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## Wright Inquiry - Dead governor 'blamed' over files' destruction

Responsibility for the destruction of security files on hundreds of former paramilitary prisoners in the top security Maze Prison was today laid at the feet of a Northern Ireland prison governor who has since died.

By: Press Association

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The public inquiry into allegations of state collusion in the murder of Loyalist Volunteer Force leader Billy Wright inside the Maze in 1997 was told there is no written record of the order for the destruction of the key documents.

The inquiry, chaired by Lord MacLean, is holding a week-long preliminary hearing concerned solely with the recovery of certain documents.

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It is seeking specific documents relating to the Maze Prison at the time Wright was murdered by three Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)

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inmates.

The preliminary hearings were called because the inquiry team was having difficulty getting the documents from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS).

Under questioning today, Maureen Johnson, a junior governor at Maghaberry Prison, which took over as Northern Ireland`s main jail after the Maze was closed down, said she had been told in late 2001 or 2002 by the prison governor Martin Mogg to destroy the files on some 800 inmates who had been held in the Maze but released under the Good Friday Agreement.

The files destroyed included those on the three men convicted of murdering Wright.

Mrs Johnson told Derek Bachelor QC, senior counsel for the inquiry, Mr Mogg told her to get rid of the files during a meeting in her cramped office at Maghaberry, where she was employed in the prisoner security department.

She said the files were kept in a series of filing cabinets in the office which she described as "unsightly and which took up a lot of room".

She added: "The office was quite small, with the cabinets in it you could hardly move."

She said the conversation with Mr Mogg, who has since died, turned to the files and he cited the Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection Act, which at the time had just been passed, and said the files should be destroyed.

She agreed with Mr Bachelor that she had received no written instruction, had not discussed it with her immediate boss and had made no record in her own journal of the instruction.

Mr Bachelor asked her if she had been aware that what she had done was in direct contravention of an instruction issued throughout the prison service in 1997 specifically prohibiting the destruction of records.

She said she had not been aware of the instruction.

Mr Bachelor asked her if she had realised the person who had issued the instruction was Mr Mogg when he had been the director of operations in the NIPS. Again she said she didn`t know.

Mr Bachelor commented: "All the security files on prisoners incarcerated in the Maze were destroyed after the Weston Park Agreement, which was the basis on which this inquiry was set up."

He said the destruction was "contrary to the prison service`s own policy and in face of an agreement with the Public Records Office".



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He said the destruction had been carried out without written authority and without leaving a paper trail and for what he called "questionable reasons".

The Weston Park Agreement in July 2001 led to an investigation of allegations of collusion in four murders including that of Wright - by retired Canadian judge Peter Cory.

Cory concluded there was enough evidence of possible state collusion in the murders for public inquiries to be held.

The inquiry was told that computerised records of prisoner files had been compiled some time prior to the destruction of the paper records but that not everything about each prisoner had been included.

Mr Bachelor sited the example of letters written by prisoners or transcripts of tapped phone calls made by inmates.

Earlier another witness, known only as Miss H, who gave her evidence from behind screens, detailed how she was unable to find records to send to the inquiry team in prison service headquarters.

Miss H, a civil servant who used to work in the prisoner information unit, said she had been asked for files on 28 people but had found only eight.

She said she had looked in some of the files and there was very little documentation in some of them.

The prison service set up a special team to gather information for the inquiry and Miss H handed what documentation she had to them.

She told the inquiry she could not explain why material she had given them in December 2005 had not reached the inquiry until September this year.

A member of the prison service team, also given anonymity and referred to only as Mr M, said he too was unable to offer any explanation of why it had taken nine months to send documents to the inquiry.

He revealed other documentation on prisoners at the Maze at the time of the killing no longer existed.

Intelligence files were still missing, he said, and other records had been destroyed when inmates were released from custody.

The inquiry continues.



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