Bloody Friday—one year later

It was 3.02—that electric clock on the wall stopped

By Ted Oliver

THE RAIN had pulled a thin blind of mist down over the Cavehill.

Trade in the shops in the hill's shadow was normal for a wet Friday at the end of the July holidays.

A few empty cars were parked on the road separated from the forecourt of the shops by a line of concrete posts.

The binmen had been round earlier in the morning to take away the rubbish.

It was a normal, peaceful day but in the shops many people were casting their minds back to another Friday, a year all but a day ago.

That other Friday last year, the main preoccupation at the shops for most of the day was the binmen.

They had not arrived and there was much toing and fro-ing between the shops and many phone calls to the Corporation to have the overloaded bins taken away.

The shopowners walked from one shop to the next to see if there had been any suitable reply from the Corporation.

And as they walked along the forecourt they passed a car parked right at the middle of the row.

Just after three o'clock that car would disintegrate in a massive explosion, the row of shops would be badly damaged and three people would lose their lives.

Some people were just starting to evacuate the shops when the bomb went off. Some said that the police had been telephoned and told about the empty car and nothing had been done.

The lady in the hardware shop will never forget her escape.

She had gone into one of the other shops and was taking another lady across the road to her home where they would stay until the car had been cleared.

She came back into her own shop and was bending down behind the counter putting her money in her handbag when the bomb exploded.

She escaped unscathed. Her companion standing in the shop was badly injured.

A girl at the little home bakery had gone through to the back of her shop to talk to the binmen who had at last arrived.

As she went she called to a woman customer, "I won't be a second."

When she came back into the shop through the debris of the blast, she saw the cusomer lying on the floor dead.

Last Friday, almost a year later, she greeted the arrival of the binmen with, "Here are the men who saved my life."

In one of the little sweet shops, Stanley can tell the time of the blast exactly. "It was 3-02. That electric clock on the wall stopped."

As he pointed to the clock almost a year later, it again showed 3-02. But it was still going.

The shops are like those in a small village. The assistants know all their customers and there is the atmosphere of the old style country stores in the suburbs of the city.

The peace and charm was crudely ripped by the bomb in the car but the shops have recovered. They have carried on trading. One was open on the Saturday as soon as the debris was cleared.

The owner said, "I had to open up. It was the only way I could keep myself going."

The debris was quickly removed by friends, strangers, neighbours and long-haired youths.

Most of the people do not want to remember that other Friday. They think it is better forgotten. But the thought is still there at the back of their minds.

Not all the debris was thrown away. Some was kept and made into a cross.

It is called the Cavehill Cross. And on Friday it was carried from St. Peter's Church of Ireland Church on the Antrim Road to the Little Flower Oratory on the Somerton Road.

There it will remain for a year. An epitaph from the rubble to the three who died at the friendly row of shops on the Cavehill Road.

A bunch of yellow chrysanths.. someone had remembered

By John Burns

IN THE MORNING, before the rush started, those who had remembered took the wreath of roses and carnations and placed it upon a chair where it could be seen by everyone who passed that way.

All through the day passengers streamed in and out of Oxford Street bus depot. A few failed to notice the solitary wreath, stoically supported by two pieces of hardboard upon the rusted chair.

Some hurried past before the unexpected splash of colour caught their attention. But most paused for a moment to stare at this small reminder of a day remembered perhaps by name alone.

The card on the wreath said it had been placed by the staff of Oxford Street Depot left in remembrance of the six who had died that other Friday.

A chain, hung with danger notices, separates then and now. On this side the people still walk along to the buses. The sweets and tobacconist's kiosks are still there, with new windows. Only the station clock, its frozen face still registering the moment of death, serves to remind of time past.

But beyond the chain lie the gaping ruins of a summer day last year. Rain drives in through the holes in the roof, the wind blows through the empty window frames. Here, beyond the chain, the wound is still open.

Mostly those who come this way, homeward bound or heading for the city, pass by on the safe side of the chain where life goes on in qualified normality. They have seen the ruins before and nothing has changed. They hold little interest.

But on this new day their eyes and minds are drawn across time and space by the single wreath. Even the chair on which it is placed is an unconscious reminder. Its battered shape bears witness to the blast.

A small bespectacled woman reads the inscription on the wreath. "You wouldn't think it was a year," she says. "So much has happened . . . you forget, don't you."

"Well thank God I'm able to stand here. Some poor people can't even do that."

The blast had hurled bodies and pieces of bodies in a forty yard radius around it. Last year soldiers had gone round with red plastic bags, gathering the pathetic debris of people.

Then in the evening it had rained and the pavements and roads were washed clean of blood. Now, where the passers-by walk there is only the exposed shell of a wrecked building.

Outside there aren't any unattended cars, only a row of three taxis whose drivers play desultory poker while waiting for fares.

Last year the day had been sunnier. "It was more of a summer's day," says Bob Robinson, a shunter at the depot. "There were a lot of people around in the station and then the bombs started going off.

"There was one on the bridge and another on the Laganbank. We started running into the yard when the one here went off. You couldn't breathe. I think it was that old weedkiller stuff they put in the bomb.

"There was a man lying in the pav in room. I got a policeman and we ran in to get the man. He stopped breathing as we went to lift him. I knew him well but I didn't even recognise him."

In the station a busman says: "People forget. But you can't really expect them to remember all the people who have been killed. There are too many to think about."

And an old lady, bending over the wreath, says: "Wouldn't you like to say something?"

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