

Behind the headlines in Northern Ireland
The bombing of Markethill
A Personal View

Edited by

Anita Linden

Teacher Fellow in History Education, School of Education, University of Nottingham

Marcella Gillespie

Head of History, Christ the King School, Nottingham

&

Alex Wollard

Head of History, Tuxford School, Tuxford

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Introduction - briefing sheet for teachers

Markethill

On Wednesday, 28 August 1991, a massive explosion rocked Markethill, a predominantly Protestant village in Co. Armagh in Northern Ireland.

The IRA placed a 1,000 lb bomb in a van outside the police station. The explosion was heard more than twenty miles away. The blast destroyed the police station, injured a soldier, destroyed a factory, shops and houses, and damaged hundreds of other buildings.

Evacuation

Forty minutes warning had been given and many buildings were evacuated, but not, for some reason, the house of one thirteen-year-old girl belonging to one of the handful of Catholic families in the village. She and her three sisters were at home and were not told of the threat. Consequently, they were lucky to escape with only cuts and bruises as the blast almost destroyed the house.

Recalling the experience

The first time this young woman spoke about her experience outside her family was nine years later, when she was on teaching practice in a Catholic secondary school in England. Her students were studying Ireland as part of the Modern World Study at GCSE History. As she said,

I was in year nine and about 13. It was my first real experience of violence in Northern Ireland and, although I've always been aware of violence, it's the first time I was ever affected.

The students were rivetted by her account, which brought home to them the realities of life in Northern Ireland and encouraged them to tackle their coursework with even more enthusiasm - and understanding.

A resource

The impact on the students was so marked that the material is being being tested in other schools and is presented in two formats:

1. Behind the headlines - a national, local and individual view of an event

This gives students an opportunity to examine newspapers critically as sources of evidence. Reports on the Markethill bombing are given from a leading British daily newspaper, *The Times*, and a leading Northern Ireland daily newspaper, *The Ulster News Letter**. The two reports can then be compared with an individual's account of the same incident.

2. Growing up in Northern Ireland

This A5 booklet presents the wide-ranging questions asked by Year 10 students and the student teacher's frank and personal responses. It could be used as extension material or as a trigger to bring home the realities of life in Northern Ireland.

* Founded in 1737, *The Ulster News Letter* was the first newspaper in Ulster and remains the oldest daily paper in Ireland. Formerly called the *Belfast News Letter*, it is unionist in politics with a daily circulation of almost 33,000 in Northern Ireland and the northern counties of the Irish Republic.

Behind the headlines

Lesson 1a - Tuxford

Lesson objective

Working with primary source material to improve source work skills and detection of bias.

Class

Year 10

Time

50 minutes

Tasks

1. Arrange pupils into small groups of approximately four.
2. Give each group one of the two newspaper articles and the question sheet. Give out an equal number of each article if possible.
3. Ask pupils to read the articles together in their groups - *have dictionaries available* - and to record their answers to the first ten questions on the sheet. (*Only one pupil need write.*)
4. Ask pupils to feedback their findings through a teacher led class discussion. It should soon become apparent that some groups have far more detailed responses and some groups could not answer several questions at all.
5. Hand out the second newspaper article to all the groups and allow time for pupils to skim read and gain an overview of the article. All groups will now have the same two articles.
6. Direct pupils to the final five questions on the sheet. Use each question as a stimulus for class discussion.
7. *Plenary*
What have students learned from the lesson?
How will this help in the completion of their coursework?
What other information would they need in order to complete a more thorough investigation of this particular bombing incident?

Questions on newspaper articles

A. *Working together in your groups, use the newspaper article to answer the questions below. You should write your answers on this sheet.*

1. How big was the bomb?
2. Who planted the bomb?
3. Exactly what vehicle was the bomb planted in?
4. What was the name of the town?
5. How many minutes before the blast was a warning given?
6. Which two people had to be treated and what for?
7. What happened to the sheep?
8. Exactly which buildings were damaged by the blast?
9. When was the last serious terrorist attack on the town?
10. What was the reaction of people who lived in the area?

B. *Now compare your newspaper article to the other newspaper article and discuss the following questions:*

11. One of the articles is from a British newspaper and the other is from an Irish newspaper. Which do you think is which?
12. What evidence do you have to back up your point of view?
13. What do your findings tell you about different attitudes towards IRA bombs from the mainland U.K. and from Ireland?
14. Search the articles again to find any evidence of language which could indicate bias.
15. What other sources of information would be useful for a more detailed and thorough investigation of this particular bomb blast?

