

New search hope for missing Martin's dad

[Published: Sunday 20, January 2008 - 09:36]

By Stephen Breen

The father of a missing Co Down man was last night given new hope after a pal of his son offered to conduct a fresh search for his body.

Raymond Kelly - whose boy Martin has been missing since New Year's Day 2006 - praised drainage firm Precision Industrial Services after it offered to search an old Victorian drain.

Martin (22) went missing after New Year drinks with friends at Pat's Bar in Belfast's docks area.

Although police were out in boats last Monday, they have refused to conduct a search of the utility, which is located just 40ft from where Martin was last seen alive.

The young man's friend, Alan Stringer, offered to search the drain after Mr Kelly spoke to Sunday Life last week about his ongoing pain and torment.

The company has received permission from the Belfast Harbour Commissioner and is set to examine the drain before the end of the month.

Said Stringer: "I actually knew Martin very well and when I saw Raymond's story last week I just had to do something. I asked our company's owner John McFadden if we could assist him and there was no problem. We hope to conduct the search quite soon.

"We have the specialised equipment to search this drain and I've already spoken to Raymond about it. I just hope we can help put his mind at rest."

The devastated dad has also severed his links with police after a meeting last week.

A police spokeswoman said they remained "determined" to bring closure to the Kelly family but it was unlikely there would be any further searches.

Added Mr Kelly: "Why has it taken them so long to tell me there will be no more searches? The fact is that two PSNI sniffer dogs and one independent dog detected human remains last August but there was still no search.

"The police stated if the drain had been 24 inches in diameter they would have searched it but the facts are that it is this size and I don't know what they are playing at. They have got their calculations wrong. People have searched smaller drains.

"Their decision not to search the drain has caused incredible pain and I think it is down to expense and resources."

Mr Kelly also thanked Precision Industrial Services for agreeing to search the drain with their specialised cameras.