

Jury hears man's dying breath in police station

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A jury yesterday watched a harrowing film of the last moments of an arrested man as he lay crumpled and dying on the tiled floor of a police station, his trousers and underpants round his knees.

The jury of seven men and five women at Teesside crown court wore headphones to hear more clearly what the prosecution called the final raucous breaths of Christopher Alder, 37, who died in custody in Hull on April 1 1998.

They heard on the soundtrack officers describe Mr Alder as playacting and "doing dying swan acts" in the hospital.

He had been arrested at the city's infirmary where he had caused a disturbance. He had been taken there after an incident outside a Hull nightclub in which he was punched, the court heard. He had struck his head as he fell.

Five Humberside officers, Nigel Dawson, 39, Neil Blakey, 42, Mark Ellerington, 36, John Dunn, 40, and Matthew Barr, 38, have pleaded not guilty to manslaughter. Each faces an alternative charge of misconduct.

The prosecution claims they "denied him a chance to survive" and did not speak to him or touch him as the gaps between his laboured breaths became increasing long as he lay on the floor at the Queen's Gardens police station.

"Tragically, he died visibly for all in that room to see, audibly for all in that room to hear," said James Curtis QC, prosecuting.

The closed-circuit TV footage, taken from nine cameras in the custody suite, showed the last 10 minutes of Mr Alder's life; during the first three of them, his wrists were handcuffed behind his back.

Dunn, the custody sergeant, is given an account of the hospital disturbance. Dawson is heard describing Alder as "only acting". Blakey, reporting on the hospital incident, added: "He kept doing his dying swan act, falling off the trolley." Barr is heard to say: "He's shit himself."

Mr Curtis said the footage showed the officers had apparently paid "astonishingly little attention" to Mr Alder. It had taken them almost a minute and a quarter to react after his final breath, taken just before 3.57am,

and then they had panicked. Their attempts to resuscitate him were "pretty amateur", the court heard.

Mr Curtis had earlier described how Mr Alder had been threatened with CS gas by one of the officers at the hospital. His behaviour was so erratic that a doctor refused to treat him, but reminded Dawson and Blakey that he had not discharged him.

Mr Curtis said the officers dragged him out of the hospital and summoned a police van driven by Ellerington. He walked unaided into the van.

"By the time Christopher Alder arrived at that police station, he was deeply unconscious," said Mr Curtis. "He never regained consciousness. He was dragged into the police station, his feet trailing behind him. His trousers and underpants were down his legs."

The trial continues.
