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Confusion over burnt Wright files

Inquiry told how crucial documents were removed from prison office

By Claire Regan

05 December 2006

A public inquiry into the murder of LVF leader Billy Wright has received yet more conflicting evidence on the destruction of files on hundreds of terrorist prisoners held at the Maze.

The Billy Wright Inquiry yesterday resumed hearing evidence at Belfast's Europa Hotel and was given contradictory accounts on how the key documents, which had been transferred from the Maze to Maghaberry after its closure, came to be incinerated.

Lord MacClean's inquiry is investigating claims of state collusion in the murder of Wright in the Maze in 1997 at the hands of INLA inmates.

A preliminary hearing held last month heard that some 800 files containing security information on terrorist prisoners released under the Good Friday Agreement had been destroyed on the orders of then prison governor Martin Mogg, who has since died. The files included those on the three men convicted of murdering Wright.

Junior governor Maureen Johnson said Mr Mogg told her they should be removed from her cramped office and destroyed - but agreed he did not give her a written order.

At yesterday's hearing, prison hospital officer Peter Dew (45) confirmed that he had burned all the files while working briefly in Maghaberry's security office in February 2002 - but kept back one relating to Wright.

He said he removed all the security files on the instruction of senior security officer Richard Malloy.

He said that when he was pulling documents from the filing cabinets to bag them he came across Wright's.

"I knew Wright had been killed in custody and thought the file might be needed at some time so I kept it," he said.

"It was by chance, I certainly didn't go looking for it. I recognised other names."

Earlier in yesterday's proceedings, Mr Malloy confirmed that he had been responsible for removing the

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documents from the Maze and taking them to the security office in Maghaberry.

He claimed, however, that he did not know what had happened to the documents afterwards and was not involved in their destruction.

"The information was removed to Maghaberry and went to a secure store, referred to as the cage, that can only be accessed by security staff. I haven't seen them since that day," he said.

"I believe they may since have been destroyed, from what I have heard from Ms Johnson's evidence."

When asked by the inquiry's senior counsel, Derek Batchelor QC, if he had been involved with pulling out or burning files, he replied: "No sir".

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