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## Robert Hamill inquiry: Murder suspect denies prison talk with warder

Saturday, 31 January 2009

A prison officer who knew a suspect in the murder of Robert Hamill asked him about the fatal attack while he was on remand in prison, the Hamill Inquiry heard yesterday.

William Leathem went to the same Tae Kwon Do club in Portadown as murder suspect Allister Hanvey and Robert Atkinson, a policeman accused of tipping Hanvey off to destroy clothing including a silver jacket worn on the night of the attack on Mr Hamill in April 1997.

A statement by Mr Leathem was shown in which he described speaking to Hanvey while at work in the Maze prison, where Hanvey was being held on remand. "What sort of f\*\*\*\*\*g idiot are you, did you or didn't you?" Mr Leathem said.

According to Mr Leathem's statement, Hanvey replied: "He told me he did not know because he could not remember anything about what he did that night".

Mr Leathem said he asked Mr Atkinson shortly after the death of Mr Hamill if it was true that RUC men stayed in their vehicle during the violent confrontation in which Mr Hamill died.

"[Robert] said it was "rubbish".

He said the four of them were in the Land Rover going up the other side of the street when they had seen a fight break out at the corner of Woodhouse Street.

"He said they went on up the town and came back down to where the fight was taking place. When they got to the scene of the fighting he saw Allister Hanvey standing back watching the fight. Robert told me that Allister was either drunk or high on drugs so he told him to 'f\*\*\* off home out of the road'. Allister apparently stood and argued with Robert for a while."

Mr Leathem said he was "100%" sure the conversation had taken place but Margaret Ann Dinsmore QC said her client, Mr Atkinson, was "adamant" it had not.

"You had knowledge that Allister was either drunk or high on drugs. It did not occur to you that that is information that you should perhaps have brought to the attention of the murder investigation?"

Mr Leathem said he wanted to "keep myself clean" because of his job.

Murder charges against Mr Hanvey and five others were eventually dropped. A charge of perverting the course of justice against Mr Atkinson was also dropped.

Julian Lyons, owner of Paranoid clothes shop in Portadown, said it was "possible" a silver Skanx jacket — like one seen on a suspect in the murder on the night of the attack — had been sold by the shop to Tracey Clarke, the girlfriend of Allister Hanvey.

"It was possible that Prince Charles came in and bought a pair of pink Lycra tights but I could not say that that was true," Mr Lyons said.

Barra McGrory QC, counsel for the Hamill family, said: "But we are not talking about Prince Charles buying underwear. We are talking about a man being murdered in the street and we are talking about whether he [the person responsible] can be identified from a jacket he was wearing."

At hearing.

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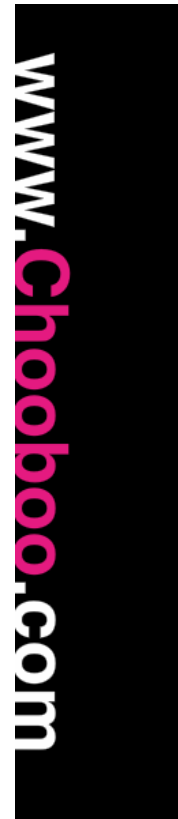
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