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Catholic boy was killed 'for one reason only' murder trial is told

By Maeve Connolly

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MICHAEL McIlveen suffered a "brutal and savage attack" after being subjected to sectarian insults, the court heard at the opening of his murder trial.

The prosecution said the Catholic teenager was murdered in May 2006 for "one reason and one reason only".

Coleraine Crown Court heard that the 15-year-old from Ballymena was struck on the head with a baseball bat

during an attack by a group who were later captured on CCTV footage at a Chinese takeaway and filling station.

Six people from the town are accused of murder and causing an affray while a seventh, Paul Edward David Henson (18), from Condiere Avenue in Ballymena, is charged with affray and criminal damage.

The six are Jeff Colin Lewis (19) from Rosssdale, Mervyn Wilson Moon (20) of Douglas Terrace, Christopher Francis Kerr (22) of Carnduff Drive, Aaron Cavana Wallace (20) from Moat Road, Christopher Andrew McLeister (18) of Knock Crescent and a 17-year-old who cannot be identified because of his age.

Mr Lewis and the youth are also accused of criminal damage. All seven accused deny the charges.

Opening the prosecution case John Orr QC said Michael McIlveen and two Catholic friends were called "Fenian b*****s" and told "You shouldn't be in our area" by a group of up to 40 people gathered in a car park beside the town's cinema and leisure centre.

Mr Orr told the jury that Michael had approached the group and CCTV footage showed him standing talking to them with his hands outstretched, palms up.

The court also heard that a police vehicle which had been in the car park drove away not long after the three teenagers arrived.

One of the young people received a call on his mobile phone from his father asking him to return home and he started to leave but changed his mind when the crowd "jeered" him for abandoning his friends, Mr Orr said.

After references about giving him "a hiding" were overheard the prosecution said he and Michael McIlveen ran away but the third person remained.

Mr Orr said CCTV footage showed a number of people giving chase to the teenagers whose friend later found them hiding in an alleyway beside a car park in the centre of town.

He said the court would hear that their pursuers then entered the alleyway and there was a fight between Mr Lewis and Michael McIlveen.

Mr Orr said Mr Moon "appeared at the scene carrying a baseball bat" which he used to knock Michael McIlveen to the ground and that Mr Lewis was seen kicking the injured teenager.

He claimed Mr Kerr had gone to his nearby home to collect a baseball bat.

The court heard how Michael McIlveen's friend helped him to his feet afterwards but the teenager "didn't appear to be talking normally and was scrabbling around on the ground as if looking for something that wasn't there".

He walked Michael home from where the school-boy was taken to hospital and placed on a life-support machine.

Mr Orr said a postmortem examination revealed that the teenager's skull had been fractured on either side and that he had suffered bruising to the brain.

Meanwhile, the trial is to move to Antrim Crown Court after a combined submission by the prosecution and defence claiming that the courtroom was too small and could jeopardise a fair trial.

Extra seats were brought in yesterday to accommodate the seven defendants' legal teams while on previous days their families had been unable to enter the courtroom due to space constraints.

Mr Justice Treacy expressed his surprise that the complaint had been made months after Coleraine was named as the venue, adding that many of the legal teams were familiar with the dimensions of that courthouse.

The trial continues.

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