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Mums weep as killer of Andrew Robb and David McIlwaine yawns in court

Wednesday, 4 March 2009

A knife-wielding killer yawned repeatedly as a judge told him he may never be freed from prison for his part in the barbaric double murder of two friends nine years ago.

Convicting 28-year-old Steven Brown of murdering Protestant teenagers Andrew Robb and David McIlwaine, Belfast Crown Court judge Mr Justice Gillen warned him he faced being put behind bars for the rest of his natural life as a result of the "heinous" murders.



Murder victim Andrew Robb's heartbroken mother Anne in tears as she leaves Lagside Court in Belfast

There were emotional scenes as the judge told Brown that given the evidence against him, he had no doubt he was guilty of killing teenage friends Andrew (19) and David (18) on February 19 2000.

At the end of his three and a half hour judgement, he said that having watched Brown giving evidence, he had "no doubt whatsoever that I had seen a man whose hands had been engaged in the executions of these two young victims".

Brown, also known as Revels and from Castle Place in Castlecaulfield, stood in the dock totally impassive and yawning repeatedly as the judge delivered his damning verdicts.

However, the families of his two young victims could not contain their relief as they applauded the verdicts and wept dignified tears of sorrow in the public gallery from where they had witnessed every day of the trial.

Along with 'supergrass' Mark Burcombe and Noel Dillon, who has since killed himself, the friends had been drinking in Brown's Tandragee flat when Andrew had spoken derogatorily about UVF commander Richard Jameson, who had been gunned down by the LVF two weeks beforehand.

Incensed by the comment about his friend, Brown hatched his plan to slaughter the teenagers and after driving them to the isolated Drumminure Road just outside the town on the pretence of looking for a drugs party, butchered them with a large knife.

The friends were found lying on the blood-spattered road with horrific knife wounds to their throats and stomachs.

Burcombe, who was once a co-accused of Brown but turned 'Queen's evidence', recounted to the trial how he saw Brown repeatedly drive the knife into David as he lay wheezing and prone on the ground.

As well as Burcombe's evidence, the judge heard Brown had confessed to a woman he knew that he had been involved in the murders and that forensic evidence had been uncovered in the investigation.

Brown's DNA profile was found on David's jacket, tyre tracks similar to the Peugeot 205 car owned by Brown were uncovered at the bloody scene and pieces of green plastic from the top of an aerosol can were found at the scene with their matches discovered outside Brown's house.

Following the guilty verdicts Mr Justice Gillen told Brown the only sentence open to him to pass was one of life imprisonment and added that he would decide at a later court hearing what his

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minimum tariff would be.

The judge warned, however, that while he was keeping an open mind, the killings were "one of the most serious murders I have ever encountered", and so he was considering an option to jail Brown for the rest of his natural life.

In conclusion the judge declared: "I have no doubt whatsoever therefore that the accused was involved in a joint enterprise to murder both Mr Robb and Mr McIlwaine. In all the circumstances therefore I find the accused guilty on both counts."

As he announced the guilty verdicts, family and friends of the victims clapped but were silenced as the judge warned them that "this is a solemn occasion".

During exchanges with defence QC John McCrudden, the lawyer prevaricated whether to ask the court for probation presentence reports in case the contents would affect any future appeal by Brown.

Finally, Mr Justice Gillen told Brown: "The sentence I have to pass on you is one of life imprisonment. There is still a tariff sentence to be imposed and I will do that on April 3."

**'I won't stop until every last one is in court'**

Speaking outside Belfast Crown Court moments after the judge had delivered his guilty verdict Paul McIlwaine and his wife Gail spoke of their satisfaction after nine long years of campaigning for their murdered son David.

"We are just delighted. In saying that we had never any doubt that if we had got Revels into court, for this trial there would be this outcome. The unfortunate thing is that it should have been nine years ago, although there are issues we are going to take up at a later stage, but we are delighted with the judgment.

"The judge has been fair throughout and it's a remarkable judgment and a lengthy one as well, and I would hope, given the nature of the injuries that were inflicted, something which the judge remarked on as well, it will reflect severely on the tariff that he sets."

Asked how difficult it had been for them both to have to listen in court to how their son and his friend Andrew Robb were butchered, his weeping wife Gail said "it was just terrible", while he added, his own voice close to breaking: "It's been a very long struggle, very emotional because we didn't think we would get to here."

Mr McIlwaine said there were still "very many questions to be raised. I have no doubt there are a lot of people sitting thinking, with a sense of relief, that's it, and it's over, but believe you me, today is only the beginning of the campaign I have. I won't stop until I have every last one of them into the courts."

Commenting on the evidence of Revels' former co-accused, who turned Queen's evidence for a lesser sentence, Mr McIlwaine admitted he had "a lot of issues around Burcombe, I understand fully his evidence was used and was compelling as to the actions of Revels and Dillon, but his own role in the murders is yet to be explored. I don't believe for one minute he told the complete truth."

Asked what the past nine years have been like for the family, Gail said that they had had "our ups and downs, and things have been very, very hard and we have had our disagreements about things, but we were strong in ourselves".

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