

# What happened in Omagh?

## An introduction to Irish history for Year 7

by  
Nicky Peart  
Ashfield School

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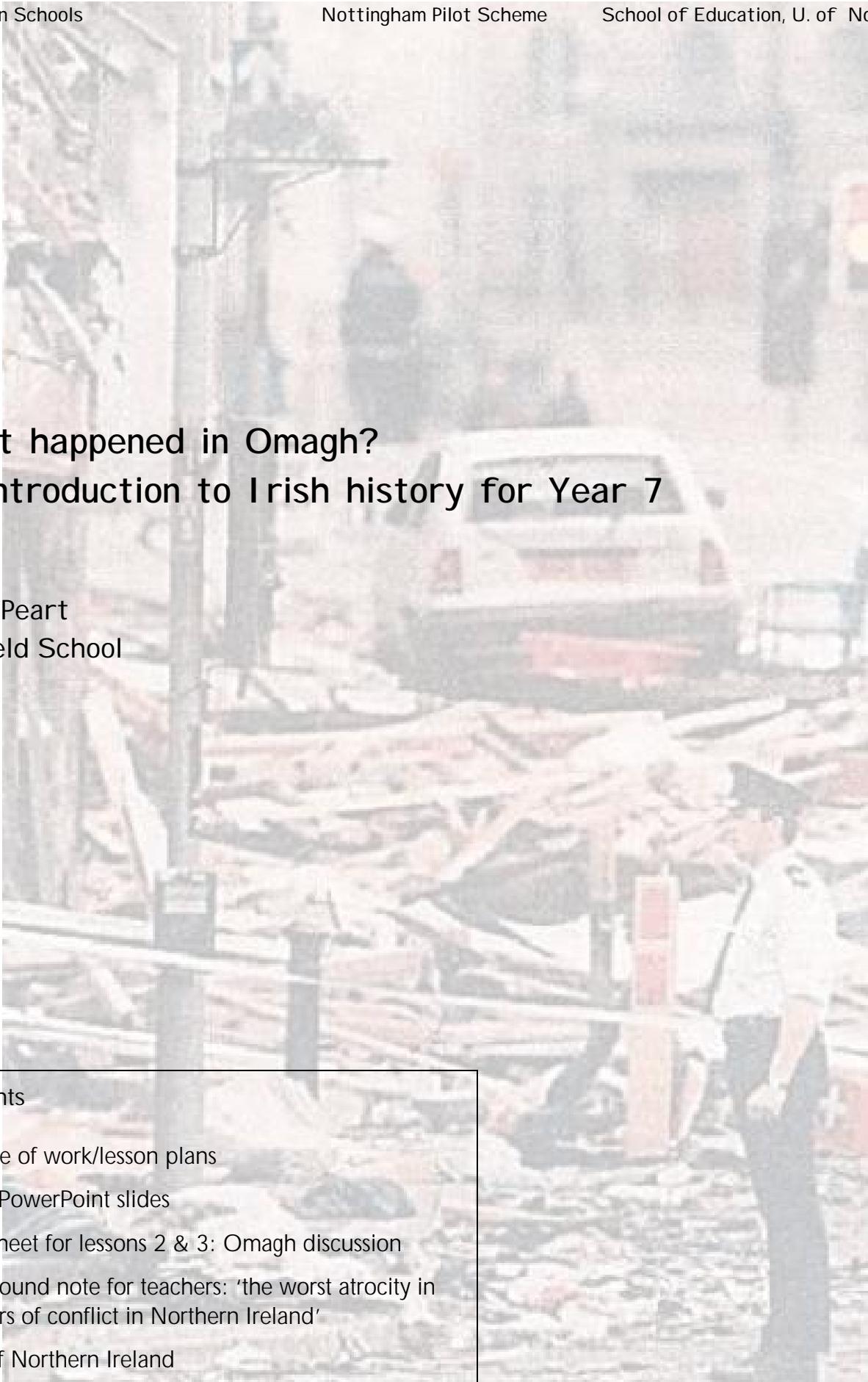
Scheme of work/lesson plans

