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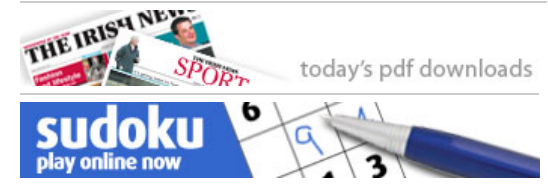
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Murder trial told defendant became pariah

By Maeve Connolly

30/09/08

ONE of those accused of murdering Ballymena schoolboy Michael McIlveen had become “public enemy number one” after he had “transferred his allegiances” from Catholic friends to Protestants, the trial heard yesterday.

A lawyer said Christopher Francis Kerr had “done the unthinkable” and that, because of this, witness Liam

Phillips was happy to back Mr Kerr's name and put the

22-year-old "into the frame".

However, Mr Phillips – who was with 15-year-old Michael on the night he was fatally attacked – said he had "no reason" to do so.

During cross-examination Antrim Crown Court heard Laurence McCrudden QC, for Mr Kerr, detail how his client had been attacked in the Co Antrim town in April 2005.

Mr McCrudden said Mr Kerr, of Carnduff Drive, had been hospitalised after having his leg broken by a hurling stick in an attack in the top, or Catholic, end of the town a year before Michael was murdered and that he had previously lived in that area.

When asked, the witness confirmed that he had known Mr Kerr had "got a beating from people".

The lawyer said Mr Kerr's was "the most unpopular name" that could be mentioned among young people in that area and for those reasons Mr Phillips – in a "complete and utter exaggeration" – had placed the defendant at the front of a crowd of more than 30 Protestant youths who had chased him, Michael and another Catholic teenager through the town. Mr Phillips rejected the suggestion.

Asked whether Mr Kerr had used any "vulgar, sectarian language" towards the three friends, the witness said: "Not that I remember."

When it was put to him that Mr Kerr "did nothing" when allegedly urged by others to hit one of the teenagers, he replied: "That's correct".

The court has previously heard Mr Phillips describe how he had seen Michael and defendant Jeff Colin Lewis (19) from Rossdale fighting in an alley but had been pulled into a garden and had therefore not witnessed the fatal attack.

Mervyn Wilson Moon (20) of Douglas Terrace has already pleaded guilty to murder.


Five others are charged with murder and a sixth faces lesser charges.

Mr McCrudden put it to the witness that he could only have found out what happened in the alley from the key witness who has already given evidence, but Mr Phillips said he had not spoken about the attack since because "it hurts too much to talk about it".

The trial continues.

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