. What took years was turning what the police knew into evidence a court would accept.

THE CONFESSION THAT COULD NOT BE USED

Christopher Halliwell led Detective Superintendent Steve Fulcher to two bodies on 24 March 2011, the second of them Becky Godden-Edwards, missing since January 2003.[1] Within a year the confession about Becky had been ruled inadmissible, because the rules on cautioning and detaining suspects had been broken by a deliberate decision of the senior investigating officer.[2]

The law did not regard the confession as false. It regarded the way it was obtained as unfair, and under section 78 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 a court may exclude evidence on that ground.[2,3]

The IOPC-managed investigation found that evidence capable of convicting Halliwell without the confession, a soil sample, a doctor's note, a breakdown record and a gamekeeper's sighting, was known about or within reach in 2011 and was not pursued until 2014.[4] It concluded that if those lines had been followed, or the prosecution told about them, before the hearing in early 2012, the outcome might have been different.[4]

THE ARRESTS THAT CAME TOO LATE

The Stephen Lawrence inquiry received the names of five suspects within hours of the murder.[5] The Macpherson report found the decision not to arrest them early a fundamental error, while accepting that no one could know what early arrests would have produced.[6]

The cost was measurable. Because the clothing was seized two weeks after the murder, the scientists judged a search for fibres from

Stephen's clothes not worthwhile; thirteen years later a re-examination found exactly such fibres.[5]

In 2011 the Court of Appeal accepted an absence of diligence in the early investigations, but found that even with proper diligence the new evidence would not have been appreciated then.[5]

Both things can be true: a slow start, and a science that had not yet caught up.

THE CASE WITH NO BODIES

The third case has the longest wait in this part. Renee MacRae and her son Andrew disappeared on 12 November 1976; their bodies have never been found.[7] William MacDowell, Andrew's father, was questioned about his relationship with Renee and at first denied it.[8,9]

The jury that convicted him in 2022 heard a circumstantial case.[9] Lord Armstrong's sentencing statement says nothing about why the case took 45 years, and Police Scotland's later statements concern the search for the bodies.[7,10,11]

This file therefore records the delay, but makes no finding about its cause.

WHAT THE THREE HAVE IN COMMON

In all three cases the man eventually convicted was known to investigators years before a jury convicted him. None of the three was solved by finding a new suspect. They were solved when the evidence about a known suspect became strong enough, and lawful enough, for a jury.[4,5,10]

SOURCES

Full addresses in Annex 3 · all retrieved 28 November 2026

1 ■ Operation Kala: independent learning report on the Wiltshire Police investigation, 2011–2014, of the murder of Becky Godden-Edwards (2022). Independent Office for Police Conduct. S004 2 ■ R v Christopher Halliwell: summary of the rulings of Mrs Justice Cox on preliminary issues, February and May 2012 (not part of the rulings). Courts and Tribunals Judiciary. S002 3 ■ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. legislation.gov.uk. S037 4 ■ IOPC managed investigation finds missed opportunities in Becky Godden-Edwards murder inquiry. Independent Office for Police Conduct. S003 5 ■ R v Dobson [2011] EWCA Crim 1255. The National Archives (Find Case Law). S006 6 ■ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: report of an inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, February 1999. Home Office (Cm 4262-I). S007 7 ■ Renewed appeal to locate the bodies of Renee and Andrew MacRae (August 2023). Police Scotland. S010 8 □ Renee MacRae case: William MacDowell guilty of murdering woman and three year old son in 1976. The Scotsman. S013 9 □ Renee and Andrew MacRae: the murders that shocked the Highlands. STV News. S012 10 ■ HMA v William MacDowell: sentencing statement of Lord Armstrong, 30 September 2022. Judiciary of Scotland. S009 11 ■ Efforts ongoing to locate the bodies of Renee and Andrew MacRae (March 2026). Police Scotland. S011

BECKY GODDEN-EDWARDS

Murdered near Swindon, Wiltshire, in January 2003. Her killer confessed in 2011 and was convicted in 2016.



