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Local & National

Coroner halts inquest over family claims of collusion

Suspension ordered after hearing in High Court

Wednesday, November 14, 2007

By Victoria O'Hara

An inquest into the murder of Catholic teenager Gerard Lawlor was dramatically halted after the High Court ordered a temporary suspension following family claims of collusion.

Mr Lawlor (19) was making his way home from the Bellevue Arms to the Whitewell area of north Belfast when he was shot dead on July 21, 2002.

The UFF and Red Hand Defenders both claimed responsibility for the murder at the time.

During an extensive police investigation, two men were arrested but released due to lack of evidence. However, the Lawlor family has issued a complaint to the Police Ombudsman, believing collusion was involved.

They want the inquest to be held after the full report by the Police Ombudsman into the murder is published.

Speaking outside the court on behalf of the family, solicitor Niall Murphy said the Lawlor family have concerns in relation to the suspects and subsequently have an interim relief order which was granted by Mr Justice Stevens today.

Before the inquest was halted Detective Inspector Steven Clark, a senior investigating officer into the case who is now retired, said the motive for the murder was "simple sectarian bigotry".

He said the shooting was carried out for revenge for a previous attack on a Protestant man just hours before.

Evidence was given that on the night of the murder a scooter carrying two people was spotted in the area.

DI Clark said he believed that these men were directly involved in the murder.

He said that both men who had been arrested and questioned by police were linked to loyalism.

However, the two suspects were released due to a lack of evidence.

Witness Mark O'Kane said he was driving home from the cinema when he and his girlfriend saw Mr Lawlor lying face down on Floral Road.






He also said he had passed a moped which was on the wrong side of the road on the night of the murder.

Mr O'Kane said he stopped the car and ran over to see if Mr Lawlor was okay.

"I lifted his head and he was still breathing," he said.

He added that when he lifted his head it was covered in blood and he phoned the police and ambulance.

"I lifted his head again and saw his face covered in blood but I found a pulse in his neck. His eyes were

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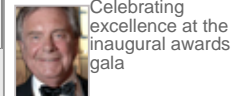
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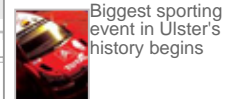
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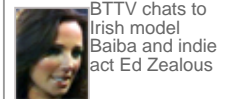
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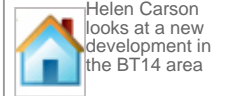
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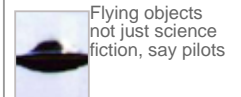
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Sunday Life

rolling back."

Ireland's Saturday Night

Mr O'Kane said a taxi then pulled up and a man he knew, Eddie Giles, got out and ran over to help.

Community Telegraph

Mr Giles, who also gave evidence, gently pulled up Mr Lawlor's top and saw a wound in the middle of his back.

A pathologist's report said that Mr Lawlor had been shot four times.

One bullet had passed his lungs and pierced his heart, the second had entered his chest and went into his spinal cord.

He was also struck in both legs.

Coroner John Leckey adjourned the inquest, adding that he would give no verdict today.

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