

Monkey chants as black man died 'not racist'

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A tape capturing monkey chants made as a black man lay dead on a police station floor was missed by investigators for nearly four years, it emerged yesterday.

Christopher Alder, 37, died handcuffed and face down in a Hull police station in April 1998 surrounded by police officers, after choking on his own vomit. Sections of the tape show the officers joking and chatting as the former paratrooper died.

Last month five Humberside policemen were cleared of manslaughter and neglect of public duty over the death.

Tapes from the custody suite cameras were seized in April 1998, but a section containing monkey chants and laughter was not investigated until March 2002, a fortnight before the trial began.

Mr Alder's family are furious that this evidence was never put before the jury. The crown prosecution service said it never tried to have this evidence admitted because it could not be determined who was making the noises.

Last night the CPS and West Yorkshire police, who investigated the case, refused to say whether any of the officers on the tape had been questioned about who made the noises.

But a source with knowledge of the investigation told the Guardian that the evidence was found so late none of the five officers was ever asked about the animal noises.

The CPS also said it could not be proved the monkey chanting was racist as someone could have been reacting or laughing at an officer who uttered the word "banana", shortly before the monkey chant is heard on the tape.

Mr Alder's sister, Janet Alder, said: "West Yorkshire police and the CPS have seen everything. How could they miss it? They just wanted this to go away.

"It's typical of the racist, inhuman and disgraceful way they've treated my family and my brother. They've added to our hurt."

In a letter to Ms Alder, the CPS says an expert determined the sounds on the tape to be "chimpanzee or monkey like". It continued: "It is not possible to infer that there was a racist motivation here."

Barrister Peter Herbert, a member of the attorney general's race advisory body, called for a public inquiry.

He said the missed monkey chants were just one example of a bungled case.

"Anybody with any common sense knows monkey noises [are] evidence of racial abuse," he added.

The officers, who now face an internal disciplinary investigation, have returned to duty after being suspended for four years.

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