

# 40 years after the 1972 Dublin bombings, the questions remain

## The day Liberty Hall was bombed

Forty years have passed since the dark winter evening of 1st December 1972, when the first ever car bomb exploded in the Republic of Ireland.

It occurred beside Liberty Hall, where the ITGWU had its headquarters. There were no fatalities but the explosion caused many injuries.

Several minutes later, a second blast at Sackville Place, off O'Connell Street, killed bus driver George Bradshaw, 29, and 23-year-old bus conductor Tommy Duffy.

Both were married. George and his wife Kathleen had two young children. Tommy and his wife Monica had a daughter. Monica was also pregnant with their second child.

Three minutes before the first bomb exploded, the Belfast Newsletter received an anonymous telephone warning that bombs planted at Liberty Hall and behind Clery's would explode at 8.05 pm. The person who received the warning said the caller had spoken with a "Belfast English-type accent". However, the warnings came too late and the result was devastating, two men dead and 127 people injured. Damage to property was extensive.

Although it was a Friday evening the Dáil was in session at Leinster House. A bill to amend the Offences Against the State Act was being debated and a defeat for the Fianna Fáil Government seemed inevitable as Opposition parties and some members of the Government were opposing it on civil liberties' grounds. The amendment would admit the opinion of a senior Garda officer as evidence of an accused person's membership of the IRA.

However, the bomb explosions changed the course of Irish history. When the vote was taken after an adjournment Fine Gael abstained

allowing the amendment to be passed.

Early investigations centred around four cars. One car containing the owner's driving licence had been stolen four months before in Ballymoney, county Antrim.

The stolen licence of Englishman Joseph Fleming was used to hire three cars from different Belfast companies on 30th November by a man with an English accent. Two of the hired cars exploded at Liberty Hall and Sackville Place. Both these vehicles were already in Dublin on the evening of 30th November, according to a number of eyewitnesses.

The Gardaí were very pro-active in the early days of the investigation, travelling to Belfast and London to retrieve hire agreement documents and interviewing witnesses.

Although the RUC were relatively helpful, the Garda report comments that RUC officers would not permit them to interview some persons "for reasons best known to themselves". Despite a promising start, the Garda enquiries led nowhere.

A fortnight after the bombings, two significant, but ostensibly unconnected, arrests were made in Dublin hotels on 18th and 19th December. British agent John Wyman was arrested at the West County Hotel, Chapelizod, on the 18th.

The following day Gardaí apprehended Detective Sergeant Patrick Crinnion, Crime and Security Branch, Garda Síochána, at the Burlington, where he was attempting to rendezvous with his handler.

Crinnion was found to have secret documents which he was about to pass on to Wyman. During the trial, Wyman's notebook was produced. There were references to "RLs", "car bombs", "arrest policy". When asked to explain these entries, he replied that "RLs" were rocket launchers, which he said the IRA were using and "car bombs" referred to the explosions in Dublin. Of these, he added: "We are as interested in finding out who did this as you are". He would not comment on what "arrest policy" meant.

Both Crinnion and Wyman were convicted under the Official Secrets Act and sentenced to three months in jail in February

1973. However, as they had already served two months, they were immediately released and flown to England.

Shortly before his arrest, Crinnion confided to a fellow Garda that “the Brits” had been involved in causing the explosions. He had received this information from his brother-in-law in the British Army, James Lattimore of the Royal Irish Rangers.

Lattimore was based in Belfast in 1972. In his death notice published on 4th April 2007, he is described as Major James Benedict Lattimore MBE, Enniskillen Fusiliers (retired).

Over the following months of 1972 a number of stories appeared in the media about possible British involvement in the bombings. Former Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, admitted he suspected British involvement – an assertion that was denied by the London government.

A copycat car bomb was planted in Sackville Place on 20th January 1973, killing another young bus conductor, 21-year-old Tommy Douglas – a native of Stirling, Scotland.

The investigation into this bombing was minimal and very little information is known about it.

Nobody has ever been arrested, let alone convicted, for these atrocities.

The claims of British collusion in these and later bombings persist.

Justice for the Forgotten is still pressing the British authorities to make documents available on all the cross-Border bombings of the 1970s, which they failed to disclose to Judge Henry Barron to assist in his Independent Commission of Inquiry.

**Margaret Urwin is spokesperson for Justice for the Forgotten**