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Local & National

Police give up hope of convicting Jim Gray's murderers

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Tuesday, November 20, 2007

By Deborah McAleese

Police have run out of hope of ever finding the killer of UDA terror boss Jim Gray, a senior police officer yesterday told a coroner's court.

Senior investigating officer, Detective Inspector Deborah McMaster, told an inquest into the former east Belfast 'brigadier's' murder that police have come to a dead end in their investigations.

She said she believes those responsible had UDA connections but unless they get new evidence they will soon be closing the case.

"It (the murder investigation) has more or less come to a dead end. Unless something comes to light by some other means - someone comes forward or other evidence comes to light - police are coming to a close on it," she said.

Ms McMaster also told the court that police had visited Gray on two occasions to warn him of threats to his life.

Gray was shot dead outside his father's home at Knockwood Park in the Clarawood estate at around 8pm in October 2005.

He died at the scene.

Several people have been arrested for his murder but nobody has ever been charged.

At the time of his murder Gray (47) was on bail facing money laundering charges and seven months earlier had been thrown out of the UDA by his terror associates after they became sickened by his lavish lifestyle.

Yesterday's inquest at Belfast Coroner's Court heard that Grey was shot twice at close range by a revolver.

He fell onto a grass verge after the first bullet pierced his heart and lung and was shot a second time in the body as he lay on the ground. A third shot was fired but it hit the kerb beside him.

Gray was lifting weights out of his friend Gary Matthews' car when he was shot from behind.

His father, James Gray Snr, told the court that on the night of his murder his son was watching EastEnders as he waited for Mr Matthews to call at the house with the weights and Spanish cigarettes that he had bought while on holiday.

He said that Matthews knocked on the door and Gray went outside to meet him. He said that moments later he heard what sounded like fireworks coming from outside.

As he went to close the door he heard Mr Matthews calling for an ambulance. When he looked out he saw Mr Matthews holding his son off the ground.

The coroner, John Leckey, asked Mr Gray who he thought was responsible for his son's murder and he replied: "I just could not tell that there. It's hard to know."

When asked if he thought loyalist paramilitaries were responsible he said: " Nobody else, only them ones."

Gary Matthews was at the scene when Gray was shot. However, he failed to appear to give evidence at yesterday's inquest.

Mr Leckey said he would like to see new legislation that would give coroners greater powers to help ensure witnesses are brought before the court as it can "sometimes make a mockery of an inquest when those who are key witnesses do not give evidence to the courts."

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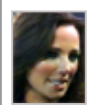
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He added that Gray's murder was "carefully planned and ruthlessly executed" and that those responsible were former UDA associates of Gray's.

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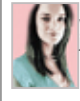
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