

Party line

THIS year will mark the 20th anniversary of the death of Cambridge graduate Mark Blanco (pictured) in mysterious circumstances at a small gathering attended by a drug-addled Pete Doherty, frontman of the Libertines – and of his mother Sheila Blanco's tireless fight for justice (Eyes 1644 & 1652).

She has spent the intervening years – and the best part of £200,000 – fighting to get Scotland Yard to reopen the case and review its initial botched investigation, only to keep coming across the same names coming to the same conclusions and marking their own homework, passing it every time.

However, she has finally won the first ever independent review and is feeling “cautiously optimistic”. She hopes it will establish why the first officers on the scene cleaned it up instead of calling in forensics. They told her they assumed it to be a suicide, despite having no evidence to support that theory. One even handed Sheila a lens from his smashed glasses found on the cobbles below as a “keepsake”.

The 2007 inquest unreservedly ruled out suicide and asked the Met to reopen the case, while one of the six attendees at the party, Johnny “Headlock” Jeannevol, made a confession, which he then retracted, saying he was under the influence of drugs at the time.

He was seen on CCTV running past Mark's lifeless body in the street alongside Doherty and a female, after they fled the east London flat above, where they had been partying before Mark had a fight with the singer. Doherty later said in an interview: “The pressure they [police] put on me was completely minimal. And they kind of said off-tape, ‘Pete, we're sorry about this, right, but the family are convinced that their son was murdered.’ I can understand it and it does look dodgy.” He has said his fear of being arrested for possession of class A drugs overrode any concern for what happened to Mark, and described it as feeling like an “inconvenience”. Doherty denies any involvement in Mark's death

or knowledge of how he died.

Two years ago, a Channel 4 documentary, *Pete Doherty, Who Killed My Son?*, uncovered fresh evidence and analysis by experts, including an FBI forensic scientist who concluded from the mechanics of Mark's fall he could only have been thrown or pushed.

Still, the Met stuck to its guns that there was no evidence of foul play. Last year it closed the case – a blow to Sheila and her supporters. However, it opened the door to an external review of the Met's handling of the case. She put in a complaint to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) a year ago. However, it did not accept the complaint was sufficiently serious and has pushed it back down the line to, er, the Met, which is now reviewing the complaint internally, again.

Sheila is convinced they are hiding something, such as the concealment of an informant. If not, she says, the levels of incompetence are almost more frightening. Her MP Zöe Franklin sought a meeting with the home secretary to discuss the case but was turned down late last year.

Sheila now has one hard-won last hope of justice for Mark, an aspiring playwright who would have turned 50 this March. City of London Police has taken on the case, under the Victims' Right to Review scheme. The Met had also sought to oversee that review internally, even appointing a senior officer in the same line of command as the team Sheila holds responsible for previous failures. However, her legal team fought for the right to have it transferred.

Speaking after their first meeting, Sheila said: “The Met Police's defensive attitude towards investigations, shrouded in incompetence and procrastination, has permeated the years since December 2006.

“In contrast, I found the City of London Police to be receptive to our thoughts and far less defensive than their Met counterparts. I trust they will be objective and open-minded regarding this complex case, riddled with error, apathy and celebrity taint. As I go into this 20th year of fighting for justice, I am cautiously optimistic.”