List of PowerPoint slides

Worksheet for lessons 2 & 3: Omagh discussion

Background note for teachers: 'the worst atrocity in 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland'

Map of Northern Ireland



Lesson 1: What happened in Omagh?					
Aims/Key Questions	Resources	Engage (0-10 mins)	Exposition (10-15 mins)	Main Activity (15-40 mins)	Summary (40-50 mins)
1. To analyse an event. 2. To see the reactions. 3. To see the background.	1. Ppt 'What happened in Omagh?' 2. Dvd 'Omagh' 3. CD Irish Music.	Using Ppt Slide 2 show the images of Ireland, with the music in the background. Using Slide 3 of the Ppt ask the students which of the words best describes Ireland. Get them to give reasons why using the images they have previously seen.	Explain (using Ppt Slide 4) that Ireland has been divided over religion for centuries and it still causes disagreement and trouble today. They are going to look at one event, Omagh, which happened in August 1998.	Show the students the clip from the BBC Omagh programme. It shows the Real IRA planting the bomb, a family affected and the bomb blast. Just let them watch this, as it is very dramatic.	Show the students the poem (using slide 5 of the Ppt). Ask them how the people of Omagh feel about the bomb blast.
Lesson 2: What happened in Omagh? Discussion preparation					
1. To analyse an event. 2. To prepare questions. 3. To see reactions.	1. Ppt 'What happened in Omagh? Discussion Preparation'. 2. w/sheet 'Omagh discussion'.	Using Slide 2 of the Ppt read the students the letter from Gwen Hall after the Omagh Bombing. As a class answer the questions.	Explain using Ppt slide 3 that they are going to prepare for a discussion lesson on the Omagh Bombing. They need to answer all the questions on the w/sheet in bullet points.	Answer all the questions on the w/sheet in preparation for the discussion.	N/a
Lesson 3: What happened in Omagh? Discussion					
1. To analyse an event. 2. To take part in a discussion.	1. W/sheet 'Omagh Discussion' 2. 2 packs of playing cards 3. Ppt 'What happened in Omagh? Discussion'	N/a	Using Ppt slide 2 explain the rules of the discussion and how the playing cards discussion works.	Students are involved in the discussion. Have two packs of playing cards. Take out the number of cards needed for the size of class you have. From the other pack take a matching set of cards. Shuffle the teacher set and pull out the top card. The person with the matching card must give the answer to the question you are answering from the previous lesson's worksheet. Continue this process and shuffle occasionally.	

## List of PowerPoint slides

- Lesson 1            Aims: What happened in Omagh?  
                        Slideshow: What is Ireland like?  
                        What descriptive words would you use to describe Ireland?  
                        Why are there troubles in Ireland?  
                        Omagh: What happened?  
                                An Omagh Remembrance - A poem by John Friel  
                        How do the people of Omagh feel?  
                                An Omagh Remembrance - A poem by John Friel
- Lesson 2            Aims: What happened in Omagh?  
                        Discussion Preparation  
                        How do the people of Ireland feel about Omagh, and react?  
                                Gwen Hall's open letter to the 'Real' IRA from her hospital bed  
                        Discussion Preparation
- Lesson 3            Aims: Discussion - What happened in Omagh?  
                        Discussion lessons: How do they work?

Prepare all the questions below for the discussion next lesson.

1. What is Ireland like as a country?
2. What happened at Omagh?
3. Why did the bombing happen?
4. What were the reactions of the people of Omagh?



Background note for teachers

## 'The worst atrocity in 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland'

Taken from *Conflict in Northern Ireland* by R.G. Grant, Hodder Wayland, 0-75023-429-6, pp 5-7

On Saturday, 15 August 1998, members of an Irish Republican group calling itself the Real IRA drove into the small town of Omagh in County Tyrone. Using a stolen maroon Vauxhall Cavalier, was packed with explosives, they carried out what would prove to be the worst atrocity in 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland.

### Peace process

The 'Troubles' had started in 1969 with clashes between the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. The Catholic IRA (Irish Republican Army) had subsequently attempted to end British rule in the province by force of arms.