Behind the headlines

Lesson 1b - Christ the King

Lesson objectives

1. Stimulate interest and aid understanding through an investigation of the Markethill bombing;
2. Enhance skills of comprehension and evaluation through working with primary source material.

Class

Year 10

Time

50 minutes

Introduction

Show map on OHT to set Markethill in its geographical context. At this stage do not give any more details about the town, apart from the fact that a bomb exploded there and the students' task is to find out as much as they can about the town and the explosion.

Tasks - same as 1a

Town centre blasted by IRA van bomb

A bomb planted inside a van devastated the centre of Markethill, County Armagh, demolishing buildings and injuring a soldier.

The 1,000lb bomb, planted by the IRA, exploded outside the town's police station as the streets were crowded on market day. The blast was heard more than 20 miles away in Newry. Hundreds of sheep trapped in pens near the police station were later destroyed on veterinary advice. Many others were killed in the explosion.

A factory, shops and houses were destroyed and hundreds of other buildings

extensively damaged. A soldier suffered a foot wound and a woman was treated for shock.

The RUC said that a warning was received 40 minutes before the explosion and the area evacuated.

James Nicholson, the Ulster Unionist MEP who lives in the area, condemned the IRA attack as callous. 'Once again, the people of the town have suffered at the hands of the IRA, who have shown a total disregard for life and property.'

MAYHEM AT THE MARKET

PEOPLE in the sleepy town of Markethill missed a sea of slaughter by minutes yesterday.

A 1,000lb IRA van bomb planted outside Markethill RUC station wreaked havoc throughout the Co Armagh market town.

The heavily fortified security base at Mowhan Road was extensively damaged when the blue Toyota Hi-Ace blew up.

Hundreds of homes and shops throughout the town centre were badly hit. There was serious damage to several houses in Mowhan Court, a housing development close to the station. Windows were blown out, doors and roofs ripped off.

Across the road from the police station, the Spence Bryson weaving factory was virtually reduced to rubble, putting 50 jobs in jeopardy. The firm produces linen for export.

It was cheap sales day at the livestock mart just round the corner in Newry Street. There were upwards of 900 sheep and lambs on offer - many died in the massive explosion.

Two warning calls were received about the attack.

The first to a hospital was given 37 minutes before the blast. Security forces had evacuated and sealed off the area.

A woman was treated for shock and a soldier sustained a slight foot injury.

Police officers were in the station, which operates a limited opening to the public of four hours daily, when the alarm was raised. The last serious terrorist attack in the town was in June 1980 when eight families were left homeless.

The town's two Presbyterian churches sustained structural damage and had windows blown out.

Presbyterian Moderator Dr Rodney Sterritt went to the scene accompanied by the minister the Rev Bob Allely.

Parked vehicles were damaged by flying debris and the streets were carpeted with broken glass.

SDLP MP Seamus Mallon described the town as 'devastated'.

He estimated that the homes of up to 300 people had been seriously damaged. Quite a few houses would not be habitable for some time.

Mr Mallon, who lives a quarter of a mile from the scene, said it was a huge explosion. The force had brought him to his knees.

A senior RUC officer at Gough Barracks in Armagh said once again a terrorist outrage had been achieved through the use of a van bomb.

'The explosion could have taken many lives either in Markethill or en route to the station. Thankfully, it did not,' said the officer.

The explosion had caused a temporary disruption to policing but the lasting tragedy was the devastation and suffering inflicted on many people by a pointless exercise.

He said a police service will be maintained in the area despite the extensive damage and the station will be re-opened as soon as possible.

The Ulster Unionist chairman of Armagh District Council, Mr George Macartney, condemned the attack and slammed the IRA for committing a 'foul deed' of destruction on a peaceful hard-working community.

He had this message for the terrorists: 'You will never defeat the will of the people in Armagh district to live in peace and prosperity.'

Mr Macartney called on the Government to show resolution to defeat 'these evil men and women of violence'.

Workers Party spokesman Pat McCusker denounced the attack as 'savage and indiscriminate' and said it was the IRA's idea of freedom and justice.'

He described those people who would suggest dialogue with Provos as 'dangerously naive'.

Detectives investigating the incident are appealing to anyone who saw the vehicle, which had the false number EBZ 3489, being abandoned outside the RUC station or in transit to contact Armagh 523311 or use the confidential phone.

