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## Robert Hamill: Man who saw attack denies seeing friend among mob

By Emily Moulton  
Thursday, 26 February 2009

A childhood friend of one of the men charged in connection with the murder of Robert Hamill "did not think" to tell police that his friend was not among the mob which beat the Portadown man to death 12 years ago, an inquiry heard yesterday.

Neil Ritchie, who was in the town with friends the night Mr Hamill was killed, was responding to questions from barrister Barra McGrory, who is representing the Hamill family at the inquiry into the Catholic father-of-three's death.

The 30-year-old told the hearing that he remembered hearing a woman screaming as he walked passed the Boots chemist and saw what appeared to be a little "commotion" just past the church. However, he could not recall seeing anyone he recognised.

Earlier, part of his police interview from 1997 was read out to the hearing in which Mr Ritchie had told police he saw a group of about 15-20 males and females fighting amongst each other but he did not recognise any of them.

When pressed by Mr McGrory if he remembered anything about that night, Mr Ritchie, who was 19 at the time, said he could not.

"Would you say this was a very significant event in your life?," Mr McGrory asked.

"Yes it was," he replied, "someone was killed."

"And you were close to where someone was beaten to death. Is that something that has printed on your mind?"

"I was just glad I was not involved in it," Mr Ritchie responded.

It then emerged Mr Ritchie had been a close personal friend of Allister Hanvey — one of the five people charged with Mr Hamill's murder. The charges were later dropped.

Mr McGrory then asked Mr Ritchie if Mr Hanvey was someone who was "instantly recognisable" to him, to which he replied yes, however he still insisted that he did not recognise anyone in the crowd that night.

"Do you remember a number of people being charged with his (Mr Hamill) murder and one of those people was Allister Hanvey who you know. Did it not occur to you to tell police that 'I did not see Allister getting involved in that?'," Mr McGrory asked.

"I could not recognise anyone," he replied.

"The fact that you did not recognise anyone, did it not occur to you to tell the police," Mr McGrory asked.

"No," Mr Ritchie replied.



"So you turned round at Boots, you observed 15-20 people fighting, you made a good enough assessment to know that you did not know any of them is that right?" Mr McGrory went on.

"I did not recognise anyone. I was pretty drunk," he replied.

"But if you saw Allister Hanvey you would recognise him?" Mr McGrory asked again.

"Not necessarily," he said.

The inquiry then heard that two witnesses, Timothy Jameson and Tracey Clarke — the then girlfriend of Mr Hanvey and mother to his children — both gave statements to police in 1997

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naming Mr Hanvey as one of the men involved in the vicious beating of Mr Hamill.

Mr Jameson had said in his police statement that he saw Mr Hanvey punching and kicking someone on the ground.

Ms Clarke had also identified her then boyfriend Allister Hanvey as one of the men who attacked Mr Hamill.

Mr McGrory then asked Mr Ritchie if he was so positive that he did not see anyone why he never came forward to clear his friend, Mr Hanvey, of any wrongdoing — to which Mr Ritchie replied no.

“I am suggesting to you that you had a perfectly good view of who was fighting and that you saw a lot more than you are letting on,” Mr McGrory then said. “No, no,” Mr Ritchie replied.

*At hearing.*

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