

Unionism at the crossroads

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Jill Dando murder: man held

DETECTIVES hunting the killer of TV presenter Jill Dando today arrested a man on suspicion of murder, Scotland Yard said.

He was detained at about 6.30am and taken to a London police station.

There was no indication this morning as to the identity of the suspect.

Miss Dando was shot once in the head on the doorstep of her £400,000 home in Gowan Avenue, Fulham, south west London, on April 26 last year after returning from a shopping trip.

She was given emergency treatment at the scene and at Charing Cross Hospital, but was certified dead less than two hours later.

Miss Dando's father, Jack, (82), said he was "highly elated" to hear of the arrest, adding: "I gave a big whoop of joy. Twelve months I've waited to hear a message like this.

"It's just terrific. But I suppose it's still early days.

"I'm highly elated but at the same time a bit cautious because we've been here before, with them arresting someone and then releasing them without charge.

"But as he's been arrested for murder rather than just 'helping police with their inquiries', I'm more optimistic."

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Jill Dando's father, Jack

Mr Dando said he had no idea about who the police had arrested.

Miss Dando's brother Nigel, chief reporter at the Bristol Evening Post, said: "I had a call from police this morning saying someone had been arrested on suspicion of murder, but that is all I know."

Miss Dando's fiancé Alan Farthing declined to comment on the arrest.

His spokesman and friend, Abel Hadden, said the gynaecologist was at work as usual today.

Detectives have always remained confident that they would arrest someone for the murder, and a total of £250,000 has been offered in rewards.

But officers in the year-long inquiry have been frustrated by the lack of significant breakthroughs from a series of public appeals.

On May 27 last year police arrested funeral director James Shackleton. He was questioned then released without charge.

He looked like the e-fit of the "sweating man" who was seen at a bus stop close to the 37-year-old's home minutes after the murder.

One man spotted 45 minutes before the shooting, talking on a mobile telephone, was finally traced by police last September after weeks of work — he was found to be a gas meter reader, and was ruled out as a suspect.

Members of the near 50-member murder team have been analysing thousands of mobile telephone calls made in the area at the time of Miss Dando's murder.

At one point during the inquiry detectives had a list of 280 suspects they wanted to speak to.

Officers also spent months trying to find a metallic blue Range Rover seen parked near the murder scene and driven at speed away from the area.

Police have become increasingly convinced that Miss Dando was killed by a stalker or an obsessed fan. Officers have concentrated on the final two years of her life.

In August last year police ruled out the possibility that Miss Dando was killed by a former boyfriend, reinforcing the stalker theory.

In April this year it emerged that detectives had mounting evidence that the television star was being stalked by an obsessed fan who secretly watched her home for several weeks before the shooting.

A second Crimewatch appeal last month generated more than 400 calls and gave police 200 new names, 20 of them treated as "relevant and interesting".

Police disclosed a woman called Dando was phoned by an anonymous man asking for details about the TV presenter months before the shooting.

The call lasted for 10 minutes but the woman, whose initial is J, had no connection with Jill Dando.

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Jill Dando: Gunned down on the doorstep of her Fulham home last April

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Ulster house prices soar

By Mandi Millar
Property Correspondent

NORTHERN Ireland's house price index has reached an all-time high — but property pundits fear the market may be dangerously volatile.

Although the Ulster Bank-sponsored Northern Ireland Quarterly House Price Index for the first quarter of 2000 shows a major surge (17.5%) in house values to an overall average of £79,841, there are fears

Fears grow of 'volatile' local market

over the sustainability of the market.

Apartment and terraces rose most in value — apartments by over 34% in a year and terraces by over 22%.

The authors of the report, Professor Alastair Adair, Professor Stanley McGreal and Louise Brown of the University

of Ulster, said that while confidence remained high they were concerned at the level of volatility in some areas of the market.

"Confidence at the moment is still strong but I feel that affordability could become a bigger issue. I wonder if there is room for much further price growth?" said Tom McClelland of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Indeed, current growth rates are now ex-

ceeding the record levels of 1996-97.