Attack sparks rage

Stormont minister Jeremy Handley said he was not surprised to hear that the Provisional IRA claimed responsibility for the attack on the community in Markethill which shattered an old people's home and devastated a peaceful town.

'This terrorist organisation has, as its hallmark and its aims, wanton destruction of life and livelihood.

'Protestations of peaceful intent by the Provisionals' fellow travellers ring hollow after the devastation of at Kilrea and Markethill - just what have they achieved?'

Behind the headlines

Lesson 2a - Tuxford

Lesson objective

To create a more empathetic student response by studying a personal account of the bombing and comparing it with the previous lesson on newspaper reports.

Class

Year 10

Time

50 minutes

Tasks

1. Brief introduction by the teacher to the town of Markethill and the family of the young girl whose story is to be studied. Use maps on OHT to give a geographical overview and information from the background and introduction sections of the Markethill resource pack.
2. *Inductive exercise*
Pupils to work in pairs to arrange the cards containing a summarised personal account of the bombing into chronological order. Feedback findings and corrections through whole class discussion.
3. Invite pupils to read the story out loud. Encourage all students to attempt a sentence at least and ask confident readers to attempt whole cards. The teacher should also take turns to read. An OHT should be used showing the layout of the house and the effect of the bomb to support the story.
4. *Plenary*
Whole class discussion to compare the personalised account with the findings of the previous lesson.
How has a personal account helped?
Has it changed any views/opinions about the bombings in Ireland?
How can this information be used to enhance GCSE coursework?

Behind the headlines

Lesson 2b - Christ the King

Lesson objectives

1. Encourage empathetic understanding and interest using a personal account;
2. Help students gain more insight into the situation in Northern Ireland.

Class

Year 10

Time

50 minutes

Introduction

Recap the main points learned from the two newspaper articles in lesson 1b. Explain that the new source is a personal account of a young teenager caught up in the bomb. *Optional: show 3-4 minute excerpt from the video showing her talking about her experiences to students.*

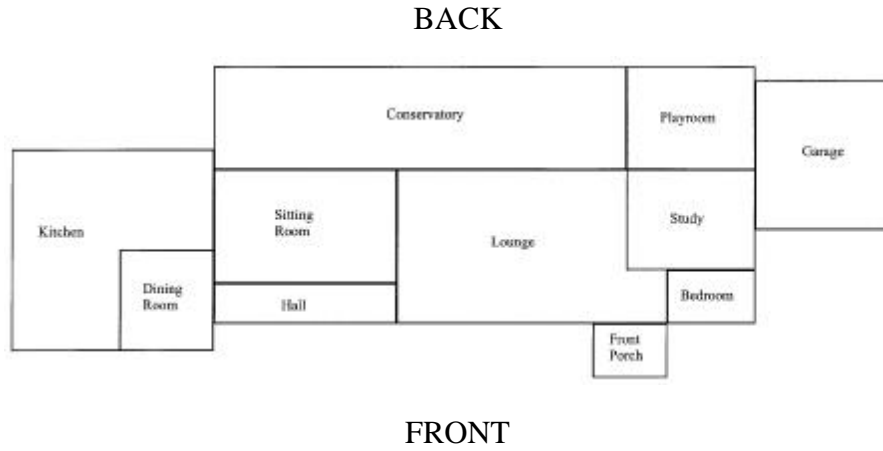
Tasks

1. In pairs complete as many details on the A3 sheet (*accompanying A4 sheet blown up*) through a shared reading of the account.
2. When this activity is completed, invite students to share their answers.
Put plan and picture of the rooms on OHT to show pupils as they are giving their feedback on the damage caused by the bomb.
Draw attention to the broken glass and the chair the teenager was sitting on 'with her legs hanging over the other side'.
Ask students to pick out other details shown that are mentioned in the text, for example, the ironing board, the damage done to the playroom where the three year old was, Venetian blinds etc.
3. *Plenary*
Compare this evidence to that contained in the newspapers, especially the differences between the accounts. Why are there differences?
Which source was most useful for thinking about (a) this bomb and (b) the situation in Northern Ireland?
How valuable is the personalised account?
If you could speak to this young girl, what other questions might you want to ask her about her life in Northern Ireland? (*This last part could be useful as a lead in to using the A5 booklet 'Growing up in Northern Ireland'.*)

Behind the headlines: a personal account of the Markethill bomb

Brief family details

Location of children in house and garden



Effects of the bomb

1. *On the children*

2. *On the home*

Details given in this account not found in the newspapers

Ways in which this account helps you understand more about the bomb

Viewpoint of a Markethill teenager

My background

Markethill

Basically I grew up in a town called Markethill. It's a small village in Armagh. It's near South Armagh. It's a predominantly Protestant village and growing up as a Catholic I was in a minority. There's not very many families. In fact, we can probably name all the families that I know that are the same religion as me.

