

Fog on the Tyne

The Story of Britain's Bloodiest Gang War

Bernard O'Mahoney



Mainstream Publishing *eBooks*



About the Author

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SINCE I BEGAN writing this book, I have married my girlfriend, Roshea, a Geordie lass with supermodel looks, the voice of an angel and a heart of gold. On 15 January 2010, my mother's birthday, Roshea gave birth to our beautiful son, Paddy. My first name is Patrick, my father's name was Patrick and Roshea's grandfather was Patrick, and so naming our son did not demand much thought.

Five days later, I spent the night at New Cross Hospital, in Wolverhampton. For 14 long, painful hours, I watched helplessly as my lifelong heroine fought the hardest fight of her life. At 8.31 a.m. on 20 January 2010, I held my dear mother's hand and cuddled her as she gracefully conceded defeat and breathed her last.

This book, as you can imagine, has been written while experiencing every possible human emotion. So many good people have helped me through the numerous highs and lows. You know who you are, so please forgive me for not mentioning you by name, but I am sure that you will understand. I can only dedicate this book to two very special people. The first is my son Paddy O'Mahoney, who has given me hope and belief in a bright future. The other is my mother, Anna O'Mahoney, who has given me a mind awash with beautiful memories and a heart overflowing with love. Thank you both for yesterday, today and tomorrow.

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Introduction

CONROY

ON 11 AUGUST 2006, I received a late-night call on my mobile phone from a withheld number. 'You murdered Tucker, Tate, Rolfe and Danny Marlow, the taxi driver,' a man with a strong Geordie accent ranted.

'Really?' I replied. 'You'd better go to the police and tell them that the wrong men are in jail then, hadn't you?'

'No,' the Geordie sneered. 'I want £10,000 in cash from you, or I'm going to go to the newspapers with tapes that prove you killed them all.' I told the man, who was clearly intoxicated, that I would pay him the £10,000 he was demanding but that he would have to pop around to my house to pick up the cash. 'Do you think I'm fucking stupid?' he replied. 'I will give you a time and a place to drop it off.'

'Perhaps I can put it in a bag and leave it in my front garden for you?' I joked. 'Do yourself a favour, you maggot, and fuck off!'

I replaced the receiver and thought that would be the end of the matter. It had been 11 years since my former associates Pat Tate, Tony Tucker and Craig Rolfe had been executed as they sat in their Range Rover. In the early '90s, we had started out as a nightclub security company, which, fuelled by drugs, soon transformed itself into a ruthless gang that immersed itself in murder, extortion and drug importation and distribution. Following my associates' executions in 1995, which made national headline news, the media began calling us the Essex Boys firm, and overnight a mythical monster had been born. Our gang's rapid rise, and kamikaze fall, became the subject of numerous books,

television documentaries and feature films. Blatant lies and exaggerated stories have been manufactured by hangers-on, wannabes and never-will-bes since our demise; most are told by people we never even met. As with the Kray gang before us, every chancer and loser in the UK seemed to want to be associated with the Essex Boys firm and its imaginary exploits.

I did know the late Danny Marlow. He was a family man, a taxi driver from Leicestershire. He owed an associate of the Essex Boys firm a relatively small sum of money, which I had gone to collect from him just a few hours before he was murdered. The debt had nothing to do with crime. The guy he owed it to had a chain of video rental shops that had gone bust. I never bothered asking the details of how Danny's debt came into being. The guy he owed was a friend of a friend, and so I agreed to help him retrieve his money. I was interviewed by the police about Danny's death, but I honestly played no part in it. Two men were later convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the killing. Two men were also convicted of the triple murders in the Essex Boys case, and they too are serving life imprisonment.

Taking into consideration those facts, I failed to see how a drunken Geordie was going to convince the police that they had locked up the wrong men, although all four do claim that they are innocent. I knew, of course, that my late-night caller had no intention of contacting the police. I had been receiving regular phone calls for more than a decade from strangers or strange people who were either in awe of my deceased associates or who were abusive and issued death threats because I had quite rightly described their heroes as arseholes. It can be a tad annoying and frustrating, and occasionally depressing, but never have I felt threatened. If somebody did intend to cause me serious harm, I am in no doubt that they would not give me the courtesy of a warning. The drunken Geordie was not the first person to

accuse me of being a murderer, but it was most certainly the first time that somebody had demanded money from me.

