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## Police were told of threat to loyalist

[\(Irish News\)](#)

Police were alerted the night before a loyalist paramilitary assassin carried out a grudge killing, an inquest was told yesterday (Friday).

A detective also confirmed a car used in the murder of William 'Wassy' Paul was stopped by officers hours before the shooting.

Paul (49) was gunned down at point-blank range outside his home in Bangor, Co Down in July 1998.

Notorious paramilitary Frankie Curry confessed to the killing, along with up to 18 others, days before his own violent death less than a year later.

The two men had been locked in a bitter feud since Curry allegedly drove a car at Paul's brother, then warned him to drop charges before wounding him in a shooting, Belfast Coroner's Court was told.

Paul's widow, Sarah, told the hearing how the hatred intensified when she saw her husband batter his enemy after chasing him through Bangor.

"Wassy trailed Frankie Curry around and headbutted him," she said.

"I heard Wassy tell him if he ever went near his family again he would beat him to death. He wouldn't need a gun."

Following the confrontation with 46-year-old Curry – who had links to various shadowy loyalist outfits – Paul received a series of death threats, the inquest was told.

He met with loyalist paramilitary representatives who assured him their organisations were not involved.

Even though security cameras were fitted at his Glastry Gardens home to increase protection, Paul was shot three times as he returned from getting his morning newspapers.

His widow recalled seeing the gunman, masked in a red,

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white and blue balaclava, before he got into a waiting Ford Orion car. She immediately knew from his distinctive, sloping run that it was Curry, the inquest heard.

"I saw Wassy lying on the side of the square. His two papers were lying beside him," she said.

"I knelt down beside him, I knew he was dead and I lay over him.

"Everything went into slow motion and I started screaming 'Frankie Curry shot my husband'."

Questioned by her lawyer Philip Henry, Mrs Paul confirmed that she believed the man driving the Orion, which was later found burnt out, was Thomas Maginnis.

Maginnis (44) was later charged with murdering Paul and three others, after being secretly recorded admitting the crimes to police officers.

But he was later freed after a judge ruled the confessions were inadmissible.

The loyalist, from Newtownards, Co Down, and said to have an IQ of 67, is now believed to be living at an unknown location outside Northern Ireland.

Mrs Paul told the hearing how his girlfriend at the time, Sonia Adams, contacted her after her husband's murder to say she had been in touch with police the night before the shooting.

"She said that she told him Frankie Curry and Thomas Maginnis had been in her house.

"She said they were about to carry out a murder."

Questioned about any tip-offs, Detective Chief Inspector Jeff Smyth spoke of the risk to witnesses if he was to reveal what information was passed to police.

But it was confirmed that Ms Adams made a statement and contacted police the night before the shooting.

The officer also told the hearing: "I do believe the vehicle [the Ford Orion] was stopped by police in the Newtownards sub-division at that time."

He agreed with Mr Henry's assessment that the car was then allowed to drive on.

However, it is understood that the vehicle check was for motoring matters. No suggestion was made either that either of the men linked to Paul's shooting were inside.

Coroner John Leckey interrupted Mr Henry when he asked whether the detective believed the murder could have been prevented if different actions had been taken.

"It's impossible for the chief inspector to answer that," Mr Leckey said.

"Would that not be a matter for the police ombudsman to examine."

The killer sprang from the boot of the Orion and opened fire at close range, Mr Smyth said.

The weapon used in the shooting had no previous history and no paramilitary organisation claimed responsibility.

"We suspect that there had been a personal vendetta motive that brought about Mr Paul's being murdered," the detective said.

"Our investigations suggest Mr Curry was indeed the gunman and acted in concert with an accomplice, Mr Maginnis, who we believe was the driver of the car."

After Mr Leckey expressed astonishment that Curry boasted to journalists about carrying out a string of killings, Mr Smyth replied: "That was the character of that person.

"He would often speak about his evil deeds."

Mr Leckey told the victim's relatives he understood how they felt something could have been done to prevent the murder.

"All families in similar situations engage in some soul-searching that the outcome could have been different if earlier action had been taken."

In his findings, the coroner confirmed Paul had been shot three times outside his home.

"Whilst there was no claim of responsibility it is believed the gunman was Frankie Curry, now deceased, and the motive for the murder was personal," Mr Leckey said.

"The identification of the person believed to have driven Frankie Curry to the scene is known to police."

Outside the court, Mrs Paul spoke of her nine-year fight to

get justice.

"It's my belief if the information from Sonia Adams, Maginnis's girlfriend, had been acted on I wouldn't have to be in the coroner's court today," she said.

"She gave information to police before which was acted upon. They knew her and knew it wasn't just a story."

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