Growing up

I went to a school about eleven miles away from the town. It was a girls' school and a Catholic school. This is pretty normal for Northern Ireland. Most children go to either a Catholic school or a Protestant school. It is divided by their religion very much.

When I was growing up there was no such thing as mixed schools or integrated schools. There was never the opportunity for me to meet with other Protestants until I was old enough to be going out and meeting them for myself because we're very much segregated in the early years.

The family

I come from a family of seven. There are five kids and I'm in the middle. I'm 22. I have a younger sister who's 13 and my brother's 20. My two older sisters are 27 and 28. We all have had different experiences of life in Northern Ireland, everybody has.

As a family I guess the main experience was the bomb that we had. I was in year nine and about 13. It was my first real experience of violence in Northern Ireland and, although I've always been aware of violence, it's the first time I was ever affected.

Viewpoint of a Markethill teenager

The day of the bomb

Messing around

It was a Wednesday, so it was, half-day closing and my sister was working in the local supermarket at the time at a part-time job. She came home at lunch time and said, 'Something's happening. Something's going on'. We could see all the houses behind us. Somebody was from running door to door and everybody was gathering.

We just thought it was a barbecue. It was a really, really hot summer's day ... for lying about in the sunshine and messing around. My sister was doing the ironing and I was watching the TV, lounging in the chair. We were all in shorts, no shoes and socks and it was really hot. It was glorious. I was swinging on the chair with my legs hanging out over the side of it. Another sister, she was outside sunbathing in the garden and my other wee sister was in the playroom. She was three at the time.

The explosion

When the bomb went off, the blast of it was horrendous, It went off just the other side of our fence. We live near a police station, which is about 100-200 yards away from the house. The bomb went off, a thousand pounds. It had been packed into a transit van driven into the town during market day and then left there. The experience of being in a bomb is absolutely horrendous. There's nothing like the experience you go through.

What happened to the family

I was sitting relaxing on my chair when something almost like a big suction comes into the room, just lifted me into the air and hurled me about. My sister was standing beside our really big glass windows doing the ironing. She was hurled out over the top of the ironing board.

My wee sister, who was three, was in the playroom. She was probably the luckiest out of all of us in the house. The playroom is in the conservatory and is surrounded by glass with glass roofing too. Every window was blown in with the blast and the whole lot came in round her. She didn't get harmed at all. There wasn't even a glass cut on her.

My sister who was outside – well she got showered with the shrapnel from the bomb. The van just went into thousands of wee bits and bits of metal that got all twisted up and that. And she got showered with them in the force of it. We were all extremely lucky. The pressure of the bomb lifted the entire roof off the house and set it back down crooked again. It's amazing the destruction it can do.

In shock

After the bomb was over I was – oh, you can't imagine the feeling of shock that comes into you. You know what's happened, you know a bomb's gone off. You're not really thinking straight. You're just in a big shock. I landed on the floor somewhere near the TV. I got up and I was screaming, 'I'm dead. I'm dead. Look at me. I'm dead.' Obviously I wasn't. I thought with the force of the blast I should have been killed.

I was looking at my sister and she was jumping about with an iron in her hand. The plug was left in the wall but she had burned the socket of the iron. The whole thing had come out with the blast. But she was going, 'You're not dead, you're not dead. I'm dead. I'm dead.' It's very – it's funny now, looking back on it after all these years but it wasn't funny at the time.

It was so frightening. But you get over that initial shock, I think she slapped me across the face to calm me down. I can't really remember. It was just – my God, where is everybody else? Where is my family? You know, is everybody OK?

Telling Mum

After the bomb actually went off, the place was just covered in smoke and dust. It was really disgusting. Everything, your whole world has just turned upside down, so it is. My Mammy had been playing golf that day with my wee brother and we had to tell her what had happened. Lucky enough, the phone lines were still working. We got through to the club. She already knew the bomb had gone off. The golf course was seven miles away but she heard the blast. She had seen the big mushroom of smoke that comes up when the bomb goes off and she just knew that our town was the only town in that direction. This made her run for it.

