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Lawyers for Omagh bomb victims have failed in their bid to have a book by former Prime Minister Tony Blair's chief of staff introduced at the civil trial of five men being sued over the atrocity.

Mr Justice Morgan ruled that claims in Jonathan Powell's memoirs about alleged Real IRA chief Michael McKevitt could not be admitted as evidence unless backed up by an identifiable source.

The judge also refused to allow a newspaper article from the London Independent for the same reasons.

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From The Belfast Telegraph Archives

In his book Great Hatred, Little Room

Mr Powell refers to McKeivitt, who is facing a multi-million pound lawsuit over the August 1998 Real IRA attack on Omagh which killed 29 people and injured hundreds more.

He is described as the "long-time quartermaster general of the IRA responsible for all their weapons and material", the High Court in Belfast heard.

A handwriting expert has told the Omagh bomb civil action that "rogue" interview notes were made during the questioning of one of those suspected of involvement in the atrocity.

Document examiner Kim Hughes gave his assessment to the High Court as lawyers for Colm Murphy opened their defence against claims he can be held responsible.

Murphy, 54, a building contractor from Co Louth, is one of five men being sued over the August 1998 Real IRA bombing which killed 29 people, including a woman pregnant with twins.

He denies liability along with Michael McKeivitt, Liam Campbell, Seamus McKeivitt and Seamus Daly.

In separate criminal proceedings Murphy is challenging a decision to re-try him on conspiracy charges connected to the Omagh attack.

His original conviction was overturned after it was found the Special Criminal Court in Dublin failed to give proper regard to altered interview notes by investigating Garda detectives.

Mr Hughes, a private document examiner who once worked for the Home Office Forensic Science Services, told the civil trial how he used the electrostatic detection apparatus method of studying handwriting impressions after being called examine notes from interviews with Murphy at Monaghan Garda Station in February 1999.

He said part of the documentation appeared to contain "another version" of the notes.

Mr Hughes added: "I found the indented impression of rogue handwriting." Later, Dermot Fee QC, for Murphy, read from transcripts of questioning sessions with one of the Garda detectives at the centre of the altered notes issue.

With the court told that the officer declined to make any comment, Mr Justice Morgan cast doubt on whether any adverse inference could be drawn from that.

The judge pointed out: "This man was interviewed under caution in the Republic of Ireland where he was told he was not required to say anything." Mr Fee replied: "I'm presenting this evidence to show that an experienced detective Garda, when given the opportunity to deal with the most serious allegation of altering notes and perjury, decided the proper approach to that was to say nothing.

"He may well have been given legal advice (and) in respect of the criminal context that's the approach to be taken.

"In a criminal trial no adverse inference can be drawn. I'm simply presenting the evidence to the court." The trial continues.

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