

ULSTER HERALD
August 15
1998
Omagh

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACKIE SLOAN

ColdType
Fall 2002



SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS



Tears have flowed freely in Omagh and surrounding districts in the short few days since the worst atrocity ever in the last 30 years of violence here was visited on the town on Saturday. In the years ahead, that day will be used as a marker by which we gauge our lives. For us all our existence will be measured in terms of things which happened before or after this traumatic event. The sheer scale of the appalling tragedy which unfolded on the Feast of the Assumption still beggars belief within a community where hardly a family has been left untouched by its ferocity.

Indeed, throughout the world, the events which took place in Omagh have elicited a wave of sympathy, regret and condemnation as the sheer brutality and senselessness of the cowardly bomb attack which has left 28 people dead and some 200 injured began to hit home. The unseen malignant hand which reached out and touched so many lives has seemingly left little room for hope, and has brought with it only an overwhelming sense of sorrow.

Those who witnessed the awful scenes at Market Street

on Saturday afternoon and the equally traumatic aftermath which followed at local hospitals, cannot fail to have been touched, angered and tempted towards despair.

Attempts to stem the tide of grief which has been evoked amongst the bereaved seem at this stage to be almost futile. No words can describe the indescribable. No word of comfort, no matter how heartfelt, can console the inconsolable, yet we must continue to try and do so.

To do otherwise would be an abdication of our responsibilities to those that have suffered so much. They cannot be left in any doubt that they are constantly in our hearts and in our prayers. They cannot be left in any doubt that their loss is our loss, their pain is our pain.

More than anything else, however, they must be given time to grieve. For the moment thoughts of the future, of peace processes and wider implications of Saturday's outrage are totally irrelevant. The human tragedy is such that it requires all our concentration to cope with the simple process of trying to come through this ordeal together. The wider world can move on if it must, but for the savaged communities in and around Omagh, the process of healing will be a much more gradual one.

Rescue workers
remove the body of
one of the victims of
Saturday's bombing.





Above: An exhausted fireman takes a break from the testing task of sifting through the rubble at Market Street.



Right: Firemen use cranes to help them examine the remains of a building as the search for victims continued.

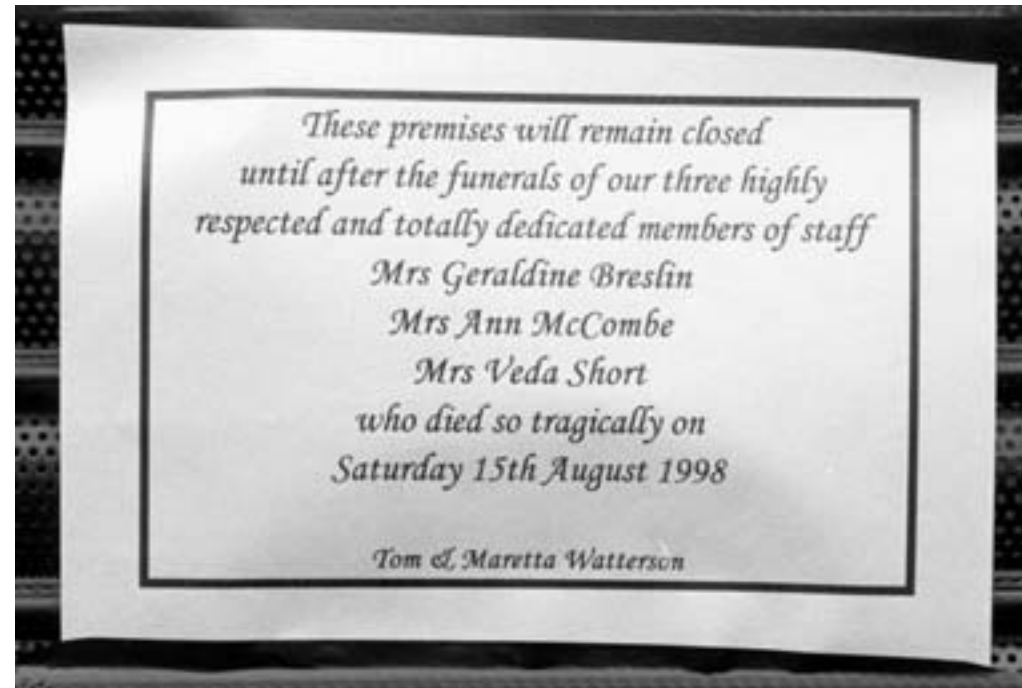


Left: John McFall, Economy Minister for Northern Ireland, shows Britain's Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott the scene of the devastation when he visited the town on Sunday.

Above: John Prescott speaks to the media following his visit to Tyrone County Hospital. He is flanked by John McFall and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon.

