

SIX WEEK INQUEST INTO DEATH IN POLICE CUSTODY OF CHRISTOPHER ALDER CONCLUDES WEEK BEGINNING 21 AUGUST

11am Monday 21st August
Hull Crown Court

Following six weeks of evidence the inquest into the death of Christopher Alder will conclude next week. The HM Coroner Mr J C Saul will begin his summing up of the case to the jury and direct them on verdicts to consider on Monday 21st August. Their conclusions are expected on Tuesday 22nd or Wednesday 23rd August.

Mr Alder, a 37 year old black man who was a former paratrooper, died on 1st April 1998 after being arrested and taken to Queen's Gardens Police Station, Hull.

He was arrested at Hull Royal Infirmary where he had been taken after a fight outside a night-club. He was taken in a police van to the station. He was supported into the custody suite and after 13 minutes police officers called an ambulance. However despite resuscitation attempts Mr Alder died.

From video evidence shown to the jury it was demonstrated that he died after being left unconscious face down on the floor of Queen's Gardens Police Station Custody Suite for 11 minutes. His trousers were around knees, he had been doubly incontinent and blood had formed a pool around his mouth. Apart from removing his handcuffs when he was initially brought into the police station the four police officers present in the custody suite did not touch Mr Alder in the 11 minutes he lay dying on the floor despite his condition. Rattles of breath were also clearly heard on the video.

The jury has heard that Mr Alder had been involved in an altercation outside The Waterfront night-club. He had been hit in the mouth and had fallen to the floor. He was taken to Hull Royal Infirmary where he was seen by a doctor. He was confused and unco-operative at the hospital and was unable to be treated. Police officers escorted Mr Alder from the premises. Both inside the hospital and outside the police drew a CS Spray canister and threatened to use it on Mr Alder. Once outside Mr Alder complained that he wanted to return to see the doctors. According to police officers he was still being abusive and they warned him if he did not leave he would be arrested. He refused to leave and was arrested for breach of the peace and handcuffed behind his back. He was then put into the back of a police van and conveyed to the police station.

On arrival at the police station evidence was heard that he was taken from the police van and then evidence was seen on video that he was dragged into the police station custody suite and placed face down on the floor. Officers were heard to speculate that he was faking illness. Five police officers have been suspended from duty and are awaiting trial accused of misconduct in public office. As a consequence they did not answer any questions about the incident exercising their right not to incriminate themselves under the Coroners Rules.

The jury has heard evidence from some fifteen medical experts and to the cause of death and they will need to decide how Mr Alder died and then return their verdict.

Unusually, exceptional legal aid was granted to allow the family to be represented at the inquest following representations to the Lord Chancellor's department from the family lawyer and INQUEST. INQUEST Lawyers Group member Leslie Thomas represented the family at the inquest.