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## Sisters brought case to a global audience

BY Allison Morris

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There were chaotic scenes in Belfast Crown Court number 12 yesterday as the judgment in one of the most high-profile murder cases of recent years was delivered.

The investigation into the murder of Robert McCartney in 2005 has attracted worldwide media coverage and yesterday's proceedings were to be no different.

In excess of 30 journalists, backed up by a legion of photographers and cameramen waiting in the rain outside, had descended upon Laganside courthouse in Oxford Street.

In an unprecedented turn of events, a court clerk handed out copies of the judgement to several journalists before Justice Gillen had taken his position at head of the court to deliver his findings, which ran to 75 pages.

As word of the not guilty verdicts leaked to the public gallery where Mr McCartney's grieving partner and sisters had gathered along with around 30 other relatives, there were gasps of horror before many walked out.

Bridgeen Hagan, Mr McCartney's long term partner and mother of his two sons, had spent only minutes in court. She did not return to hear the senior judge deliver his ruling in person.

Family members of the three men acquitted of all charges sat off to the side of the public gallery and remained in their seats impassively throughout the lengthy judgement.

Justice Gillen arrived to an already tense courtroom just after 10.30am and began by apologising to the families for what he said was an "administrative error" in the premature delivery of the judgement.

He then went through his findings page by page in a process that lasted over two hours.

Terence Davison (51), charged with Mr McCartney's murder, sat smartly dressed and staring straight ahead throughout.

He showed no reaction to the not guilty verdict and did not speak to his co-accused either inside or outside of the dock.

James McCormick (39) appeared emotional and stared upward as Justice Gillen went through the various discrepancies in witness statements that had brought him to his decisions.

Joseph Fitzpatrick (47), dressed casually, also showed little reaction to his acquittal on charges of affray.

As Justice Gillen concluded his judgement, only a scattering of people remained in the previously packed public gallery.

The press pack that had lined both sides of the court had also thinned considerably.

Outside in the rain, the McCartney family conducted a few interviews before leaving ahead of the emergence of the three men who had stood accused.

Police dressed in public order dress – in the end an unnecessary precaution – also cleared the front of the building.

As the three men left the building separately, cameras caught them for one last time as they made the short walk to the Markets area – just yards from the maze of streets where an argument in a bar had ended in the murder of Robert McCartney three years ago.


His death now joins thousands of other unsolved cases left on the PSNI books.

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