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Murder suspect had made informer claim

By Seamus McKinney

23/02/08

A MAN arrested by police in connection with the murder of Strabane man Andrew Burns went public in 2005 over alleged police attempts to recruit them as informers.

Brendan 'Ben' Stewart from Strabane was one of three men arrested in a series of early morning operations yesterday.

Police, wearing white forensic evidence suits, also searched a number of premises in the Co Tyrone town

during the arrest operation.

Mr Stewart (42) was arrested along with an 18-year-old man and a 33-year-old man. All three were still being questioned by police last night.

Mr Burns (27) was shot dead at Doneyloop, near the Donegal/Tyrone border, on Tuesday February 12.

A former member of the Real IRA, Mr Burns was last seen alive on his way to a bar in Strabane at around 6.45pm on the night of his death.

Just 30 minutes later he was found in the middle of the road at Doneyloop - six miles from Strabane - suffering gunshot wounds to his stomach. Despite the efforts of an off-duty nurse, Mr Burns died at the scene.

It subsequently emerged that Mr Burns had been the victim of a so-called punishment attack by the Real IRA two years ago. A painter and decorator by trade, he was understood to be a supporter of dissident republican groups.

The Irish News has learned that Mr Burns - along with Mr Stewart - was one of five Strabane men who claimed the PSNI tried to recruit them as informers in 2005.

The five men went public on their claims in an article in the now defunct Daily Ireland newspaper. Mr Burns and Mr Stewart both appeared in a photograph published in the newspaper with the story.