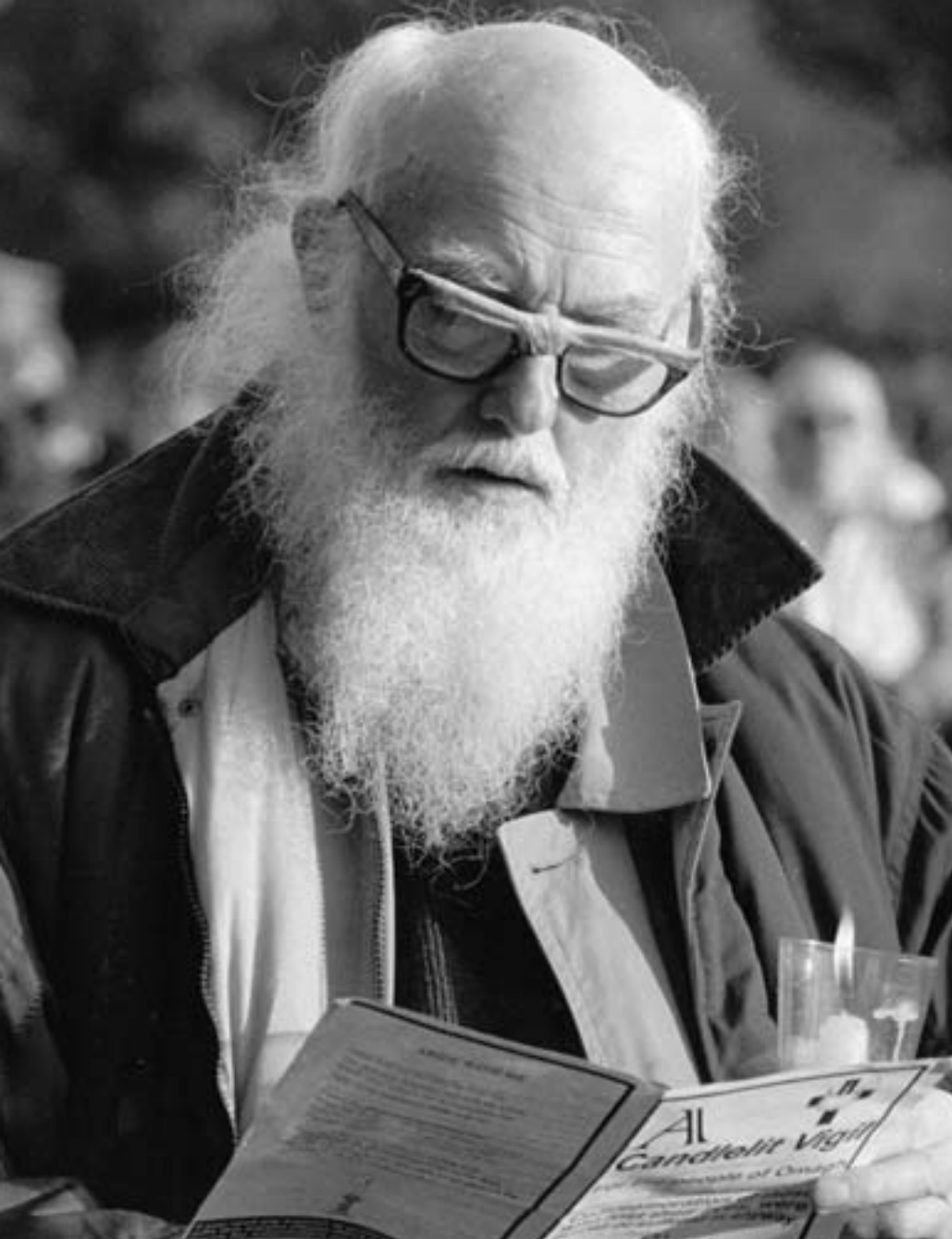
Tearful remembrance as three police officers take flowers to the scene of the tragedy.





Left: A young child reaches out to touch one of the floral tributes.

Above: Sign outside one of the shops hit by the bomb blast.



Left and above: people come together in remembrance of the victims at the candle-lit vigil attended by 5,000 people on the Tuesday after the bombing.



Above: Thousands of people turned out for the vigil on the eve of the funerals.



Right: Mourners pack the centre of Omagh for the Act of Prayerful Reflection a week after the bomb attack.

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THIS PHOTO-ESSAY WAS DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY TONY SUTTON, NEWS DESIGN ASSOCIATES INC, GEORGETOWN, ONTARIO, CANADA. E-MAIL: TONY SUTTON@NEWSDESIGN.NET. WEBSITE: WWW.NEWSDESIGN.NET