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Wall of 'amnesia' blocks truth in Hamill inquiry

By Barry McCaffrey

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CONCERNS have been raised at the public inquiry into Robert Hamill's death over the apparent collective amnesia of some witnesses.

In recent weeks barristers have voiced concerns that a "wall of silence" among some witnesses was threatening to block the inquiry from uncovering the full truth surrounding the killing of the Portadown man.

Rory Robinson was one of six men charged with Mr Hamill's murder in May 1997 before the charges were dramatically dropped a year later.

The 37-year-old was identified by witnesses, including four police officers, as having been involved in the attack on Mr Hamill.

One police officer said that he had been forced to hit Robinson in the chest with his baton to stop him from breaking through police ranks to attack Mr Hamill on the ground.

However, when Robinson gave evidence to the public inquiry yesterday he said he could not remember anything about the night of Mr Hamill's attack and couldn't even remember being in Portadown.

Asked by barrister Ashley Underwood if a statement he had made to the inquiry was accurate, Robinson replied: "I can't remember, my memory is blank."

Asked when he had lost his memory, Robinson replied: "I'm not sure."

When challenged that a previous witness had admitted that he, Robinson and two others had been involved in the initial confrontation with Mr Hamill, Robinson replied: "I don't even know the fella."

Another witness at the scene reported that Robinson had been "running around like a headless chicken".

At least three civilian witnesses identified Robinson as kicking and stamping on Mr Hamill.

One policeman reported seeing Robinson and others kicking Mr Hamill's defenceless body on the ground.

However the 37-year-old repeatedly denied involvement.

"Not true, I wasn't there," he said.

Questioned on how he felt when he found out that Mr Hamill had died, Robinson replied: "I can't remember."

Asked by barrister Kevin O'Hare, representing police officers, if Mr Hamill's death was "just another dead fenian", Robinson repeated: "I can't remember."

Asked why so many police officers and civilian witnesses had implicated him in the attack, he replied: "I don't know."

Challenged if he had thought about Mr Hamill's death in the 12 years since the attack, he said: "I wouldn't really think about it because I wasn't there."

When reminded that he had made a statement in 2007 admitting being in Portadown, he answered: "If I could remember that far back. I probably was."

When admonished by the inquiry chairman for evading the barrister's questions, Robinson replied: "That's not true."

When asked by the Hamill family's lawyer, Barra MacGrory QC, if he could recall tensions in Portadown in 1997, he replied: "I don't know."

Asked if he had been interested in the Troubles, he said: "No, I can't remember."

Questioned if he'd been aware that the north had suffered 30 years of violence, he replied: "I don't remember."

In a bizarre series of answers Robinson went on to claim that he had never heard of the IRA, UVF, LVF or even the Maze prison, where he had spent five months awaiting trial for murder.

Asked if he considered the LVF and UVF to have been dangerous organisations, whose sole aim had been to kill Catholics, he replied: "I couldn't tell you."

Questioned if he could remember being charged with murder, he replied: "No."

Asked if he could remember going to prison, he replied: "No."

Asked the name of the prison where he was held, he replied: "I can't remember."

When he claimed never to have heard of the Maze Prison, despite having spent five months as an inmate, inquiry chairman Sir Edwin Jowitt asked: "Does the 'dirty protest' not ring a bell with you?"

Robinson replied: "No."

He said he could not remember why he had asked to be held on the LVF wing in the prison, while his five co-accused had all gone to a UVF wing.

When an increasingly nervous Robinson was asked why he kept staring at a clock on the wall: "I've a child to collect at three o'clock."

Barrister Margaret Ann Dinsmore QC asked Robinson how long he had been married, he replied: "I can't remember."

When asked by Ms Dinsmore: "What is the last thing you do remember?" Robinson replied: "Drinking that glass of water."

Asked how he had never seen coverage of the Troubles, despite owning a television for 20 years, he replied: "I

remember this now and tomorrow I could forget about it.”

However, Robinson’s memory loss reached a new high when he forgot that he had a loyalist tattoo commemorating 1690 on his arm.

He initially denied that the words ‘Rem 1690’ were tattooed on his arm.

When challenged to allow the inquiry to see the tattoo, Robinson declined, claiming

it was not relevant to the

inquiry.

When Sir Edwin reminded Robinson that it was he who would decide what evidence was heard in the inquiry,

Robinson’s barrister asked for an adjournment to consult with his client.


When proceedings resumed the inquiry was informed that Mr Robinson now accepted that ‘Rem 1690’ was tattooed on his arm.

With that, Robinson was thanked for his evidence and invited to leave the inquiry.

Minutes later Sir Edwin informed the inquiry that the PSNI would now be invited to help Robinson improve his memory.

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