

Unreliable admissions

Lord Justice SCARMAN, sitting with Lord Justice ORMEROD and Mr Justice SWANWICK, said yesterday: "The admissions, in whatever circumstances they came to be made, must be unreliable and the convictions accordingly must be unsafe and unsatisfactory."

Lattimore would need all the help society could give him on his return to the community. All three really needed probation officers' help, but it would be wrong to put them on probation in relation to offences of which they were innocent.

During the appeal evidence was heard from fire experts and pathologists about the estimated times of the start of the fire and Confait's death.

It showed that while the fire was at about 1 a.m., Confait had probably been strangled no later than midnight and possibly as early as 6.30 p.m.

Lord Justice SCARMAN said that a crucial aspect of the prosecution case at the trial was that the killing was within a matter of minutes of the start of the fire.

If it could be shown that a substantial period of time must have elapsed between Confait's death and the lighting of the fire the story given in the admissions could not be true.

Reading on bed

The account of events which emerged from police interrogation was that the three youths went to the flat to steal from Confait. Leighton, it was said, found him sitting on a bed reading.

Lattimore put a piece of electric flex round Confait's neck and strangled him. Salih was at the door watching. The trio then sprinkled paraffin about and started a fire with the idea of destroying any fingerprints.

But the new evidence established that this was not so.

Absence of evidence of a struggle in Confait's flat and the fact the flex was put away in a drawer afterwards were consistent with the hypothesis that the killer was known to him.

Confait possibly allowed the ligature to be put round his neck for some sexual purpose.

re: any death announced article we have 18.10.75

THREE HELD AFTER 1972 KILLING GO FREE

TWO YOUTHS convicted in 1972 of the killing of a male prostitute who dressed as a woman and was called the "Funny Man" were cleared and freed in the Appeal Court yesterday.

Fresh medical evidence heard during the appeal—ordered by the Home Secretary—established that the dead man, MAXWELL CONFAIT, 26, was strangled at his

Catford flat earlier than originally thought.

This meant that alleged confessions by the youths to the police that they were responsible for the killing could not be true, said Lord Justice SCARMAN. They had alibis for the time death was now said to have taken place.

The two, who had been in custody since shortly after Confait was found dead, were COLIN GEORGE LATTIMORE—a 21-year-old with the mental age of an eight-year-old — of Nelgarde Road, Catford, and RONALD WILLIAM LEIGHTON, 19, of Doggett Road, Catford.



Maxwell Confait.

Murder conviction

Lattimore was convicted of manslaughter and arson and Leighton of murder and arson. Lattimore was made subject of a hospital order and has been at Rampton. Leighton was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure.

A third youth, AHMED SALIH, 17, of Coraline Walk, Thamesmead, who was on parole from a four-year detention order on the arson charge, also had his conviction quashed.

Confait's body was found by firemen called to his flat in Doggett Road on the night of April 21-22, 1972. Lattimore, Leighton and Salih were later arrested concerning other fires, and admitted being concerned in three.

Police said that after being questioned about Confait's killing and the fire they admitted being involved.

These alleged confessions were challenged by the defence at the trial. The youths denied using some of the words attributed to them and alleged they were struck or threatened by police when statements were taken.

Confait

...unreliable etc

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