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Omagh: Michael McKevitt shuns his £22,000 video link

The defendant in the Omagh bombing civil case has never watched the trial from his prison cell

[Henry McDonald](#), Ireland editor
[The Observer](#), Sunday July 13, 2008

Real IRA founder Michael Mc-Kevitt's video link in his prison cell, to enable him to see the Omagh civil trial against him and five others, has cost UK taxpayers £22,000 - yet he has refused to watch any of the proceedings.

Relatives of those killed in the Omagh bomb atrocity almost ten years ago and legal sources have told The Observer that the video link to McKeivitt's cell in the Republic's top security Portlaoise jail has never been switched on while the case, which started in April, is being heard. McKeivitt - who demanded the link - has only used it to confer with his legal team between sittings or after the case has concluded for the day, they said.

Michael Gallagher, the Omagh campaigner whose son Aidan was killed in the single biggest terrorist massacre of the Troubles, confirmed that McKeivitt has 'never gone live'.

Gallagher said: 'Every day of the trial we have attended, the only time the screen is switched on while court is sitting is when two Irish prison officers test the microphone down in Portlaoise.'

'McKeivitt has a kind of remote control device with a PIN number that enables him to tune into the court proceedings. Yet every one of us who has attended the trial has never seen him. When the evidence is heard in court the device is always switched to "off", it is never "on".'

'The device has never been live while the court was on, so presumably he doesn't bother watching it unfold. If he was watching we would see him on the webcam.'

Legal sources close to the case and Irish security sources also confirmed that McKeivitt had not watched the trial.

The Northern Ireland Court service confirmed this weekend that it had installed video conference facilities in the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast for the trial. A spokesperson said: 'While the installation was primarily to facilitate the Omagh civil trial, it will also be utilised in other court hearings as necessary.'

The Court Service spokesperson said it was not responsible for any equipment used in Portlaoise, nor did it pay for such facilities.

The cost for the video conference equipment in the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast was £22,700, the spokesperson said.

She added that the equipment had been used by a defendant in the Omagh case to consult his legal advisers. That defendant, The Observer has learnt, was Michael McKeivitt.



The Omagh families are suing McKevitt along with Seamus Daly, Liam Campbell, Colm Murphy and Seamus McKenna for what is believed to be £10m over their alleged involvement in the Omagh bomb plot. All five men deny any involvement in the bombing.

The case will reconvene in Dublin High Court this September and is expected to finish back at the High Court in Belfast a month later. Lord Brennan, who is representing the six families bringing the case, said it was probably the first case in the world where private citizens were confronting alleged terrorists.

Last week the Northern Ireland Policing Board admitted that, unless fresh evidence and new witnesses came forward, no one would ever be charged with the Omagh bombing.

The body that oversees policing in the north of Ireland concluded that there was virtually no chance of criminal charges being brought against anyone in the Real IRA connected to the atrocity. Twenty-nine men, women and children died in the blast on 15 August, 1998.

Some of the relatives of those killed privately admit that the civil action was their last chance to have their day in court.

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