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Local & National

Did Wright killer tell inquiry of events?

Monday, June 11, 2007

By Chris Thornton

The Billy Wright Inquiry has been unable to confirm whether it had taken a statement from the LVF chief's killer, who was found dead in his prison cell on Friday.

John Kennaway (44) was one of three INLA inmates who murdered Wright in the Maze Prison 10 years ago, the killing that is currently being examined by a public inquiry.

He was found dead at Maghaberry Prison on Friday, more than four months after his freedom had been revoked for allegedly making threats.

He reportedly died from strangulation that may have been self-inflicted.

The PSNI confirmed that officers attended the scene of his death, and a spokeswoman said police are investigating the circumstances.

The Prisons Ombudsman is also investigating. It is also standard procedure for a coroner's inquest to be held into any death in prison.

Last night, the Billy Wright Inquiry, which is due to resume hearings in Banbridge this morning, would not confirm whether Kennaway was due to be among the 150 witnesses scheduled to appear before it.

A spokeswoman would only say that the inquiry intends to hear from witnesses who can address its terms of reference, which concern whether the state actively colluded or allowed Wright's killing.

And she noted that the inquiry's investigations are still under way.

The inquiry began full hearings last month, but is currently taking only background evidence. Lord MacLean, the chairman of the inquiry, said in an opening statement that investigations are still under way because the PSNI had been late in handing over papers. This includes the taking of statements from all potential witnesses.

Previously the political wing of the INLA had indicated that Kennaway and the two other men who killed Wright might be willing to testify, although they strenuously denied that they colluded with any state agency.

The inquiry has already heard that every state agency connected with the Wright killing - the Prison Service, PSNI and MI5 - has been unable to find documents linked to the murder.






Kennaway's security file was among the missing material. A dead prison governor has been blamed for its destruction, along with hundreds of other files.

Kennaway, from north Belfast, was originally jailed for an attempt to kill Dr Laurence Kennedy, the former leader of the Northern Ireland Conservatives. He was part of an INLA gang that took over Dr Kennedy's house and held his family captive. His wife foiled the plot by tripping a silent alarm.

As well as the murder of Wright, Kennaway was centrally involved in another episode that the inquiry is due to examine later this year.

In April 1997, he and another one of Wright's killers, Christopher McWilliams, tried to kill another republican in Maghaberry after smuggling a gun into the jail. It was later claimed they originally were trying to kill Wright, who was transferred to the Maze days earlier. Instead, they tried to shoot rival republican Kevin McAlorum, but the bid was foiled by prison staff.

Days later the two men were transferred to the same H-Block where Wright was imprisoned. Eight months later they managed to bypass prison security and use two smuggled handguns to shoot Wright in a prison van.

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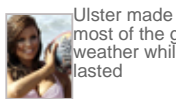
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