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Local & National

House of Lords to give ruling on inquiry

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

By Chris Thornton

The panel hearing the inquiry into the murder of Portadown man Robert Hamill is going to the UK's highest court in a bid to publicly identify police officers involved in the case.

The House of Lords has agreed to hear an appeal about whether as many as 20 serving and former officers can remain anonymous when they testify.

The inquiry - which is examining police behaviour at the time Mr Hamill was fatally beaten by a loyalist mob 10 years ago - initially ruled that the officers should be identified.

Mr Hamill was attacked in Portadown town centre in April 1997 while walking home from a night out. A nearby police patrol allegedly failed to intervene during the attack, and there have been additional accusations that a police officer advised a suspect about getting rid of evidence.

The officers who are being called to testify went to the High Court in Belfast last year and succeeded in getting the panel's decision reversed.

The inquiry appealed, but the Court of Appeal upheld the ruling that granted anonymity.

A panel led by Lord Bingham, the senior Law Lord, has now granted the inquiry's bid for a House of Lords appeal.

The hearing is expected to take place later this year.

The inquiry and lawyers involved in the case have asked for it to be looked at urgently.

The case means further delays to the start of the inquiry, which was originally set up in 2004.

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