I put the call down to the evils of drink, drugs or gangster rap and thought that I would hear no more once the sad wretch had sobered up. The following morning, I was awoken by the insistent ringing of my mobile phone. Still half asleep, I picked up the handset, but before I had a chance to speak the caller said, 'Because of your fucking cheek, O'Mahoney, we now want 20 grand or we go to the police and the newspapers.'

'Who the fuck is "we"?' I replied.

The man, whom I recognised as the Geordie who had called the night before, screamed, 'I am one of the Conroys! CONROYS! CONROYS! Have you got that?' I had no idea who the Conroys were or what business they thought they had with me, and so I asked the man to explain just what his problem was. 'We have proof that you murdered Tucker, Tate, Rolfe and Marlow. We want 20 . . . no, fuck it, 50 grand off you, or you are going to jail. The people in prison didn't kill them, O'Mahoney. You did.'

Rather than debate my innocence or guilt with an obviously mentally challenged monkey, I switched my phone off and tried to get back to sleep. These nuisance calls continued for three weeks, and on each occasion the Geordie became more and more abusive. During the first week, he threatened to cut my eyes out, and the following week he promised an unsavoury death unless I met his increasing demands for more and more cash.

A 26-year-old 'man' named Michael Strawbridge, from Pelton, in County Durham, was eventually traced and arrested by the police. He confessed that he was responsible for the calls, which he had made 'for a laugh', and was subsequently fined the princely sum of £80. When Strawbridge had claimed that he was 'one of the Conroys', I had researched the name on the Internet in the hope that I

could find out who they were and how I could contact them. I must admit that the information that I did find available about the Conroy family made for very uncomfortable reading. In their 'manor', which is the north-east of England, they are as well known as Alan Shearer, Newcastle Brown Ale, doner kebabs and Newcastle United.

After Strawbridge had been arrested and admitted that he had never even met the Conroys, my interest in the family naturally waned. That was until one evening when I was watching Donal MacIntyre's television series *MacIntyre's Underworld*. The programme examines the day-to-day lives of notorious criminals. Paddy Conroy, a snarling, spitting Geordie with serious anger-management issues and an eyepatch, growled at the camera and began ranting about destroying his rivals, the Sayers family, who he claimed were registered police informants. In 1995, Conroy had been sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment for his part in the kidnapping and torture of a fellow criminal who was alleged to have desecrated the grave of Conroy's father. The unfortunate fellow had had his teeth removed with a pair of unsterilised pliers. Although Conroy denied the work was his own, he did admit to dropping the patient off where the emergency dental work was performed. However, Conroy rather undermined his case by physically attacking the prosecution barrister in court and was subsequently found guilty. Towards the end of the show, Conroy went off on a terrifying four-minute rant against his perceived enemies, which culminated in him shouting, 'Put that in ya fookin' documentary!'

At the time, I was working on a book entitled *Faces* with a rising star in photojournalism named Brian Anderson. *Faces* is a collection of classic black and white photographs of the most infamous villains in the UK. I knew immediately that Paddy Conroy, the man who was threatening to explode out of my television screen, would just have to be included in it. A week later, I had managed to contact Conroy, he had

agreed to pose for photographs for the book and I had visited him at his home in the West End of Newcastle. Talking at length with Conroy, I learned that he has lived a life saturated with extreme violence and hardship but has somehow managed to lace it heavily with his own brand of morality and infectious humour. I am not saying Conroy is a saint. On the contrary, he would be the first to admit that he has been responsible for many of the crimes committed in Newcastle over the last three decades, although, in fairness to him, Conroy and his infamous family have been wrongly accused of so much more. A whole host of unsavoury allegations, including murder, has been laid at their door.

Like the Conroy family, their rivals the Sayers clan have a mafia-type reputation in the north-east. Blackmail, robbery, drug dealing and allegations of murder are synonymous with their name. I had also contacted the Sayers family to request that they pose for photographs for inclusion in the book. At the time, John Henry Sayers was in prison and Michael Sayers was 'out of town' and therefore unavailable, but Stephen Sayers agreed to meet me. I found Stephen to be polite, intelligent and surprisingly honest. He conceded that he and his family had been involved in criminality in the past but said that it was not something that he or they were proud of. 'I don't mind helping you with your book,' Stephen said. 'You can take a few photographs of me while I talk to people here, but I don't wish to pose for them. The last thing I want to be seen as is a gangster.'

