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## Local & National

### A village gripped by disgust

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

By Claire McNeilly in Cullyhanna

After the screams of anguish came the silence, the anger, the bitterness, the recriminations.

Cullyhanna was not a pleasant place to be yesterday.

You could almost feel the tension in the air, the nausea and disgust over what happened to one of their own.

The political fall-out from Paul Quinn's brutal murder will be felt elsewhere - but here in the Co Armagh village, all they could think about was the unspeakable agony of the young man's final moments.

It has emerged that virtually every bone in the 21-year old's body was broken as he was bludgeoned to death by iron bars and pick-axe handles in a remote Co Monaghan shed.

Some of Paul's friends, who had been abducted as part of the ruthless gang's plan, were forced to listen to him screaming, begging for his life. They were even taunted about it; one assailant shouted: "Can you hear your friend squealing?"

Towards the end, they couldn't, but the merciless beating went on regardless.

Paul's heartbroken family were too distressed to talk yesterday, but their grief was palpable as cars bearing other loved ones, close friends and well-wishers continued to arrive at their bungalow. And while the Quinns prepare to bury their youngest son, there have been emotional scenes in the small neighbourhood and reports of house windows being smashed as tempers flare under the backlash of this horrific murder.

"The community are very upset and numb at the death of someone who died in such tragic circumstances, so young," said local priest Fr Kevin Cullen.

"I was speaking with Paul's family yesterday and they are in a great state of shock."

Outside the house, a tearful family member admitted: "We are not fit to talk about this yet. We are trying to deal with what has happened."

Mr Quinn was pronounced dead at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital shortly after the savage assault by up to 10 men on Saturday night.

His parents have blamed the Provisional IRA - a claim denied by Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, who insists it was linked to fuel smuggling in the area.

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But senior gardai across the border say they believe the fatal beating was meted out following two previous run-ins Mr Quinn had with local republicans.

Former Sinn Fein councillor and close family friend Jim McAllister (64) said: "Personally, I want to believe that this was a punishment beating gone wrong.

"For a while his family, local people - and even Paul himself - have been waiting for retaliation. He thought he would get a few thumps. He was expecting it from the IRA."

The victim was thought to have ignored warnings to leave the country from former Provisional "heavies" following two separate altercations with republicans.

"Everyone believes it has to do with those two incidents," said Mr McAllister.

"In one case a number of lads attempted to abuse him, but Paul stood up for himself.

"Three of them ran off and one - the son of a prominent republican in the area - got a couple of thumps. Then, a couple of months later, another republican got a black eye."

Mr McAllister added: "Paul wasn't a man to bow the head or take instructions and in this area you've got to do what you're told or shut up."

Mr Quinn was lured to a farm shed at Tullycorra, Drumnacrib, near Castleblaney, where he was set upon by masked men.

He suffered massive injuries to his head, shoulders, arms and legs, his broken body left virtually unrecognisable to loved ones. His friends were also beaten up but survived. Mr McAllister said that the other victims remain deeply shocked and traumatised.

"They heard Paul screaming," he said.

"They heard them beating him. And when Paul's voice finally stopped, they still kept beating him.

"They said to them: 'You can hear your friend squealing. We'll show you who rules this area'."

He added: "There has been a backlash in the community. I think there is an element of fatalism setting in among young men and they don't see what direction politics is going. There is anger.

"Windows were broken in a house in this village last night connected to one of the lads involved in this dispute, but we hope that as the days pass things will calm down and people will see the best road to go."

Mr Quinn's death is the second tragedy in as many months to rock the close-knit village following the death of 18-year-old Brendan McCooey, who drowned whilst on holiday in Crete.

Mr Quinn was among a group of young men on the trip to Greece in August with the teenager - who was his best friend - and the last person to speak to him alive.

A young Cullyhanna man, who asked not to be named, said that the deaths of both men in such close proximity has brought the small community to its knees.

"It shouldn't have happened," he said.

"You don't like to see that happen to someone that age. I feel for his family. Paul and Brendan were best friends. There are two young lads that should have been growing up with us and we'll never see them again."

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