Head to toe in blood

I don't know what we did in the house until Mammy arrived. It must have taken her over 20 minutes to arrive. I don't remember that 20 minutes at all. It's lost—so it is. I'll never forget her coming into the house and she was crying, so she was, 'Oh my God, where's my children? Where's my children?'

We were all just standing there like and we looked a bit drab because we're all covered head to toe in blood. We'd all been cut with glass. Not serious cuts, they're all like paper cuts, because the glass is in smithereens. Mammy comes in and here we all are standing covered in blood with our clothes all ripped and in states of shock. She comes in and she was touching each of our faces and wiping the blood away. We'd blood on our arms and legs and she was wiping it away to make sure we were all right. And, I don't know why, we were all just standing with the phone until mum had checked us all over. And she was dead frightened because all she could see was this pool of blood at our feet.

None of us were badly hurt. It looked worse than it was. But there was this like whole wee pool of blood at our feet. That was why she thought some of us had been cut badly because we were leaking blood. It had happened I think when we were running through the house in our bare feet over all the glass. And we never, we didn't realise we were cut, so we didn't. And, obviously then we realised, hello, we're standing on glass. Is there any wonder there was a pool of blood? That was my first ever experience of violence in Ireland. And it was a horrendous thing to go through.

The results of the bombing

It took us two years to get our house back to normal again after it happened. Everything that we owned was covered in glass - our mattresses and everything. We, ourselves had to be really careful, you know. We couldn't brush our hair because our hair caught the blast on the way through, so it had. And we just had to shake it out. You can't wash it because it would cut into your scalp. For two years we lived in two rooms of the house.

Why no evacuation?

The Northern Ireland Office comes round after the bomb and inspects it to see the damage, for your insurance money and that. When they came round to visit us, they said we were so lucky to be evacuated and so lucky to get out when the alarm was given. My Mum was so annoyed. She said, 'There was no warning given you know. The kids were all in the house. Nobody told us to get out.' She was really angry that everybody behind us who were all further away from the bomb, were all evacuated and we weren't. Some people ask, 'Why was that?'

You could say maybe it was an isolated house and the people going door to door missed it or maybe because we were Catholics. In a Protestant town, maybe we weren't the priority on the list. Whatever the reason, we were all extremely lucky to get out. Everybody who walked through the house said what saved all of our lives was the Venetian blinds and curtains. They took the brunt of the blast and protected us from most of the bigger lumps of shrapnel and glass coming through. That was the first bomb that we had.

