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Such a radical legal departure began in fairly ordinary legal surroundings: the well appointed but otherwise unremarkable court room known as Queen's Bench 2, on this occasion crowded with wigged barristers and

volumes of files that bare thousands of pages of evidence documenting the worst single atroc ity of the

It also began in fairly ordinary legal circumstances - a testy exchange between lawyers. Less than 20

minutes into his opening statement, Lord Brennan began reciting the convictions of the five defendants, describing them all as convicted terrorists. This brought objections from the four defendants who are legally

represented, their lawyers saying that the convictions were not relevant, should not be aired in public and

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Michael Higgins QC, who represents convicted Real IRA leader Michael McKevitt told the court: "I object to the description of my client as a terrorist."

He said it was an "utterly pejorative term".

The court heard earlier Mr McKevitt will be allowed to view the proceedings through a video link to

Mr Justice Morgan smoothed over the exchange, reminding everyone that the matter will be decided on the evidence, not the language or content of the opening statement.

The shelves of files on either side of the court room stood in mute support of the judge's observation.

Their detail - mobile phone records, the evidence of an FBI informer, an account of an MI5 sting operation will be telling.

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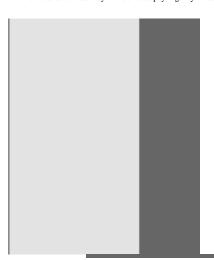
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