A few weeks after that meeting, Stephen was arrested for perverting the course of justice in a murder trial that had involved his brother John Henry. He had stood trial at Leeds Crown Court in September 2002 accused of the gangland execution of a small-time crook named Freddie Knights. While giving evidence, John Henry had stunned everybody by announcing that he was totally innocent and that the Conroys were not only responsible for ordering Knights' murder but had also been the driving force behind the

murder of Tyneside legend Viv Graham. John Henry was later cleared of any involvement in Knights' murder. It's hard to gauge just what the Conroys actually know, if anything, about either murder, because for many years they have been embroiled in a bitter war with members of the Sayers family. It has waged for so long now that I doubt either side can honestly say how it started.

When I heard that Stephen Sayers had been arrested for perverting the course of justice in the Knights case, it did make me wonder if Stephen had deliberately tried to mislead me when we had met or if he was, at that time, genuinely trying to walk away from his past. Like the Conroys, the Sayers family has a long, bloody history that they have excused over the years by quoting their own code of morality. It is therefore hard to try to decipher who is and who is not telling the truth about the crimes each family accuses the other of committing. All I can do is repeat the stories that I have been told and let you, the reader, decide what the Conroys and the Sayers families may or may not be guilty of.

Chapter One

ONCE UPON A TYNE

PADDY CONROY WAS born in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne on 23 April 1960. Lee Majors, who played a former astronaut with bionic limbs in the popular television series *The Six Million Dollar Man*, shares his birthday. So, too, did the world's most famous playwright, William Shakespeare. In some ways, the three men are linked. Like Shakespeare, Conroy's time on earth has been spent immersed in one bloody drama after another, and like the Six Million Dollar Man, many of Conroy's adversaries have ended up being rebuilt or having false limbs fitted.

Conroy's parents had eight children: Lenny, the eldest, Billy, Maureen, Denny (Denise), Paddy, Michael, Neil and Dawn, the youngest. In the summer of 1963, Conroy's mother and father were involved in a bitter argument at Newcastle Central Station. Leonard Conroy was trying to board a train bound for London, and his long-suffering wife was begging him not to go. In desperation, Mrs Conroy grabbed Leonard's jacket, pulled it off his back and ran out of the station. Without his jacket, which contained his money, train ticket and wallet, Leonard was unable to make his planned trip. Paddy Conroy, aged just three at the time, stood with his father on the platform and watched as the powerful locomotive huffed and puffed before gathering speed and disappearing from view, cloaked in its own steam and billowing smoke. The atmosphere between Mr and Mrs Conroy during their journey home was extremely uncomfortable. Leonard did not say one word to his

triumphant wife; he just sat on the bus glancing at her occasionally and shaking his head.

Several years later, it was revealed that Leonard had planned to travel to London to meet up with a gang of fifteen men who had gone on to commit one of the most infamous crimes in British history. They had halted a Glasgow to London mail train and stolen £2.6 million in used banknotes. Friends claim that when the enormity of the gang's heist was broadcast on the radio Leonard Conroy couldn't bring himself to be in the same room as his wife, because he was so upset. Stifling tears and screams, he would stare vacantly at the newspaper headlines about the robbery and mumble, 'No, no, no.' Five days later, Mrs Conroy had the last laugh. The police discovered the train robbers' hideout, which turned out to be an Aladdin's cave of damning evidence. Just eight months after the crime had been committed, thirteen members of the Great Train Robbery gang, as they became known, were jailed for a total of three hundred years. Leonard Conroy lost count of the number of times he heard his wife say, 'I told you so. Are you still upset that I stopped you going?' Mothers always do know best.

When Paddy Conroy was five years old, he was sent to a school in Cruddas Park. This area, in the West End of Newcastle, was named after George Cruddas, a director of the local Vickers-Armstrong armament factories. Cruddas Park attracted the weak and the poor simply because it was the cheapest area of Newcastle to live in, and this shaped the district's abnormal social make-up. The suicide rate and the incidence of respiratory TB were both three times the average for the rest of the city, while cases of venereal disease were twelve times the average. The area became a gravitation point for many of Newcastle's problem families. In fact, five times as many families deemed criminal or antisocial ended up living around Cruddas Park than were found in any other suburb.

