

# *Anne: One Mother's Story* (World Productions for ITV) available to UK viewers to stream on ITVHub until February 4

**Paul Bond****24 January 2022**

Several dramas have been made in recent years dealing with miscarriages of justice, testament to an increasing determination to expose and oppose them by layers of serious artists. It is difficult to think of a more representative travesty of justice than Hillsborough.

Britain's biggest sporting disaster, with a toll of 97 dead and 766 injured, was wholly avoidable. On April 15, 1989, around 54,000 fans of Liverpool and Nottingham Forest attended the FA Cup semi-final at the Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield. Shortly before the 3pm kick-off, police ordered the opening of Gate C to Liverpool fans without closing the tunnel into the terraces.

Thousands of fans were forced into already dangerously overcrowded pens. That afternoon, 94 mostly young men, women and children died. Two more were subsequently taken off life support. Another never fully recovered, dying last year of his injuries. Another man committed suicide in his guilt at having sold his ticket to one of the victims.

There followed a vicious campaign of lies and misinformation to cover up police culpability, supported by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government and the press. It began by smearing Liverpool supporters, with lies about late-arriving drunken fans forcing the gate, robbing the dead and attacking police. This became the official narrative, even in the face of footage showing fans doing all they could to help the injured and dying.

Despite the police being found responsible just four months afterwards, everything was done to prevent anybody being held to account. Evidence was suppressed, and the police altered officers' testimony.

Hillsborough has been the model for the British ruling class in how to conduct "investigations" that ensure the perpetrators get off scot free. Repeated judicial reviews kicked the inquiry into the long grass. It took 28 years for any crown prosecutions to be brought. Cases collapsed, and no one has ever been held legally accountable.

Like the Aberfan school disaster, the Iraq war and the

Grenfell Tower fire, Hillsborough demonstrated how public inquiries are used as an outlet for anger while exonerating the capitalist state of heinous crimes. A similar outcome can be expected for the forthcoming COVID inquiry.

That the facts are now well-known is down to the tenacity of the bereaved and the survivors. Kevin Sampson's four-part television series *Anne: One Mother's Story* is an admirable tribute to Anne Williams (played magnificently by Maxine Peake), who lost her 15-year-old son Kevin. The circumstances surrounding Kevin's death were crucial in unravelling the tissue of police lies.

Peake has recently also made a documentary on Anne Williams's campaign for justice. *The Real Anne: Unfinished Business* is also available to UK viewers on ITVHub.

Sampson's nearly four hours of drama skilfully incorporates archive news footage, like Thatcher's press secretary Bernard Ingham's lies about Liverpool fans.

The *Sun*'s disgusting role is portrayed, but we might also have seen the 2004 *Spectator* magazine editorial repeating the long-debunked claims of "the part played ... by drunken fans." It was drafted at the request of then editor and now Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

There is a compelling unfolding of every layer of the official cover-up, showing just how much incriminating evidence was kept from the bereaved and for how long. Only a year after the disaster did Anne see a photograph of off-duty police officer Derek Bruder (David Walmsley) administering mouth-to-mouth and learn that Kevin was still alive at 3.30pm. It was four years before she saw a picture of fans carrying Kevin on a makeshift stretcher. One photo confirmed that Kevin was alive when police left him.

The police narrative of violence among the fans was used to prevent 42 ambulances outside the ground from entering. It was finally determined in 2012 that at least 41 of the deaths could have been avoided.

Kevin Williams (Campbell Wallace) was a typical football-mad teenager, whose parents only allowed him to go to the

match at the last minute. It quickly became apparent that the situation was terrible, and the unfolding of the tragedy is well portrayed, as is the response of those affected. When Anne and Steve Williams (Stephen Walters) run out of petrol on their way to Sheffield they are helped by a farmer, prompting the observation, “People are good. Most people are good.”

An entire system is levelled against them. This began immediately, with archive footage of senior officers stating categorically, “The police certainly aren’t to blame.” The lies are only slowly and painstakingly counteracted by the evidence.

The Taylor Inquiry and inquests, begun in May 1989, were intended only to allow the bereaved to know when and where the victims had died. Questions of why and how were deferred, supposedly against possible future criminal prosecutions.

Taylor criticised South Yorkshire police and accused Chief Superintendent David Duckenfield, who was match commander on the day, of misjudging the build-up of crowds outside the ground. Not until 2015 did Duckenfield accept any responsibility. Taylor also noted that the police had lied. Despite this, the jury returned a majority verdict of accidental death.

Misleading medical evidence and police pressure on Bruder to revise his statement were aimed at preventing any investigation showing that Kevin was still alive. The coroner’s ruling that those who died had already received their critical injuries by 3.15pm encouraged the impression that the deaths had already occurred by then, excluding any evidence critical of the role of the police after that time.

Kevin’s case exploded this fraud, but the narrative was constantly reinforced by those intent on a cover-up. After a West Midlands police inspector told the Williamses that Bruder had revised his testimony, Steve wonders what it means for such a senior officer to come and tell them this. The series shows a determined struggle against stacked odds, and the slow emergence of evidence contradicting this official account.

A new inquiry was again refused in 1996. Sampson shows the families’ optimism that Tony Blair’s 1997 Labour government might bring some change. But Blair’s referral of Hillsborough to Sir Murray Stuart-Smith (Nicholas Jones) for judicial scrutiny simply furthered the injustice. His rejection of a new inquest prompts cries of “New Labour, new cover-up.”

When Andy Burnham MP, Labour’s Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, attempted to address the twentieth anniversary commemoration meeting at Anfield, he was drowned out by the crowd chanting “Justice for the 96!”

Despite growing recognition by bereaved families that

Labour had failed them, Burnham (Matthew McNulty) is used to keep some connections with the party. Anne tells him plaintively, “Labour was our party. It shouldn’t be down to us.” Out of this comes the Hillsborough Independent Panel, which in 2012 finally confirmed officially what had long been known.

The police operational control of the match was entirely inadequate. There were critical delays in the emergency response, and no pattern of unavoidable death. The 3.15pm cut-off had severely limited the inquest. South Yorkshire Police had used a press agency to circulate their lies about fans.

Anne died of cancer three days after attending the 2013 commemoration service at Liverpool’s Anfield stadium. A touching scene points to the impact of such events on those who live through them. Terminally ill, she tells Steve that they would have been fine without Hillsborough.

Anne Williams did not live to see 2016’s unlawful killing verdicts, but nor did she see the continued collapse of the legal cases.

In 2021, all outstanding cases were dropped. As the programme’s end titles conclude, “Following a retrial in November 2019, David Duckenfield was found not guilty of gross negligence manslaughter. All remaining prosecutions were dismissed by the judge on 26th May 2021. On 27th July 2021, Andrew Devine passed away, making him the 97th person to die from injuries sustained at Hillsborough. Despite the verdict of unlawful killing, nobody has been held accountable for their deaths. For The Hillsborough Families, 32 years on there has been no justice”.

Nearly 33 years on, the obstructions to justice encountered by the Hillsborough bereaved and the survivors remain. *Anne* deserves praise for showing a heroic struggle waged against the combined forces of the state seeking to defend the guilty. Perhaps the most perceptive line in the drama comes from Hillsborough survivor Peter (Lenny Wood), talking about the police on the day just standing watching the carnage unfold: “Do we mean so little to them?”



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