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Local & National

Cops end grilling of potential supergrass

Friday, April 11, 2008

By Chris Thornton

CHIEF REPORTER

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POLICE have finished questioning the double murder defendant who could become Northern Ireland's first supergrass-style witness in a murder trial for two decades.

Mark Burcombe (27), was re-interviewed in detail about the cut-throat murders of Andrew Robb and David McIlwaine in February 2000.

But there have been no new arrests in the aftermath of those interviews.

A new team of detectives was required to question Burcombe again after the Crown accepted his offer to give evidence against his co-accused, Steven Leslie Brown, also known as Steven Revels, in exchange for a lighter sentence.

The supergrass trials of the Eighties saw scores of terror suspects jailed, but ever since the system collapsed prosecutors have been reluctant to use the evidence of one accused person against another in the Northern Ireland courts.

However the law was changed in 2005 to make it easier for defendants to turn Queen's evidence in exchange for lighter sentences. It was first used last year, when two men testified that a number of loyalists were drug dealers.

One of the new law's requirement is that the potential supergrass must be re-questioned, but by officers who did not conduct the initial interviews.

Burcombe's interviews began in early March. They were completed four weeks later.

Paul McIlwaine, David's father, said he was concerned that there have been no new arrests.

"I would be totally opposed to any reduction in sentence if this has only been about strengthening the case that's already there," he said.

"I think there should be the basis to bring more people before the court.

"If everything about this case is being told, then they should know who gave alibis, who washed the cars, and most importantly who gave the orders."

Andrew Robb and David McIlwaine were abducted and stabbed to death in February 2000. Their bodies were left by a remote country road near Tandragee, Co Armagh. UVF members were blamed.

Brown, 27 from Castle Place, Castlecaulfield, was arrested and charged with the murders in 2000. But those charges were dropped later in the year.

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Burcombe, from Ballynahinch Road, Lisburn, came forward in 2005. He was charged with the murders and Brown was re-arrested and charged. Another man suspected of involvement, Noel Dillon, took his own life earlier in 2005.

The trial of Brown and Burcombe is due to begin in June.

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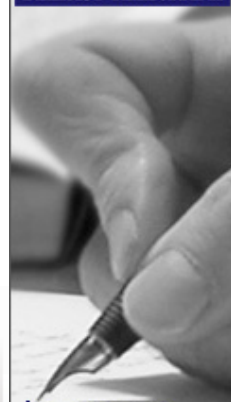


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