

**POLICE FAIL TO OVERTURN INQUEST VERDICT OF ‘UNLAWFUL  
KILLING’ FOLLOWING CUSTODY DEATH OF BLACK MAN  
CHRISTOPHER ALDER  
9<sup>th</sup> April 2001**

Hull police officers involved in the death of Christopher Alder have failed in their attempt to have the unanimous verdict of unlawful killing returned by the jury at the inquest into the death of Christopher Alder on 24 August 2000 quashed. They sought judicial review of the Coroner’s summing up of the evidence to the jury in an attempt to overturn the verdict. Today the High Court rejected this attempt.

Following seven weeks of evidence the jury returned a verdict of unlawful killing and said that the death was due to positional asphyxia. The inquest was heard at Hull Crown Court before Coroner Mr J C Saul.

Ruth Bunday solicitor for the family said:

“This has been a time-consuming diversion – we hope that the full investigation into how Christopher Alder was unlawfully killed can now resume.”

Deborah Coles co-director of INQUEST said:

“These proceedings have attempted to protect police officers from being properly brought to account over this unlawful death. Now that the High Court has given its backing to the jury’s unanimous verdict, justice must be seen to be done and criminal charges instigated.”

The family were represented at the judicial review by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Nicholas Blake QC and Steven Simblett.

Background:

Christopher Alder, a 37 year old black man who was a former paratrooper decorated for service in Northern Ireland, died on 1<sup>st</sup> 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 his knees, he had been doubly incontinent and blood formed a pool around his mouth. Apart from removing the 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 his breath were also clearly heard on the video.

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The jury heard that Mr Alder had been involved in an altercation outside The Waterfront nightclub during which 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. Mr Alder was confused and uncooperative at the hospital and was unable to be treated. Police officers dragged him from the premises. Both inside the hospital and outside the police drew a CS Spray canister and threatened to use it on him. 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 that 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. Mr Alder 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 found motionless in the police van. The video then showed him being 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.