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Police unable to establish feud link to man's murder

By Barry McCaffrey

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MURDER: The scene of the murder of builder Jameson Lockhart, who was shot dead in his lorry in east Belfast in July 2006. An inquest held yesterday was told that police were unable to establish whether a loyalist feud going on at the time was a factor in the father-of-one's murder and the case would not be reopened unless new evidence came to light

A SENIOR police officer has told a coroner that detectives still have to establish whether a north Belfast builder was killed as part of a loyalist feud.

Jameson Lockhart (25) was shot seven times as he sat in a lorry at a demolition site in east Belfast in July 2005.

An inquest yesterday heard a statement from the dead man's partner, Emma Nesbitt, which said the father-of-one had previously been threatened by the UVF.

Ms Nesbitt had moved out of the couple's home after a previous gun attack on Mr Lockhart's van.

He had been due to give evidence at the trial of a man accused of the attempted murder bid.

Ms Nesbitt said as a result of the death threats, her partner had been "very cautious" about his movements and only visited her late at night without warning, being dropped off by a friend.

She had last seen him on the day before his murder.

Ms Nesbitt said shortly before his killing, graffiti had appeared on walls on the Shankill Road warning that Mr Lockhart was a "dead man walking".

The inquest also heard from a Belfast City Council employee who had been driving a bin lorry past the

demolition site shortly before the attack.

The driver said a work colleague on the lorry had recognised Mr Lockhart and shouted out to him as they drove past.

He said his colleague expressed surprise that he was working in east Belfast stating: "He's pushing his luck being over this side of town. He hangs around with the LVF."

Minutes later Mr Lockhart was shot dead.

Detective Chief Inspector Deborah McMaster said a lone gunman wearing a baseball cap and a scarf shot the victim seven times as he sat in the driver's seat of the vehicle.

The gunman and an accomplice ran off to a waiting car which was found burned out a short distance away.

The car had been bought in Glengormley two weeks earlier and had been fitted with false number plates.

Ms McMaster said 16 people had been questioned about the murder, with 24 premises searched and 600 items seized.

However, no-one had been charged with the killing and the officer said the murder case would only be reopened if new evidence came to light.

She said while a loyalist feud had been taking place at the time of Mr Lockhart's murder, police had been unable to establish a definite motive.

Charges against a north Belfast man who had been due to go on trial for the previous attempted murder bid on Mr Lockhart were withdrawn the week after his death.

Three other men were later killed before the LVF/UVF feud was brought to an end.

Coroner Suzanne Anderson said the 25 year-old's murder had been "callous and cold-blooded" and expressed sympathy to the dead man's family.

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