In 1998 the IRA was publicly committed to an end to violence, as attempts went ahead to implement a Northern Ireland peace agreement. But IRA men opposed to the agreement had formed the Real IRA and continued to undertake terrorist acts in an effort to reignite the conflict and disrupt the peace process.

### Countdown

In the early afternoon of 15 August, the Real IRA men parked the maroon Cavalier in the centre of Omagh. After activating a timer linked the explosives, they got out of the car and walked away.

The town was busy with weekend shoppers. Kevin and Philomena Skelton were taking their three daughters to Watterson's clothes store in Market Street to buy school uniforms for the new term. Mary Grimes was celebrating her 65th birthday with a trip to the town, accompanied by her daughter and 18-month-old grand-daughter. Aidan Gallagher, a 21-year-old car mechanic, had decided to go into town to buy some jeans.

A party of Spanish schoolchildren on a visit to Northern Ireland had stopped off in Omagh with some Irish friends, including 12-year-old James Barker, 8-year-old Oran Doherty and 12-year-old Sean McLaughlin.



This snapshot of a Spanish visitor to Omagh was taken seconds before the car on the right exploded. The girl's face was blanked out by the police before they released the photo.

### The warning

Around 2.30 pm, the police received a phone call saying that a bomb had been left near the courthouse at the top

#### Eye-witness

Dorothy Boyle, who was in Omagh when the bomb went off, described to journalists the terrible scene she witnessed.

'I saw bodies lying everywhere. I saw them being put in bags and being zipped :up-... There Were people with cuts in their heads, bleeding. There was one boy had half his leg blown off and it was lying there with the wee shoe still on it. He didn't cry or anything. He was just in shock.'

*Daily Telegraph*, 16 August 1998

of Market Street. By 3.10 they had carried out the difficult task of clearing the area around the courthouse, moving people further down the street.

Some shop assistants stepped out of the doors of their shops to see what was going on. Just alongside the maroon car parked in the now crowded part of the street away from the courthouse, a member of the Spanish school party posed for a holiday snap. Seconds later, the car exploded.

### Casualties

In an instant, the area was reduced to a chaos of glass and rubble. The explosion inflicted terrible burns and blast injuries.

#### No healing

Kevin Skelton lost his wife Philomena in the Omagh bombing, in which his three teenage daughters were also injured. Only a metre away from his wife when the bomb went off, Kevin suffer barely a scratch, but the emotional trauma was intense. A year the tragedy, he told a journalist that he was still plagued with nightmares.

'I always dream that something happens that separates me from the family and that I can do nothing at all about it ... People keep saying that time. Well; it hasn't, not yet, for me.'

*Daily Telegraph, 15 August 1999*

Philomena Skelton was killed; so were Mary Grimes, her daughter and granddaughter; James Barker, Oran Doherty, Sean McLaughlin and two of the Spanish school party; Aidan Gallagher; and others like them – ordinary individuals, young and old, who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In all, 29 people died and over 200 were injured, many of them seriously. The victims were both Catholics and Protestants – people from both sides of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland.

### Reactions

One immediate reaction to the news of the Omagh bombing was to ask how anyone could carry out such a brutal outrage. Yet in the context of Irish history it was not so extraordinary.

Some 3,000 people have been killed in Northern Ireland by bombs or bullets since the late 1960s. Since the start of the 20th century many others have died in violent conflicts in Ireland involving the British, the Catholic Irish and Protestants.

#### Looking to the future

On 15 August 1998 Gary McGillion and his fiancée Donna Marie Keyes were in Omagh shopping for their wedding, which was due to take place the following Saturday. Caught in the full blast of the bomb, Donna Marie suffered horrendous burns; her 21-month-old niece, Breda Devine, was killed. Against the odds, Donna Marie survived, and her battle to recover became a symbol of the determination of the people of Omagh to overcome the tragedy. In March 1999, Gary and Donna Marie were married. Although she still bore terrible scars, Donna Marie was a radiant bride. She said:

'We were not going to let the bombers turn us into bitter people. It would have been easy to feel sorry for ourselves and spend the rest of our lives full of anger and self-pity. I cannot change the past. All I can do is make the best of the future.'

*Daily Telegraph, 28 March 1999*