One of the biggest eyesores in this very deprived area was the Noble Street flats. Thomas Daniel Smith, the man responsible for building what was nothing more than a high-rise slum and much of the rest of the neighbourhood that Conroy was reared in, was the Labour leader of Newcastle City Council at the time. Smith believed strongly in the need to clear the almost derelict housing people lived in and so put a great deal of effort into his regeneration plans. At Smith's suggestion, the city was nicknamed 'The Brasilia of the North'. Smith clearly had a fertile imagination: war-torn Beirut maybe, Brasilia never.

Unfortunately, Smith's unquenchable thirst for money became linked to his equally powerful political ambitions. A maintenance firm owned by him won more than 50 per cent of all the available council-housing contracts in the area. Smith soon expanded his business, setting up a PR company to support redevelopment in other cities throughout the country. This company was hired by John Poulson, an architect who paid Smith £156,000 for his work, which involved paying local councillors to secure contracts for Poulson's pre-packaged redevelopment schemes. Poulson earned more than £1,000,000 through Smith, but the pair were eventually arrested on corruption charges and imprisoned.

It seems that everybody connected to the West End of Newcastle at that time had some form of criminal enterprise on the go, even those who were supposedly beyond reproach. In those days, the West End community was made up of undoubtedly proud, hard people who created wealth for the nation while living in abject poverty. That wealth was generated in the large industrial factories, such as Vickers-Armstrong, that lined the banks of the River Tyne, producing ships, trains, tanks and armaments. Men would work long, gruelling shifts for little more than a pittance and never complain. As long as they had enough money to put a roof

over their families' heads, food in their families' mouths and a few brown ales in their own, they were content.

Those who lived in the West End at that time did not look upon villains as bad people. Committing crime in order to make ends meet was not considered wrong unless you were involved in unforgivable immoral acts against the old, infirm or very young. Leonard Conroy was an old-school villain who robbed post offices, stately homes and mansions throughout the UK. He knew all the notorious London villains, such as 'Mad' Frankie Fraser, the Kray brothers and Freddie Foreman, because of the numerous times he had been in jail. Leonard's choice of profession meant that the police were regular visitors to his home. His children would watch in horror as officers tipped personal possessions onto the floor while searching for evidence of their father's latest misdemeanour.

The only time the police gave the family any peace was when Leonard Conroy was residing as a guest at one of Her Majesty's prisons. Because of all the upset and trauma this caused at the family home, Paddy Conroy chose not to spend too much time there. He preferred the stability and relative peace and quiet that his grandmother Sally's home offered. Sally was a large, kind and wise woman who enjoyed a drink. She would often visit the numerous pubs along Scotswood Road, where she would sing for the locals.

Scotswood Road was the inspiration for the Geordie anthem 'Blaydon Races'. It was known locally as 'The Road of One Hundred Pubs', but in reality there were never more than forty-six trading at any one time. The atmosphere outside those pubs was as fiery as the blast furnaces that roared endlessly at the nearby armaments factories. It is said that, along the four miles that make up Scotswood Road, every Saturday night there would be a brawl on every street corner, and on bank holidays the brawling would last into the early hours of the morning. The police who patrolled the area were hand-picked for their brawn rather than for

their brains. For instance, it is said that a certain PC Elija 'Ben' Goulden once made an arrest in Corporation Street but took the prisoner to Pitt Street to charge him, because he could not spell or pronounce 'corporation'.

In time, Paddy tired of flitting from his family's home to his grandmother Sally's, and so he moved in with her on a full-time basis. Even today, a child moving from one home into another is nothing unusual in the West End. School friends will visit a fellow pupil's house to play and not go home for a month, if ever. It's just the way communities are in the north-east: everybody knows everybody, and they all look out for one another.

Both of Paddy's grandfathers had been sergeant majors in the Army. During the war, his mother's father, Billy Bell, had been stationed at Featherston Prisoner of War camp, in Haltwhistle, Northumberland. He would often tell stories of how both Italian and German POWs would be marched from the train station through the village to the camp. During the day, the prisoners would work in the fields picking vegetables or fruit. Billy Bell claimed that they had little or no desire to escape. In fact, the prisoners were considered to be such a low risk that they were allowed to go to a dance that was held in the village hall every Saturday night. I suppose that a simple life in Northumberland was far more desirable than running away to face the horrors of war.