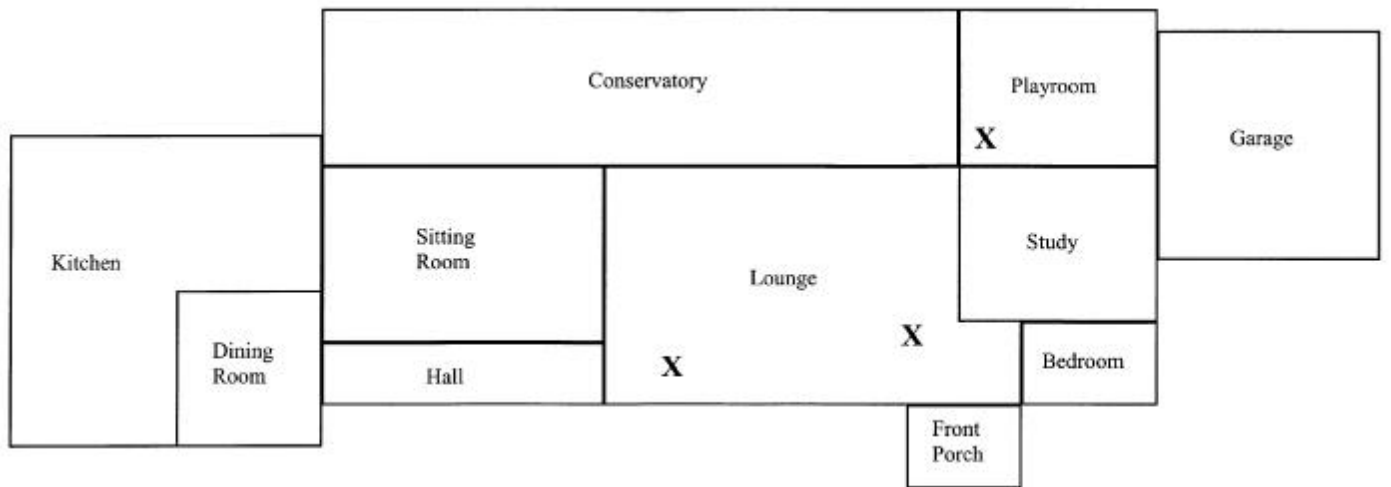


Back of the house



Conservatory

BACK



X

FRONT

X = location of children in the house and front garden at the time of the bomb



Lounge



Playroom

Northern Ireland
Markethill



The island of Ireland



Appendix

Appraisals

School 1 - Tuxford

I must apologise for the fact that I only had time to trial the first lesson. I would dearly have loved to have tried the second lesson too but our coursework deadline was looming and the students were starting to panic.

Date: 14 May 2001; *Class:* Year 10 (all girls and mixed ability); *Class size:* 20; *time:* *Period 5:* (1.50- 2.40 pm)

Positive outcomes

1. The students obviously enjoyed the lesson. They remained on task throughout and showed an interest and enthusiasm for the subject. They enjoyed the opportunity to do some groupwork after the strains of working on individual coursework assignments for so long!
2. They were aware that groups had different newspaper articles and this gave a competitive edge to the lesson. Most pupils were keen to contribute to the whole class discussion and made some pertinent points.
3. They guessed correctly which newspaper article was Irish and highlighted a number of reasons to back up their ideas. Previous knowledge clearly helped here.
4. Bias was also successfully detected. Personal accounts/interviews were identified as ways into a more thorough investigation of the bomb, along with police reports and surveyors reports on the buildings among other things.

Points to consider

5. The fact that the group is a single sex group and of a relatively small size for a GCSE group may have affected the outcome. They are a particularly hard working and enthusiastic group. Also, I could not have an equal number of groups working on each article and chose 3 of the 5 groups to work on the Irish paper.
6. Next time I would blow up the articles onto A3 paper as some students found the type difficult to read, particularly after photocopying.
7. Timing is also an issue. Fifty minutes is not very long and they took longer to answer the initial ten questions than I had originally anticipated.

On the whole I would say it is a worthwhile activity and the students commented that it had helped them in the preparation of their coursework assignments and their understanding of different perspectives/viewpoints.

School 2 - Christ the King

Lesson 1: *Date:* 29 June 2001; *time:* *Period 6:* (2.45-3.35 pm);

Lesson 2: *Date:* 2 July 2001; *time:* *Period 5:* (1.55- 2.45 pm)

Class: Year 10 (mixed, middle to high ability); *Class size:* 28.

1. The resource was used early on in the course to engage the students so, although the media dairy was underway, most students' knowledge was not extensive.
2. The students enjoyed using the newspapers and were quick to pinpoint the differences in the two reports; correctly guessing which was the Irish newspaper. In pairs they highlighted language in this report which showed bias and this led into a good discussion.
3. For more thorough investigation they identified police reports and eyewitness accounts as useful sources - which led very well into the next lesson. I told them they would be using a personal account of the bomb next lesson, and they showed interest and enthusiasm - which, given it was lesson 6 on a Friday afternoon, was very heartening!
4. The personal account engaged the pupils immediately. The shared reading gave students the chance to discuss the material as they were working through it. There was much discussion and decision making about locating the sisters in the home and the damage caused by the bomb. The pictures on the OHT were very effective for showing visually the destructive capacity of the blast.
5. In comparing the account with the newspapers the students were quick to point out that this family's experience had not been recorded in either of the articles. They were also very interested in the fact that while others were evacuated, this family were not.
6. We discussed the value and reliability of all the accounts. The general consensus was that the personal account was very useful for giving background information not normally gained in newspapers, such as, the effect on the sisters, the mother's reaction. They thought it was reliable evidence as the language used was not emotive and the pictures confirmed details in the text.

Overall the students enjoyed using the resources as it helped to give them a better understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland.

Ireland
in
Schools

Promoting
mutual
understanding
between the
peoples of
Britain and
Ireland through
young people

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Professor Patrick Buckland
Chairman
19 Woodlands Road
Liverpool
L17 0AJ

Tel./fax: 44 -151 727 6817
e-mail: kha200@aol.com