

Convicted after 15 years: the prostitute's killer who watched three men go to jail for his crime

By Jason Bennetto, Crime Correspondent

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Jeffrey Gafoor was jailed for life by a judge at Cardiff Crown Court for stabbing to death Lynette White. The court hearing brings to an end a notorious miscarriage of justice.

The 20-year-old Cardiff prostitute, who had been stabbed more than 50 times, was found at her flat above a betting shop in Butetown, Cardiff, on St Valentine's Day in 1988.

In 1990, three men, Tony Paris, Yusef Abdullahi, and Stephen Miller, were convicted of her murder and sentenced to life after a trial that lasted 117 days. Mr Miller, then aged 26 but with a mental age of 11, was "bullied and hectorred" for 13 hours during a "travesty of an interview", before giving a confession implicating the two other men, said Lord Taylor of Gosforth when he was the Lord Chief Justice. Their convictions were quashed by the Court of Appeal and the "Cardiff Three", as they had become known, were freed in 1992.

At the appeal, the judges ruled the convictions were unsafe and unsatisfactory because recorded police interviews of Mr Miller should not have been put before the jury. Mr Miller - Ms White's former boyfriend - who had an IQ of 75, had denied the offence more than 300 times.

But not until 1999 did South Wales Police begin a fresh inquiry. Thanks partly to advances in DNA analysis, they were able to uncover the evidence that would help to convict the real killer. Gafoor, 38, of Llanharan, near Bridgend, South Wales, was charged with the murder at the start of March this year.

There were gasps from the packed public gallery as Gafoor pleaded guilty yesterday to the murder. Mr Justice John Royce gave him the mandatory sentence. He told Gafoor: "For 15 years, you kept your guilty secret and evaded justice even while others stood trial for the murder you knew that you had committed."

In 1988, Gafoor had been living and working in his family's shop in the Splott area of Cardiff. He spent most of his time working, reading or watching television. According to his sister, he did not drink, smoke or take drugs. No one could recall him having a girlfriend, the court was told. "Through his life he has been a loner," said Patrick Harrington QC, for the prosecution.

In February 1988, Gafoor went to Cardiff docks to find a prostitute and paid £30 to Ms White. But when they got back to her flat, which had no running water or electricity, he changed his mind and asked for his money back. A row started and Gafoor pulled out a knife.

Mr Harrington said: "The defendant used it to kill. He did not simply kill, he attacked in a barbaric manner, cutting, stabbing and slashing his victim more than 50 times, cutting her throat, slashing both wrists, cutting, stabbing and slashing her face, arm and torso."

The security guard was linked to the killing during the new investigation after DNA was discovered on a piece of cigarette wrapping splashed with blood that was found near Ms White.

Police launched an investigation to discover who the DNA belonged to - they nicknamed the mystery suspect the "Cellophane man".

Gafoor's blood was matched after a family member gave a DNA sample and was found to have a similar profile.

As the guilty man realised he was about to be caught, he tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of pills but the police, who had him under surveillance, arrested him before his attempt was successful. On his way to hospital Gafoor confessed to the killing.

Mr Harrington said: "He took a deep breath and said, 'Just for the record, I did kill Lynette White. I have been waiting for this for 15 years. Whatever happens to me, I deserve it'."

After yesterday's hearing, Yusef Abdullahi, one of those wrongly convicted of Ms White's murder, said there should be an inquiry into the case and how he and the others had come to be falsely convicted of the killing. He said he was "very very angry" that the police had not apologised to him for his ordeal. Chief Superintendent Wynne Phillips of South Wales Police said he could not comment because there was still an inquiry into the trial from 13 years ago. Keira White, Lynette's sister, said she was pleased that justice had been done.

THE LONG SEARCH FOR JUSTICE

14 February 1988 Lynette White, a prostitute, 20, is found dead in her Cardiff flat. She was stabbed more than 50 times.

November 1990 Tony Paris, Yusef Abdullahi and Stephen Miller convicted by Swansea Crown Court for the murder of Ms White and given life.

10 December 1992 The "Cardiff Three" convictions are quashed by the Court of Appeal after judges rule they are "unsafe and unsatisfactory". Stephen Miller, 26 at the time but with a mental age of 11, was "bullied and hectorated" for 13 hours before giving a confession implicating two other men, said Lord Taylor, the Lord Chief Justice.

21 December 1992 Police announce no disciplinary action will be taken against the two officers whose taped interviews with Mr Miller led to the conviction being quashed.

June 1999 South Wales Police launch review of the case.

17 January 2002 Advances in technology identify suspect's genetic material from a blood speck on a piece of cigarette wrapping. More than 300 people have DNA tests.

14 February 2003 New appeal launched. Jeffrey Gafoor, a security guard, investigated after a DNA sample of a relative is similar to that of suspect.

28 February 2003 Gafoor held after he takes overdose and confesses on way to hospital.

March 2003 Gafoor charged with murder after DNA sample matches that of profile found in the victim's flat.

4 July 2003 Gafoor pleads guilty to murder at Cardiff Crown Court and is given life. Police continue inquiry into original miscarriage of justice.

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