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Saturday, 4 October 2008

A teenager who claimed he had seen four of those accused of the murder of Ballymena Catholic Michael McIlveen, in the alleyway where the schoolboy was attacked, yesterday accepted he was "mistaken" about one of them.

Christopher Graham told Antrim Crown Court initially "he was not sure" about him, before accepting he'd made a mistake in naming 20-year-old Mervyn Wilson Moon from Douglas Terrace, Ballymena, who has already pleaded guilty to the murder of 15-year-old Michael.

The 19-year-old later denied he had named a second defendant, 22-year-old Christopher Francis Kerr, of Carnduff Drive because he "hated him like poison" and was "prepared to put the boot in at any opportunity".

The teenager, whose home backs onto the alleyway where Michael was set upon, also rejected suggestions that he had later armed himself either with a knife or a sword and gave chase to those involved in the

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attack.

However, Mr Graham accepted that in the weeks and months before Michael's death on May 8, 2006, a sword had allegedly been used during one of many sectarian clashes between Catholics and Protestants.

The witness was being cross-examined by defence QC Richard Weir whose client, 19-year-old Jeff Colin Lewis of Rosssdale, Ballymena, was also identified by name as being in the alleyway.

Initially he told Mr Weir, that he was "sure" he saw Moon standing in his back alley, adding that Moon "must have been there", because he'd pleaded guilty.

But on being pressed by Mr Weir, Mr Graham conceded: "Well I thought he was there".

"Lets say it was a mistake," suggested Mr Weir.

"Yep," said Mr Graham, who claimed the mistake came about because the events of that night "happened so fast".

Kerr's defence QC Laurence McCrudden also challenged Mr Graham's recollection of what his client was doing in the alleyway.

Mr McCrudden claimed the witness had "promoted Kerr to the font of the group for no other reason that you knew him and he stood out like a sore thumb".

"I don't hate him," claimed Mr Graham, who accepted that while "he [Kerr] was at the front of the group, he was not leading..."

The trial continues on Monday.

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