13 YEARS

THE FILE AT A GLANCE [1,2,3]

CRIME	3 January 2003, Swindon, Wiltshire, England
CONVICTED	September 2016 (sentenced 23 September 2016)
OFFENDER	Christopher Halliwell
COURT	Bristol Crown Court
SENTENCE	Life imprisonment with a whole life order
WHY IT WAITED	A confession ruled inadmissible in 2012, then lines of enquiry left unpursued until 2014
WHAT CHANGED IT	A new investigation team acted on the missed evidence and the confession was admitted at a 2016 trial

1 THE CRIME

Becky Godden-Edwards was last seen in the early hours of 3 January 2003, getting into a taxi outside the Desire and Destiny nightclub in Swindon.[3] The judge who later sentenced her killer described a young life troubled by drug addiction, and her hope that she would one day free herself from it and return to her family.[1]

The taxi driver was Christopher Halliwell, who had known her for some time; outside the club she twice went back to her friend rather than go with him, and when she finally got into a rear seat the friend described her as "huffed".[1] The judge found that Halliwell drove her to a private place, attacked her when she refused him, and killed her; later that day his doctor examined him with a broken little finger and scratches to his face.[1] He took her body to Oxo Bottom field, an

isolated place he knew, removed her clothing so that nothing could link her to his taxi, and returned the next night to bury her.[1] Over the following years he went back again and again to make sure the shallow grave could not be seen.[1]

2 THE FIRST INVESTIGATION

The link to Becky came through another case, eight years later.[3] On Saturday 19 March 2011 Sian O'Callaghan was reported missing after a night out in Swindon, and Wiltshire Police opened an investigation, Operation Mayan, led by Detective Superintendent Steve Fulcher.[3] Halliwell was arrested on 24 March 2011; during an urgent interview he admitted murdering Sian and directed the officer to her body, then said he had murdered a second woman about eight years earlier and led him to a field in Gloucestershire.[3]

Only then was he taken to Gablecross police station, given his legal rights and examined by a police surgeon; the second body was identified as Becky through DNA on 4 April 2011.[3] Halliwell was charged with both murders, but in February 2012 Mrs Justice Cox ruled that the evidence of what he said and did between his arrest and his arrival at the police station four hours later could not be used.[4] She found serious and irretrievable breaches of the mandatory rules on the detention and interview of suspects, made by the senior investigating officer as a deliberate decision and against the advice of his deputy.[4] On the second confession she said: "As soon as he began to talk about another offence it is clear that he should have been cautioned."[4]

The prosecution did not appeal, and on 31 May 2012 the count for Becky's murder was deleted from the indictment, the court being told the crime was still under investigation.[4] A further defence application, to halt the whole prosecution because the same officer had briefed the press in detail on what Halliwell had told him, was dismissed in May 2012; the judge found a serious error of judgment but no bad faith, and moved the trial from Bristol to Preston.[4] Halliwell was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Sian O'Callaghan in 2012, with a minimum term of 25 years.[1,2]

3 THE LONG WAIT

24 Mar 2011	Halliwell is questioned after his arrest without a caution and kept from a police station for four hours; the court later finds the breaches of the rules deliberate.[4]
Jun 2011–Oct 2012	For more than 16 months no senior investigating officer is recorded for the inquiry into Becky's murder.[3]
24 Mar 2011	A custody medical officer records Halliwell saying he had been arrested for killing two people. The evidence is used only at the 2016 trial.[2]
2011	A gamekeeper tells the incident room he saw a taxi at Ramsbury at about the time Sian O'Callaghan was abducted. No witness statement is taken until February 2015.[2]
Apr 2011	A GP reports that Halliwell came to the surgery on 3 January 2003 with severe scratches to his face and an injured hand. The IOPC lists it among lines of enquiry not progressed before 2014.[2]
Feb 2012	The confession about Becky is ruled inadmissible. The IOPC later finds that, had outstanding enquiries been pursued or shared with the CPS first, the outcome might have been a different ruling, an appeal or a prosecution.[2]
2012	A newly accredited inspector is placed in sole charge of his first murder inquiry without appropriate resourcing, supervision or governance.[2]
2011–2012	Reviews that should have taken place at crucial points, in July 2011, February 2012 and September 2012, do not happen.[3]
Until Apr 2014	No one acts as Gold Commander overseeing the Category A murder investigation.[3]
2011–2014	Soil on a spade seized from Halliwell in 2011 is not examined for three years. It is then matched to rare soil in the field where Becky was buried.[2]
2014	A pond at Ramsbury later identified as Halliwell's "trophy store" is searched for the first time. The items recovered have degraded and lost their forensic potential.[2]

