# Peter Sullivan freed after 40 years as new DNA evidence overturns UK’s longest wrongful murder conviction



The family of Peter Sullivan has expressed overwhelming joy following the quashing of his conviction, which had confined him to prison for nearly 40 years—the longest miscarriage of justice in British history. Sullivan’s conviction for the 1986 murder of florist Diane Sindall was overturned after the Court of Appeal was presented with new DNA evidence. This evidence indicated that the actual killer was someone else, a prospect that had remained tantalisingly out of reach for decades.

Peter, now 68 and living with learning difficulties, was wrongfully imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Speaking about his release, his brother David Sullivan told the media that the family “knew 1000 per cent from the start that he was an innocent man,” and that they were eager to reconnect with him after such a lengthy separation. “We are absolutely ecstatic that Peter has been freed,” David added, highlighting the necessity of rebuilding family bonds after years of trauma and isolation.

The emotional toll of this case extends beyond the Sullivan family. Diane Sindall, just 21 at the time of her brutal murder, was violently killed after her van broke down in Bebington, Merseyside. Her family will now also bear the weight of this revelation; the identity of her actual killer remains a mystery. David Sullivan articulated a poignant respect for Syndall’s family, expressing both happiness for his brother and sympathy for those still mourning the loss of Diane. He emphasised, “Now her family will have to go through what we did and we feel sorry for them.” This reflection on shared pain marks a noteworthy acknowledgment of the complexities surrounding justice and the emotional aftermath of violent crime.

Sullivan was originally convicted based on circumstantial evidence that, it has now become clear, was dangerously flawed. At the time of his arrest, he had been spotted in the vicinity of the crime and convicted following a confession he later retracted, claiming it was coerced during an interrogation where he was denied legal representation—serious breaches of protocol that have now come to light. The recent scientific advances in DNA analysis, which allowed for a proper examination of evidence collected decades ago, revealed a profile that did not match Sullivan’s—shifting the narrative completely.

Prosecutors conceded that had this DNA evidence been available during the original trial, there would have been no basis for charging Sullivan. The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) had been instrumental in reopening his case, initially rebuffing his claims in 2008 due to an assumption that further DNA testing wouldn’t yield new information. Their eventual decision to re-examine the evidence in 2021 resulted in the groundbreaking findings that ultimately cleared his name.

As Sullivan begins to rebuild his life, the police are renewing their investigation into Diane's murder, having identified a mystery suspect whose DNA does not appear on any current databases. More than 260 potential suspects have already been screened out of the investigation initiated in 2023. This indicates a commitment not only to justice for Peter Sullivan but also to resolving the long-standing case of Diane Sindall—a dual pursuit that encapsulates both the complexities and the failings of the justice system.

Peter himself conveyed a sense of calm and resolution despite his ordeal. In a statement delivered through his solicitor, he acknowledged the gravity of his wrongful conviction while also expressing an absence of bitterness. Referring to his own release, he remarked, "As God is my witness, it is said the truth shall make you free." His focus now lies on the future and reconnecting with family, rather than dwelling on past injustices.