Paddy's mother's family are law-abiding, decent people who have never so much as sworn in their lives. They have never owned anything of material value, and they have never asked anybody for anything. Considering the community they were brought up in, they are unique to say the least. Leonard Conroy's family was the total opposite. Born and bred in Belmullet, County Mayo, on the west coast of Ireland, they were extremely hard people who wouldn't take shit off anybody. Leonard's mother, Sally, fell pregnant with him in the early 1930s, when the county of Mayo was experiencing a baby boom. This was due in part to the

massive loss of life Ireland had suffered in the late 1800s during the potato famine. The Irish were dependent on their potato crop, which had failed three years out of four, and this resulted in an estimated one million people dying of starvation or disease.

County Mayo, a non-industrial area, was particularly hard hit. The unusually high birth rate that followed the famine presented its own problems: there wasn't enough work to employ or house all the additional people that it produced. In an attempt to resolve the issue, the Irish government built workhouses, or poorhouses, as they became known. The able-bodied were forced to work in return for a place to sleep and enough food and water to stay alive; the men broke stones, and the women knitted or washed linen in the laundry. These inhumane establishments were overcrowded, cold and damp places where violence and sexual abuse were rife.

The only true hope many of the people living in poorhouses had for a brighter future was to try to emigrate to America or England so that they could present themselves as cheap labour to be exploited in slightly better conditions. Leonard Conroy's father had the misfortune to spend his formative years in a workhouse in Belmullet. When he learned that his wife was expecting, he decided to save his unborn child from a similar wretched existence and so acquired the means to travel to England. He and his wife eventually washed up in the West End of Newcastle, where Leonard Conroy was subsequently born. One day, Leonard's father was walking down Scotswood Road when a bull escaped from an abattoir. Fearing innocent people would be trampled to death by the rampaging beast, Leonard's father ran, gripped the bull in a headlock, wrestled it to the ground and broke its neck. From that day onwards, everybody referred to him as 'Kill the Bull'.

A few years after that incident, in a similar manner, Kill the Bull accidentally snapped an off-duty policeman's back

during a melee that he was trying to break up, again on Scotswood Road. Unfortunately, the officer died later that night in hospital. Kill the Bull was convicted of manslaughter and subsequently spent several years in prison. When he was eventually released, he was advised to move out of Newcastle because of the ill feeling some of the deceased man's colleagues held towards him. Kill the Bull refused to accept his guilt, because he had always maintained that the death was nothing more than a tragic accident. It is unclear if there were any further incidents linked to the policeman's death, but Kill the Bull never did leave Newcastle.

Paddy didn't bother going to school very often. In fact, the only time he ever did attend was to steal coal from the boiler room cellar. The 1970s was a decade blighted by strikes and industrial action by the then powerful unions. Homes were regularly plunged into darkness during power cuts caused by the miners striking, and the streets were often piled high with rotting rubbish because the binmen were working only a two-day week. Coal, the fuel that heated homes and cooked food, was scarce, and so Paddy and one of his sisters would steal it from school or off the railway lines, where it was used as ballast. The coal that was stolen from school would come in lumps, while the coal from the railway had been ground down or crushed into a fine dust by the weight of the trains – but they were still able to use it. Paddy's grandmother Sally would mix the coal dust with flour and make coke cakes, which she would then burn on the fire. It saved Sally a bit of money, and it gave Paddy and his sister an excuse to stay off school.

If you are born in Newcastle, you support Newcastle United Football Club. It's like a hereditary disease that you have been destined to contract or a religion that has been drummed into you from an early age. Everybody supported 'the Toon' in the Conroy household, but Leonard never went to watch the games at 'the Cathedral', or St James' Park, as it is more commonly known. The family were surprised,

therefore, when one Saturday morning Leonard announced that he was going to watch the Toon, but they were even more surprised that nobody else was to be invited.

On that particular Saturday morning, 9 March 1974, the city of Newcastle was buzzing with excitement: victory over West Bromwich Albion in the FA Cup fifth round meant that Newcastle United had reached the quarter-finals of the prestigious competition for the first time in 13 years. Their victory was sweetened by the fact that their opponents in the next round were going to be second-division side Nottingham Forest.

