Sisters deny Hamill provoked assault

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GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

TWO SISTERS who were with Robert Hamill the night he was fatally assaulted in Portadown have denied suggestions he was part of a group of Catholics who uttered sectarian comments that may have provoked the assault, the Robert Hamill Inquiry has heard.

The sisters, Witness E and Witness F, said 25-year-old Mr Hamill and his friend – the husband of Witness E – were beaten in a totally unprovoked attack in the centre of Portadown, Co Armagh in late April 1997.

Witness F said a crowd of up to 30 loyalists were involved in the attack on Mr Hamill and her brother-in-law, known as Witness D. "I remember them kicking at his head and shouting, 'Die you Fenian bastard'," she said. Mr Hamill died 11 days later.

The inquiry is investigating a range of allegations, including a claim that RUC officers who were close to the scene failed in their duty to intervene, that one officer colluded with one of the suspects, that suspects were not detained on the night, and that the crime scene was not properly maintained by investigating officers.

Mr Hamill and the other three were returning from a night out early in the morning of Sunday April 27th, 1997, when they were attacked in Portadown.

Ashley Underwood, QC, chief lawyer for the inquiry, referred to contradictory evidence that is to be given to the inquiry in which it will be claimed that one of a small group of nationalists allegedly assaulted a loyalist on the night, that a fight erupted between nationalists and loyalists which was broken up by police, and that earlier some nationalists shouted sectarian slogans, “You Orange bastard” and “Up the IRA” close to the general scene.

Both sisters insisted that neither Mr Hamill nor any of the group of four who were heading home early that Sunday morning made any such comments or were involved in any such incidents.

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