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Farmer linked to collusion defended

By Margaret Canning

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A SPOKESMAN for a Co Armagh victims group has defended the deceased farmer linked to the loyalist

Glenanne gang which carried out murders on both sides of the border in the 1970s.

James Mitchell (88), from Glenanne, Co Armagh, died in Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry on Saturday night.

Willie Frazer, from victims group Fair, attended his funeral in Tullyallen on Monday.

Mr Mitchell and eight others were named in reports by Mr Justice Henry Barron into the 1974 loyalist bombings of Dublin and Monaghan which killed 33 people including a pregnant woman.

The judge said it was likely that the farm belonging to Mr Mitchell – also an RUC reservist at the time – played “a significant part in the preparation for the attacks” and provided a base for the UVF men behind a series of bombings and murders in the mid-1970s including the Miami Showband massacre.

On January 4 1976 the Glenanne gang gunned down the Reavey brothers, John Martin (24), Brian (22) and Anthony (17) at their home in Whitecross.

John Martin and Brian died at the scene. Anthony appeared to recover but collapsed and died of a brain haemorrhage less than a month later.

The Historical Enquiries Team last year described the brothers as “innocent victims of senseless sectarian violence”.

On the same night three members of the O'Dowd family were killed in a coordinated attack in Gilford, Co Down.

The day after the Reavey brothers were killed, the IRA murdered 10 Protestant workers in Kingsmill, Co Armagh.

Mr Frazer said he believed Mr Mitchell was innocent of the Barron report's allegations.

“It was all hearsay and nothing was ever proved against him,” he said.

“He was a police officer and probably did know individuals who did get caught up and get involved in certain things but we have checked into his background and while I'm not saying we know everything about him – we don't – I know a lot of allegations against him were disproved.

“I'm not saying he was lily-white but he was a decent man who was never known to be involved in the Reavey murders.”

Members of the RUC and UDR were involved in the Glenanne gang killings including police officers Billy McCaughey and John Weir.

Sinn Fein Newry and Armagh MP Conor Murphy said Mr Mitchell's death was a reminder of collusion between “British state forces and unionist death squads”.

Human rights organisation the Pat Finucane Centre and victims' group Justice for the Forgotten, which has campaigned for a public inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, said it would be “inappropriate” for

them to comment on Mr Mitchell's death.

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