4 WHAT CHANGED IT

The IOPC-managed investigation found that only after Detective Chief Inspector Memory took over the murder inquiry, with oversight from

2014 by then-Assistant Chief Constable Kier Pritchard, were the earlier missed opportunities acted on.[2]

The soil on the spade was matched to the field; the RAC call-out to Halliwell's broken-down vehicle in the early hours of 3 January 2003, six miles from the grave, was established in detail; and the doctor's evidence of his injuries that day was brought into the case.[2] In 2016 a different judge ruled that the confession evidence about Becky's murder was admissible, and Halliwell stood trial in September 2016.[2] Halliwell had been charged with Becky's murder in March 2016.[3] He gave evidence that he had killed her, but the trial judge said his account bore "all the hallmarks of a contrived explanation" designed to avoid conviction.[1] The judge also rejected his claim that the injuries seen by his doctor came from a fight with a passenger, and the jury convicted him of murder.[1]

5 VERDICT AND SENTENCE

On 23 September 2016 Halliwell was sentenced to life imprisonment with a whole life order, the judge finding that both murders involved abduction and sexual conduct and were aggravated by the concealment of the bodies.[1] He found real similarities between the two murders and said the nine years between them probably reflected the absence of opportunities.[1] He said that without the 2011 confession there was every prospect that Becky's remains would never have been found, but that any mitigation it offered was outweighed by Halliwell's later attempts to manipulate first the police investigation and then the court process.[1]

> *There must have been moments when you wondered whether the case would ever be completed.*
>
> THE TRIAL JUDGE TO BECKY'S PARENTS, 23 SEPTEMBER 2016[1]

6 WHAT CAME AFTER

Becky's mother, Karen Edwards, complained that Halliwell should have been brought to justice sooner, and her complaints were examined by the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire

professional standards department under the direction and control of the IOPC.[2] The investigation found that between 2011 and 2014 the murder inquiry was poorly progressed and supervised, reasonable lines of enquiry were not pursued, and key evidence was not forensically examined.[2]

The IOPC's regional director said that no one in Wiltshire Police took responsibility for making the inquiry progress, and that the force had allowed "a fog of confusion" to develop over who was in command.[2] There was found to be a case to answer for misconduct against Kier Pritchard, by then Chief Constable, over his oversight role, and it was agreed with the Police and Crime Commissioner that he would receive management action.[2] No case to answer was found against the then Deputy Chief Constable, Mike Veale, or against the senior investigating officer of 2011 to 2014, an inexperienced officer for whom Becky's was a first murder inquiry.[2] The IOPC also examined the loss of the Deputy Chief Constable's Gold policy books from a locked drawer; it found no evidence that they had been deliberately misplaced, and when they were found they contained no evidence of particular value.[3] Ten recommendations followed, covering Gold Group policy logs and terms of reference, independent reviews of murder investigations in line with national guidance, and the use of the HOLMES major inquiry system; the force had already acted on them.[2,3]

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All retrieved 28 November 2026

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2 IOPC managed investigation finds missed opportunities in Becky Godden-Edwards murder inquiry. Independent Office for Police Conduct. https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/iopc-managed-investigation-finds-missed-opportunities-becky-godden-edwards-murder-inquiry

3 Operation Kala: independent learning report on the Wiltshire Police investigation, 2011–2014, of the murder of Becky Godden-Edwards (2022). Independent Office for Police Conduct. https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Op%20Kala%20learning%20report%202022.pdf

4 R v Christopher Halliwell: summary of the rulings of Mrs Justice Cox on preliminary issues, February and May 2012 (not part of the rulings). Courts and Tribunals Judiciary. https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/JCO/Documents/Judgments/summary-of-mrs-j-cox-r-v-halliwell.pdf

THE RECORD CONTINUES

EVERY CLAIM IN THIS BOOK HAS A SOURCE.

Annex 3 lists every document consulted for this edition, with its address and the date it was retrieved.



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