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Local & National

Omagh bomb civil action must not be 'private trial'

Friday, April 11, 2008

By Lesley-Anne Henry

A civil action being brought by the families of victims of the Omagh bomb must not become a private trial, lawyers have been warned.

Day four of the £14m lawsuit was dogged by delay as barristers for the six families and five defendants debated which statements and testimonies should be read out in court or taken as read and left up to the judge to absorb in his own time.

Presiding judge Mr Justice Morgan, who is hearing in the eight-week non-jury trial, yesterday said it was important some statements be read out in court so that the public could be kept aware of the major concerns.

"This is a public trial and I need to very careful that it doesn't turn into a private trial," he said.

The hearing was adjourned for a time to allow barristers for both sides to discuss whether evidence including telephone analysis and technical reports should be heard in court.

Families of six of those killed by the 1998 bomb are suing alleged Real IRA godfather Michael McKevitt, Seamus Daly, Seamus McKenna, Liam Campbell and Colm Murphy for exemplary damages.

All five defendants deny responsibility for the massacre.

Meanwhile a statement read to the court by Brett Lockhart QC, recalled how an assistant at a jewellery shop in Omagh watched the bombers leave the maroon Vauxhall Cavalier that exploded causing the single worst atrocity of the Troubles.

Darren Gray, who worked at Bogues Jewellers on Market Street, said he saw the man close the passenger door "very gently" and that his upper body was leaning away from the vehicle.

He described the man as between 23 and 26 years old, of light to medium build with dirty fair hair which was short at the back and sides but longer at the front. The man, he said, had sallow skin, a natural tan, clear complexion and was clean shaven.

Mr Gray, who was later blown across the road by the force of the blast, said he remembered thinking how lucky the man was for being off on a Saturday.

Another witness recalled how the driver of the bomb car let her cross a busy road. The woman, not named, was shopping with her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter.

"I remember thinking it was decent of the driver to let me across," her statement said.

The passenger in the Cavalier, which the woman said was travelling very slowly, appeared to be "crouched down" in his chair.

The case was adjourned until Monday. At hearing.

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