

THE  TIMES

Last Night's TV: Ian Brady: Endgames of a Psychopath



The Moors Murderer Ian Brady, pictured in 1966 Press Association

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Last updated at 12:01AM, August 21 2012

Paddy Wivell's documentary on the Moors Murderer Ian Brady was one of the best researched and revealing of the year

Ian Brady: Endgames of a Psychopath

Channel 4

★★★★★

There was a danger that *Ian Brady: Endgames of a Psychopath*, surely one of the best researched, revealing documentaries of the year, would be overtaken by the events its makers themselves set in motion. The revelation — that Ian Brady, Britain's most notorious living child killer, may or may not have revealed the burial site of his victim, Keith Bennett, in a sealed letter to be opened only in the event of his death — has run away with itself to become this week's big news story, even before the death of Bennett's mother Winnie Johnson. A more lurid or clumsily executed film would have been completely

eclipsed by that news. But Paddy Wivell's film held its own and no little credit goes to its makers who only through infinite tact and patience could have persuaded long-inaccessible figures in the story of Brady's crimes, arrest and imprisonment to speak publicly for the first time.

A key question raised in last night's documentary concerned the impartiality of Brady's legal advocate, Jackie Powell, the woman to whom Brady entrusted many years ago with the now notorious letter. It was not difficult to guess exactly why this woman, clearly now heavily personally involved in the case, has been quietly holding on to that missive for so long. Certainly, she gave the impression of a person who had developed a defensive protectiveness of her client in a way that surely the families of Brady's victims will have found to be disturbing and that their lawyers will soon claim to be illegal.

There were other revelations, more subtle, but no less disturbing. We saw Brady's elegant handwriting in one of hundreds of letters he has written in his supposedly deteriorating mental state, a form of psychosis which he has claimed, it emerged, to have faked with the help of rudimentary method acting.

We saw pictures of him in his youth in shades, a charismatic-looking figure who looked disconcertingly unlike what many people will imagine a psychopath to look like. Although it would be reassuring to imagine a child murderer as a transparently depraved and thuggish type, Brady emerged articulate, intelligent and highly literate, his only motivation, a desire to carry out "an existential exercise".

What ties so many people to him is the question "Why did he do it?" Beyond those directly affected by his crimes, some of those who became professionally involved in his case — Lord Longford, his legal advocate, a professor who runs some kind of course on the nature of evil — seem to have done so for not altogether transparent reasons of their own. A wider discussion about whether Brady was born or made a psychopath remains unanswered.

The most disturbing and delicately-made points were implied rather than spelt out. A brief shot of a police transcript of the recordings Brady and Hindley made of their crimes is the most terrible indictment of their cruelty. "I have to get home before 8 o'clock or I'll get killed," pleads Lesley Ann Downey, 10 at the time of her death. To which Brady replies, simply, "Yes."

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