Michael McKavanagh of the Ulster Bank — one of the report's authors — said: "You could take an alarmist view of what's happening, but I would caution against that.

"You are dealing with one quarter's data. One area of concern, however, is that house price growth is far out-stripping wages.

"However, first time buyers are still able to get onto the property ladder, albeit with fairly high income to mortgage ratios," said Mr McKavanagh.

"If prices were to continue growing at their present rate for 10 years, you would get to the situation where people could not afford to buy their first home, but many things could happen in the meantime.

"The political dimension, for instance, is another factor in Northern Ireland."

On a regional basis, average price levels for the first quarter of 2000 now make the North Coast the most expensive place to live outside Belfast, knocking North Down off its traditional top spot.

"This is due to the price levels of apartments in towns like Portstewart and Portballintrae," said Derek McAleese of Morton's Lismavady branch.

See tonight's Homefinder

Unionists in swing to Agreement says poll

By Chris Thornton
Political Correspondent

ULSTER Unionist support for the Good Friday Agreement rose dramatically after the IRA said it would put its arms "beyond use", a new poll indicates in today's Belfast Telegraph.

A clear majority of UUP supporters — 64% — said they would now vote in favour of the Agreement, according to the Queen's University/Rowntree Trust poll.

That reflects a similar

jump in pro-Agreement feeling among Protestants in general — with a majority in favour for the first time in months.

The poll — the only assessment of opinion about the Agreement after the Hillsborough deal — has already shown that 72% of UUP supporters want the party's ruling council to vote for a return to Stormont on Saturday.

But the wider results, published today, indicate a general swing in favour of the Agreement among unionists.

Last October, the same poll showed Protestant support for the Agreement at 49%, while a BBC Hearts & Minds poll conducted just before Hillsborough put it at a low ebb

of 42%. But the latest QUB/Rowntree poll — the seventh in a series of political opinion in Northern Ireland — puts Protestant support at 55%.

Dr Colin Irwin, who oversees the research, said the results across the board show that Ulster Unionists supporters are in favour of the Hillsborough deal.

"All the statistics in here seem to suggest that Ulster Unionist rank and file would go for it," he said.

A rise in people who said they voted Yes in the referendum — 78% to the actual figure of 71% — could be an indicator of a sample skewed towards the pro-Agreement side, but because other data is

consistent with earlier polls, Dr Irwin believes it is a case of more people simply saying they voted Yes because of a drift towards the Agreement.

"I don't think this is a margin of error statistic. This is what's going on in people's heads," he said.

The poll also indicates the depth of republican feeling about Government tinkering with the Patten report. Three quarters of Sinn Fein supporters made implementation of Patten the essential part of the Hillsborough deal.

And the DUP's dilemma about a return to Stormont is highlighted — with almost two-thirds saying they should stay out of the Executive. See page 18

QUB anger at guide IRA 'slur'

By Kathryn Torney

QUEEN'S University is today taking legal advice after a new guide for students alleged that IRA cells are based in the Belfast institution.

The Virgin Alternative Guide to British Universities 2001 claims there is even an IRA name for first year students at Queen's — "white lillies" — "ideal for missions difficult for known IRA members".

The guide also refers to an alleged recruitment racket by the paramilitary group during Freshers' Week.

However, a university spokesperson today said the allegations contained in the guide are "completely unfounded".

A statement issued by Queen's said: "There is absolutely no evidence that freshers were approached by members of the IRA."

"The claim that a student was beaten up because he rejected IRA advances is also untrue.

Queen's University deplores the fact that the Virgin Alternative Guide has repeated the claims without checking with the university or asking it for comment. The guide seriously misleads prospective students.

Queen's University draws its students from all traditions in Northern Ireland."

John McAuley, Students' Union president, said: "It is incredible that a publication should repeat an unsubstantiated story of campus IRA recruitment for which no evidence has been presented to the university."

No-one from Virgin Publishing was immediately available for comment.

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