

MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE

## The hot dog hit

**WARREN SLANEY** has spent the past 21 years in jail protesting his innocence of the infamous "hot-dog murders" of 1990. Now the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) has agreed to re-examine the conviction of the alleged hitman.

The review has been prompted by evidence suggesting that a key witness who helped incriminate the then 24-year-old Slaney was subsequently relocated by police and may have received a "reward" for her testimony – something that was never disclosed at trial.

Slaney and another man, Terence Burke, were sentenced to life for the murders of fast-food tycoon Gary Thompson and his business associate John Weston. Thompson had built a multi-million-pound business from his fleet of hot-dog and burger vans which raked in huge sums at rock festivals and sporting events. Known as the burger king, with a reputation for intimidating rivals, he had inevitably made some enemies.

In 1990, when he was found with three bullet wounds and with his day's takings of around £60,000 missing, his death was put down to a robbery gone wrong. But since then there have been claims that it was an intentional "hit" by an Iraqi nightclub owner, Ranzy Khachik, who is now in jail for drugs and firearms offences.

Posters went up in Leicester implicating Khachik in the murders. He was also accused of being behind threats, shootings and attacks on other catering vans that tried to move in on Thompson's old patch after his death. At the height of what became known as the "hot-dog wars", and in a scene straight out of a mafia movie, a stabbed pig was dumped outside a rival's house.

Several friends and family of Slaney, a boxer and nightclub bouncer, said he was at a party at the time of the killings. But he was convicted after Burke and another man, who admitted conspiracy to rob, blamed Slaney for the shootings. Another witness put Slaney in the company of Burke trying on masks immediately before the murders, and said he had later boasted about them. It is this witness who is the subject of the new CCRC review.

Slaney's lawyer, Maslen Merchant, says there was no forensic evidence linking his client to the crime, and no tests performed to match a partial fingerprint found on the murder weapon. Slaney's slight frame did not match the figure

described in original eyewitness accounts to the shootings.

Khachik belonged to a gun club, has firearms convictions and was questioned by police about the murders because his car had been spotted at the scene two hours before the crime. Subsequent police taps on his phones, relating to other crimes, record him boasting about how important it is to case an area well in advance.

Slaney's case has now been taken up by the University of Bristol Innocence project, where law students investigate claims of injustice. As the CCRC looks at the possibility of rewards and incentives for witnesses in this murky gangland case, the only clear fact is that it is far from the simple bungled robbery depicted at Slaney's trial.