Thirteen thousand of the Forest faithful travelled to St James' Park to roar on their side against an apparently superior Newcastle team. The atmosphere created by both sets of fans that day has been described as electric. After just 90 seconds of play, Forest stunned the home crowd by scoring. Urged on by 'the Toon Army', Newcastle did equalise, but just before the half-time whistle Forest regained the lead. The manager's half-time team talk must have been inspiring for the Newcastle players, as they came out for the second half full of fighting spirit. Unfortunately for them, the Forest defence stood firm and resisted wave after wave of attacks. This frustrated the Newcastle players, and after a number of niggling fouls and heavy challenges a Forest player was brought down in the area. The referee awarded a penalty kick. The Newcastle fans in the Leazes End of the ground were hysterical with rage and surged towards the pitch. Many of the younger fans in that end were crushed and, in fear of their lives, sought refuge on the pitch. To add insult to injury, Pat Howard, one of the Newcastle players, remonstrated with the referee about the penalty decision and was promptly sent off for dissent. The temperature on the terraces had been raised another few notches.

When Forest scored from the penalty kick, some of their supporters ran onto the pitch to celebrate in front of the

Gallowgate End. It was one insult too many for approximately five hundred Geordies, and a golden opportunity for Leonard Conroy to set his plan in motion. 'Come on lads! Howay! Howay!' bellowed Leonard as he bulldozed through a line of police officers and onto the pitch. Helmets and bodies flew through the air as he was followed by legions of crazed Geordies who were baying for the Forest fans' blood. As Leonard led the cavalry charge, ITV commentator Brian Moore said, 'Here they come. This is what they have been waiting to do.' The players stood and watched in disbelief as hundreds of Newcastle fans tried to reach the Forest supporters. The referee looked terrified and signalled for all the players to leave the pitch. It was later alleged that, before they could do so, two Forest players, Dave Serella and Martin O'Neill, were assaulted.

Fortunately for the Forest supporters, but not for Leonard Conroy, the club and the police had prepared for crowd disturbances. There were 70 officers on duty in the ground and 70 more outside with dogs. As a result of their forward thinking, the police were able to act quickly and arrest Leonard, which resulted in order being restored after just eight minutes. When the pitch had been cleared of marauding Geordies, the referee asked both sets of club officials if they wished to continue the game. Forest, who were winning 3-1 and playing against ten men, fancied their chances and elected to play on. The Newcastle officials, clearly embarrassed by the crowd disturbances, were in no position to argue.

With 25 minutes remaining, Newcastle United attacked the Forest defence with a vengeance. The steely resolve the Forest players had shown earlier in the game was now gone. Several players appeared unnerved and eyed the hysterical Newcastle fans with fear rather than watching the ball. Poise had been replaced with panic. Urged on by thousands of black-and-white-clad Geordies, Newcastle United piled on the pressure. With twenty-two minutes remaining,

Newcastle were awarded a penalty kick, which they scored, and just three minutes later they drew level with a Forest side that was by now in complete disarray. In the last minute of the game, Newcastle legend Malcolm 'Supermac' Macdonald headed the ball across the goalmouth and captain Bobby Moncur scored the winner.

When the final whistle was blown, Forest manager Allan Brown was under no illusions as to who had won the game – and it wasn't Newcastle United FC. 'The crowd and the referee undoubtedly won the game for Newcastle,' he said when interviewed after the match. Newcastle United chairman Lord Westwood did not hold back in his condemnation of the home fans either. 'I was disgusted with the behaviour of a section of the fans,' he told reporters.

Following the disturbance that Leonard Conroy had sparked, 23 fans required hospital treatment, two had suffered fractured skulls and 103 others received first aid. A number of police officers suffered minor injuries, and in all 39 people were charged with violent conduct and another 40 were ejected from the ground. Twenty-four hours later, Nottingham Forest appealed against the result, and after a meeting with the FA Cup Committee a replay at a neutral venue was ordered. The replay took place at Goodison Park, home of Everton FC. It ended in a 0-0 draw. The second replay, again played at Goodison Park, saw Newcastle United win 1-0. In the semi-final, Newcastle defeated Burnley, but their dreams of FA Cup glory, which had at one point seemed possible thanks to the actions of Leonard Conroy, were dashed when they met Liverpool in the final at Wembley and lost 3-0.

