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Thursday, February 26, 2009

Four found guilty of sectarian killing of schoolboy (15)



Aaron Wallace

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FOUR YOUNG Ballymena men were yesterday convicted of the “savagely and brutal” sectarian killing of schoolboy Michael McIlveen in Co Antrim.

Three of the accused have been jailed for life for the murder of the 15-year-old Catholic schoolboy, who was commonly known as “Mickey-Bo”, while sentence on the fourth accused, convicted of manslaughter, has been adjourned until April.

Those convicted of the murder – Jeff Colin Lewis (19), Rosedale, Christopher Francis Kerr (22), Carnduff Drive and Aaron Cavana Wallace (20), Moat Road – will also learn in April the minimum term they must serve before they are considered for release.

Facing jail for manslaughter is Christopher Andrew McLeister (18) of Knockeen Crescent.

To be jailed along with the four convicted yesterday is Meryvn Wilson Moon (20), from Douglas Terrace, also Ballymena, who had earlier pleaded guilty to murder. Moon will also be sentenced in April. A sixth accused, Paul Edward David Henson (18) of Condiere Avenue, could also be jailed for affray and criminal damage.

After the 52-day trial, which was spread over four months, it took the Antrim Crown Court jury of eight women and three men just over seven hours to hand down their judgment.

McIlveen died in hospital on May 8th, 2006 from head injuries, the day after he was beaten with a baseball bat by Protestant youths who chased him and a friend.

This is the second jury to be told that McIlveen and his friend's only crime was being "Catholics, no other reason", and they were chased after going looking for a Protestant friend among a crowd of drunken sectarian teenagers.

They chased him down an alleyway where he tried to talk himself out of trouble, only to be set upon. One of the gang, Moon, "nailed" him with a baseball bat, swinging it overhead, and also as if he were taking a golf swing.

The others, surrounding the defenceless teenager, "put the boot in", and the hail of blows fractured his skull on both sides which formed a blood clot and multiple bruising of the brain.

Unaware of his fatal injuries McIlveen, with the help of friends, stumbled home and went to bed. The family was later alerted by phone that McIlveen was the victim of a "a brutal and savage attack".

They called an ambulance, but despite all efforts, he died the following day.

The jury, by direction of the court, have already acquitted another accused, 18-year-old Peter Gavin McMullan of Meadowvale, after he pleaded guilty to causing criminal damage to a gate of a house in Granville Drive, backing onto the alleyway in which McIlveen was attacked.

McIlveen's sister Jodie read a statement on behalf of the family.

"We now feel that justice has been done for Michael.

"We now want to take this time to thank the witness who came forward and told their story, and the police, prosecutors, friends and family. The McIlveen family sympathises with the families of the accused. Now the trial is over, now we can try and rebuild our lives."

Det Supt Raymond Murray, who headed the murder team, said: "It was a big result in a very high-profile murder case."

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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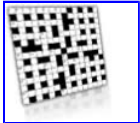
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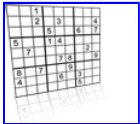
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