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Thursday, January 15, 2009

Hamill died from massive brain injuries, inquiry told

DAN KEENAN, Northern News Editor

ROBERT HAMILL, the 25-year-old Catholic assaulted in the centre of Portadown in April 1997, died as a result of widespread brain injuries caused by punching, kicking and stamping, the inquiry into his death has been told in Belfast.

Lead counsel to the inquiry, Ashley Underwood QC, told the panel the postmortem report concluded that the dead man suffered brain injuries not unlike those likely to be suffered in a car crash.

Yesterday's hearings were interrupted by a series of delays.

The first witness, Dr Boon Low was a senior house officer at Craigavon Area Hospital on the night Robert Hamill was assaulted by loyalists in Portadown.

Dr Low was working in the hospital's accident and emergency unit when Mr Hamill was brought in by ambulance staff.

Questioned by Mr Underwood, he detailed the treatment Mr Hamill received upon his admission.

Dr Low's medical notes record that Mr Hamill was "unresponsive" and that his oxygen saturation levels were very low, signalling that "something was very, very wrong".

There was evidence of some injury to the brain, he added.

The inquiry also heard Dr Low's account of another patient, known as D, who was also transported to the same hospital AE by the same ambulance.

This patient had been unconscious, but was not as seriously injured as Mr Hamill.

The doctor told the inquiry he thought the two patients had been injured in the same incident, but he could not tell if the two knew each other.

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A document detailing Mr Hamill's blood analysis was shown to the inquiry. Dr Low said the figures recorded on the sheet were "basically normal". Counsel for the inquiry said that this information shed little light on Mr Hamill's condition and Dr Low agreed.

The inquiry plans today to question Prof Jack Crane, the Northern Ireland State Pathologist who carried out the postmortem on Mr Hamill; and Dr Brian Herron, a neuropathologist.

Tomorrow Dr William Lawler, the inquiry's independent pathologist, will be questioned along with two nurses, Maureen Hagan and Maureen Millar, who treated Mr Hamill at Craigavon Area Hospital.

Further witness statements will also be read out.

This should conclude the medical evidence and the first civilian witness is expected to take the stand on Tuesday of next week.



This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

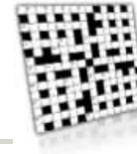
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