Publicly, Lord Westwood may have said that he was disgusted by the fans' behaviour, but Leonard later claimed that it was Lord Westwood himself who had asked him to attend and stop the match if Newcastle were losing. When Leonard appeared in court, he was condemned by the judge as being 'the architect' of an incident that had 'shamed the

city' and was imprisoned for nine months. He later told friends that he didn't care about the sentence he had received, because Lord Westwood had paid him handsomely in cash on the condition that he never talk about their agreement or darken the turnstiles of St James' Park ever again. Both men have sadly passed away since, but there is little doubt that Leonard was telling the truth; he certainly was not the sort of man who would lie to win favour.

Lord Westwood was no stranger to controversy or dodgy dealings; in 1951, he had been involved in a ticket-touting scandal after he promised FA Cup tickets to an MP. These tickets were included in a raffle before the police stepped in to stop them becoming available. Three years after the controversy surrounding the FA Cup clash with Nottingham Forest, Newcastle United were back in the news when six first-team players threatened to quit the club after their contract talks broke down. Allegations of misconduct in the boardroom were dismissed by Lord Westwood, who claimed that he and Richard Dinnis, the recently sacked manager, were being 'knifed in the back'. In an effort to keep the dispute in-house, Lord Westwood ordered a blanket ban on Newcastle United employees, and in particular the players, discussing their grievances with the media. In 1981, Newcastle United Football Club was facing financial ruin, and so each director was urged to invest a further £16,000. Lord Westwood had financial problems of his own following the stock market crash of DCM, Europe's leading toy company, of which he was also chairman, and so he declined to assist. He resigned from the board and died ten years later, in November 1991.

Shortly after Leonard Conroy's imprisonment for the pitch invasion, his son Paddy was sent to an approved school after being caught shoplifting. It was hardly an offence worthy of such punishment; he had stolen a bottle of alcohol from a shop and was apprehended by an eagle-eyed policeman who had been observing him from across the

street. Paddy did have previous convictions, so no doubt the magistrates, in their infinite wisdom, felt his crimes were heinous enough that he be denied his liberty and sent to a place where he could be taught by 'respectable adults' how one should behave.

It's unclear who had 'approved' the school, but whoever it was certainly didn't have standards, because it was, in the words of one former pupil, 'hell on fucking earth'. The 'school's' official title was Netherton Training Approved School for Boys. It was, in fact, no more than four small farm cottages in the middle of what looked like moorland, somewhere near Morpeth, in Northumberland. The only lessons the school taught its pupils were the horrors of sexual abuse and the pain of extreme violence.

The first day Paddy was there, he was introduced to a man the other children referred to as 'the Major'. Apparently, he had been charged with turning the young miscreants' lives around. Within an hour of Paddy's arrival, the Major had ushered him into a medical room, where an elderly matron ordered him to stand in front of her. Without saying another word, she pulled down his trousers and underpants while the Major looked on, smiling, sweating and slobbering. Paddy instinctively pulled away from the depraved old hag and got dressed. 'Get back here, boy,' the matron bellowed, but he was having none of it and ran back to his dormitory.

Later that night, in the television room, the teacher's pet - or bully, to give him his more realistic title - walked over to where Paddy was sitting, pointed to a comb lying on the floor and asked whose it was. 'It's not mine,' Paddy replied.

'Well, pick it up,' the bully snarled.

Paddy told him again that it wasn't his comb and that he therefore had no intention of picking it up. Moments later, the bully's sidekick swaggered into the room and asked who had stolen his comb. The bully looked at Paddy and then looked at the comb on the floor beside him before nodding to his sidekick, who immediately leapt on top of Paddy. He

did his best to fight back, but against two older, stronger boys Paddy's efforts were futile. He went to bed that night nursing a black eye. Paddy's father had slipped him a £5 note at court and advised him that if he did get sent away he could escape and use the cash to make his way home. Even though it was Paddy's first day at the approved school, he knew that the money would be needed before too long and so, rather than give in to temptation and spend it, he had hidden it in his sock for safe keeping. Less than an hour after Paddy went to bed, the heavy, morbid atmosphere in the school had convinced him that he should escape and head home to Newcastle. He got dressed in the darkness and tiptoed out of the dormitory.