The saga of Peter Sullivan serves as a somber reminder of the potential for human error within the judicial system and underlines the importance of continued advancements in forensic science. As his family prepares to celebrate his newfound freedom, their story is intertwined with the ongoing quest for justice for Diane Sindall—a dual narrative that leaves questions lingering in the shadows of both loss and redemption.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-jail-nearly-four-decades-murder-acquitted-by-london-court-2025-05-13/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/9badb50e7bf076c6319a7aab6249a670)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-jail-nearly-four-decades-murder-acquitted-by-london-court-2025-05-13/)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/9badb50e7bf076c6319a7aab6249a670)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://ccrc.gov.uk/decision/sullivan-peter/), [[5]](https://news.sky.com/story/wolfman-in-prison-since-1987-to-have-murder-conviction-re-examined-after-new-dna-evidence-13253932)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://ccrc.gov.uk/decision/sullivan-peter/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/court-of-appeal-merseyside-high-court-dna-b1193774.html)
6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-jail-nearly-four-decades-murder-acquitted-by-london-court-2025-05-13/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/court-of-appeal-merseyside-high-court-dna-b1193774.html)
7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/9badb50e7bf076c6319a7aab6249a670), [[4]](https://ccrc.gov.uk/decision/sullivan-peter/)
8. Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/9badb50e7bf076c6319a7aab6249a670), [[5]](https://news.sky.com/story/wolfman-in-prison-since-1987-to-have-murder-conviction-re-examined-after-new-dna-evidence-13253932), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/court-of-appeal-merseyside-high-court-dna-b1193774.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711419/Family-Peter-Sullivan-ecstatic-celebrate-release.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-jail-nearly-four-decades-murder-acquitted-by-london-court-2025-05-13/> - Peter Sullivan, who served nearly 40 years in prison for the 1986 murder of Diane Sindall, was acquitted by a London court after new DNA evidence cast doubt on his conviction. Sentenced to life in 1987, Sullivan was believed to be the longest-serving victim of a miscarriage of justice in the UK. In 2021, he approached the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), raising concerns about the original evidence, including police interviews, bite-mark analysis, and the alleged murder weapon. The CCRC used advanced DNA testing methods not previously available, revealing that the crime scene DNA did not match Sullivan’s. The case was referred to the Court of Appeal, which overturned the conviction. Sullivan, through his lawyer, acknowledged the tragic loss of life but emphasized the injustice he suffered. Merseyside Police, which reopened the case in 2023, found no match for the DNA on the national database and are continuing efforts to identify the real perpetrator. Sullivan expressed no anger or bitterness, stating, "The truth shall set you free." ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-jail-nearly-four-decades-murder-acquitted-by-london-court-2025-05-13/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/9badb50e7bf076c6319a7aab6249a670> - Peter Sullivan, a British man wrongfully imprisoned for 38 years for the 1986 murder of Diane Sindall, was exonerated and released after new DNA evidence proved his innocence. Sullivan, who was convicted in 1987, was the longest-serving victim of wrongful conviction in the UK. Sindall, 21, was sexually assaulted and killed after her van broke down near Liverpool. Recent scientific advancements allowed for the testing of sexual fluid found at the crime scene, conclusively showing it did not belong to Sullivan. Prosecutors did not contest the appeal, acknowledging that Sullivan would not have been charged with the existing DNA evidence. The Criminal Cases Review Commission initially declined to investigate Sullivan's claims in 2008 but later reopened the case in 2021, enabling the discovery of the exonerating evidence. The Court of Appeal overturned the conviction, declaring it unsafe. Merseyside Police have reopened the investigation to find the true perpetrator, as the DNA didn't match known profiles. Outside court, Sullivan expressed no bitterness, and his sister, Kim Smith, highlighted the emotional toll on both their family and Sindall’s. Authorities have ruled out over 260 men and remain committed to finding the real killer. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/9badb50e7bf076c6319a7aab6249a670?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://ccrc.gov.uk/decision/sullivan-peter/> - Peter Sullivan was found guilty in 1987 of the murder of Diane Sindall and given a life sentence. Ms Sindall was found dead on 2 August 1986 after leaving her place of work in Bebington, Merseyside. Mr Sullivan applied to the CCRC in March 2021 raising concerns about his interviews by the police, bitemark evidence presented in his trial, and what was said to be the murder weapon. After consulting experts, the CCRC obtained DNA information from samples taken at the time of the offence. As a result, a DNA profile was obtained which did not match Mr Sullivan. The CCRC therefore sent Mr Sullivan’s conviction back to the Court of Appeal. There was also evidence to suggest there were possible breaches of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE), which regulates police activities, in relation to the interviews, as Mr Sullivan was not provided with an appropriate adult and was denied initial legal representation. Mr Sullivan had previously applied to the CCRC in 2008 questioning DNA evidence. Experts from the Forensic Science Service (FSS) advised that any further testing would be very unlikely to produce a DNA profile. Mr Sullivan’s case was not referred to the Court of Appeal by the CCRC. When Mr Sullivan applied to the CCRC in 2008 he still had a direct avenue of appeal open to him. Mr Sullivan sought leave to appeal directly in 2019, without CCRC involvement, but this was rejected by the Court of Appeal in 2021. The Court determined that the bitemark evidence, on which he was appealing his conviction, was not central to the prosecution at trial, but the CCRC has now found evidence which suggests that it was. When Mr Sullivan re-applied, the CCRC decided to revisit the possibility of DNA testing. ([ccrc.gov.uk](https://ccrc.gov.uk/decision/sullivan-peter/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://news.sky.com/story/wolfman-in-prison-since-1987-to-have-murder-conviction-re-examined-after-new-dna-evidence-13253932> - A man who has been in prison for more than 35 years for murder will have his conviction re-examined after DNA evidence emerged. Peter Sullivan was found guilty of killing Diane Sindall after she left work in Bebington, Merseyside in August 1986 and has been in prison since the following year. Sullivan, then 29, had spent the day drinking heavily after losing a darts match and went out armed with a crowbar. That's when he came across 21-year-old florist and part-time barmaid Ms Sindall as she walked to a petrol station when - according to his conviction - he beat her to death. Sullivan was dubbed the "beast of Birkenhead" or the "wolfman" because of bite marks found on the victim's body and was unanimously found guilty. But in Sullivan's third attempt to overturn his conviction, the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) has confirmed the case has been referred to the Court of Appeal. The CCRC said Sullivan applied to the body in March 2021, citing concerns over police interviews, bitemark evidence given at his trial and the murder weapon. After consulting experts, the commission said DNA information from samples taken at the time of the offence formed a profile that did not match Sullivan. There may have been breaches of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the CCRC added, as Sullivan was denied initial legal representation. Sullivan has also claimed he had not been provided with an appropriate adult during interviews. He previously applied to the body in 2008, raising questions about DNA evidence, but forensic experts said further testing was unlikely to reveal a DNA profile. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/wolfman-in-prison-since-1987-to-have-murder-conviction-re-examined-after-new-dna-evidence-13253932?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/court-of-appeal-merseyside-high-court-dna-b1193774.html> - A man who has served more than 35 years in prison for the murder of a woman who was beaten to death when she ran out of petrol has had his conviction referred to the Court of Appeal. Diane Sindall was killed in August 1986 after she left work in Bebington, Merseyside, and Peter Sullivan was convicted of her murder the following year. According to the Liverpool Echo, he had spent the day drinking heavily after losing a darts match, and went out armed with a crowbar before a chance encounter with Ms Sindall as she walked to a petrol station. On Wednesday, the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) said that Sullivan’s conviction had been referred to the Court of Appeal on the basis of DNA evidence. Samples taken at the time of the murder were re-examined and a DNA profile that did not match Sullivan was found, the commission said. Sullivan applied to the body to have his case re-examined in 2021, raising concerns about police interviews, bite mark evidence and the murder weapon. He claimed he had not been provided with an appropriate adult during interviews and was initially denied legal representation. Sullivan had previously applied to the CCRC in 2008 raising questions about DNA evidence, but forensic experts said that further testing was unlikely to reveal a DNA profile. He applied to the High Court for permission to appeal against his conviction in 2019 over bite mark evidence, but this was rejected by the Court of Appeal in 2021. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/court-of-appeal-merseyside-high-court-dna-b1193774.html?utm_source=openai))