

Inquest into the death of Leon Patterson

Monday 4 November 10.00am

Manchester Coroners Court, Fire Station Premises, London Road, Manchester, M1 2PH

Leon Patterson was found dead in a Stockport police cell on 27 November 1992 . He was 31 years old, of mixed race and lived in North London. He had been arrested on the 21st November on suspicion of attempting to steal a till from a store.

Six days later he was discovered dead in his cell having been left naked and delirious for over 20 hours. His cell was covered in blood and he had suffered a series of seizures and vomiting fits. He had been seen by a number of doctors none of whom prescribed any treatment or medication nor had taken any steps to admit him to hospital. Afterdeath photographs were taken of the deceased which showed that he was suffering from multiple bruising and abrasions form head to foot. His family were told these were 'self inflicted.'

- In February 1993 the first inquest into Leon's death was stopped after it was discovered that a juror was married to a local serving police officer.
- In April 1993 at the second inquest what was originally claimed to be the cause of death was thrown into doubt when the Home Office toxicologist admitted in court that he had faked his report that 'proved' Leon had died from an overdose of nitrazepam (mogadon) .
- The evidence heard by the jury at this inquest about Leon's treatment by police officers and police doctors led them to return a verdict of '*unlawful killing*', but with the cause of death as unascertainable.
- However because of legal misdirection by the Coroner, that verdict was overturned in the High Court in October 1994 after a successful joint application by lawyers acting for the police and police doctors. The High Court ordered that a fresh inquest be held.
- Disgracefully it has taken over two years for a date to be set.
- Almost **four** years later his family still do not know what caused his death.
- Legal aid is not available for families to be represented at inquests despite the fact that unlimited public funds are available for lawyers to represent the police and professional funds enable the police doctors to be represented. The Lord Chancellor was written to personally to request legal aid be granted in this case as there is provision for legal aid in 'exceptional cases'. (Legal aid was granted to the families of those who died in the Marchioness disaster.)

Given the complexity of this case and the fact that this is now the third inquest it is clearly essential that the family are legally represented, particularly given that lawyers will appear on behalf of the police and prison doctors.

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Disgracefully this was refused by the Lord Chancellors department who argue that this was not in their view an exceptional case.

INQUEST have arranged for senior barrister Terry Munyard to represent the family for free. However if it was not for his generosity Leon's family would be unrepresented and alone.

To add further to the injustices faced by his family they have been told that there are 13 new witnesses to be called at this inquest including police officers and new medical evidence. Despite the fact that the Police Complaints Authority have supported calls for this evidence to be disclosed before the inquest, neither the police nor the coroner have done so which means the family barrister is unable to prepare on an equal footing with other parties.

Deborah Coles, Co Director of INQUEST who have been supporting Leon's family said:

“It is an outrage that Leon Patterson's family have had to wait so long for this inquest to be heard and are still waiting to discover the truth and who is accountable for the inhuman and degrading treatment Leon received while under the care of the police and police doctors. The failure to establish the true circumstances about his death and the lack of rights for families demonstrates the lamentable failings of current investigatory mechanisms into deaths in custody. “