Moments later, Paddy was running across the fields to freedom, but he had been spotted by the school bully, who informed the teachers, and was soon apprehended. Threats, slaps and promises of further punishment accompanied him back to his bed. When the onslaught had ended, rather than sleep, Paddy lay awake in the darkness, planning his next move. He couldn't see what was happening in his dormitory, but the cries of pain and anguish from within the darkness made it abundantly clear that some of his fellow inmates were being either raped or beaten, or both. Paddy could live with the threat of violence, but the very thought of being raped inspired him to run away at great speed the following morning.

Paddy didn't know it at the time, but running away from that institution was one of the wisest decisions he would ever make. The abuse, both sexual and physical, turned out to be far more sinister than he had experienced during his own short stay. In 2007, scores of former pupils at care homes throughout the north-east, including Netherton, sued for damages. It was proven that they had suffered rape and sexual, physical and emotional abuse. So much for sending young children who have stolen a single bottle of beer to such an establishment for 'rehabilitation'.

After making his way to the nearest town, Paddy used the £5 note that his father had given him to get home. Seeing the famous Tyne Bridge from the window of a bus later that afternoon would undoubtedly have been one of the happiest moments in Paddy's life. After fleeing from the approved school, he did his best to change his ways and avoid contact with the police. But, however good his intentions may have been, he still needed money to pay for his day-to-day needs and so, inevitably, returned to committing petty crime.

During the execution of one particular criminal enterprise, Paddy happened upon a pretty girl named Maureen, who later turned out to be the love of his life. Their first meeting was hardly romantic: Maureen was mugged, by Paddy, as she was making her way to the shops. Paddy had been told by a friend that Maureen was paid to do the shopping for her landlady, and so he decided that he would relieve her of the cash. In many ways, it was the perfect crime. Maureen did not argue when Paddy demanded that she hand over her cash to him, nor did she report him to the authorities when she had complied with his request.

After being robbed two or three times in as many weeks, Maureen didn't even bother waiting for Paddy to ask for the money when they next met. Paddy just stood outside the shop, and Maureen walked over to him and handed over her cash. Then, one day, Paddy decided to carry Maureen off home along with her money. They have been together ever since.

The authorities regularly searched Paddy's grandmother's home and scoured the local streets in pursuit of him. He was confident that he would never be caught, but his father sat him down one day and explained that it would be only a matter of time before they got lucky and he would be returned to the approved school. Leonard was no stranger to being on the run and advised his son that if he wished to stay free he would be better off moving to London to live with a good friend of his named Jack Mulholland. Paddy

knew Jack, as he had been a regular visitor to the Conroy household over the years. Paddy liked him, and so he agreed that he would move to London.

Jack was a member of Leonard's criminal 'firm', and together they used to burgle country houses, hijack lorries and rob post offices. Leonard knew that Jack would accommodate Paddy, as the Conroy home had regularly been used as a safe haven for his criminal associates. Sometimes it would be because they had just got out of prison and had nowhere else to stay, but more often than not it was because they were hiding from the police. Amongst the many guests over the years were Danny Burns, Norman Short, Leonard's brother William, Kenneth 'Panda' Anderson, Billy Gascoigne, Charlie Francis and Sugar Bentley. These men were all notorious villains in the north-east during the 1960s and '70s.

Jack Mulholland was a single man who lived in the Southall area of west London. Despite his single status, Jack was hardly unattached. In fact, he was attached to a different female nearly every evening of the week. To fund his extensive wining, dining and romancing habit, Jack worked full-time as a security guard controlling the gate of a large industrial estate. Paddy grew extremely fond of Jack, who would mesmerise him with fascinating stories about his life and the criminal enterprises that he and Paddy's father had embarked upon. During one such conversation, Paddy learned that Jack held the rather dishonourable honour of being the most flogged man ever to be incarcerated at HMP Durham. Considering the establishment was built in 1810 and has housed some of Britain's most notorious prisoners, Jack's punishment record was quite remarkable.

Whenever Jack was taken from court to prison, he would spit into the face of the first prison officer who spoke to him. Then - *bang* - he would throw a punch and a fight would begin. Jack knew that he would never be able to defeat all the prison officers, but he told friends that he wanted them