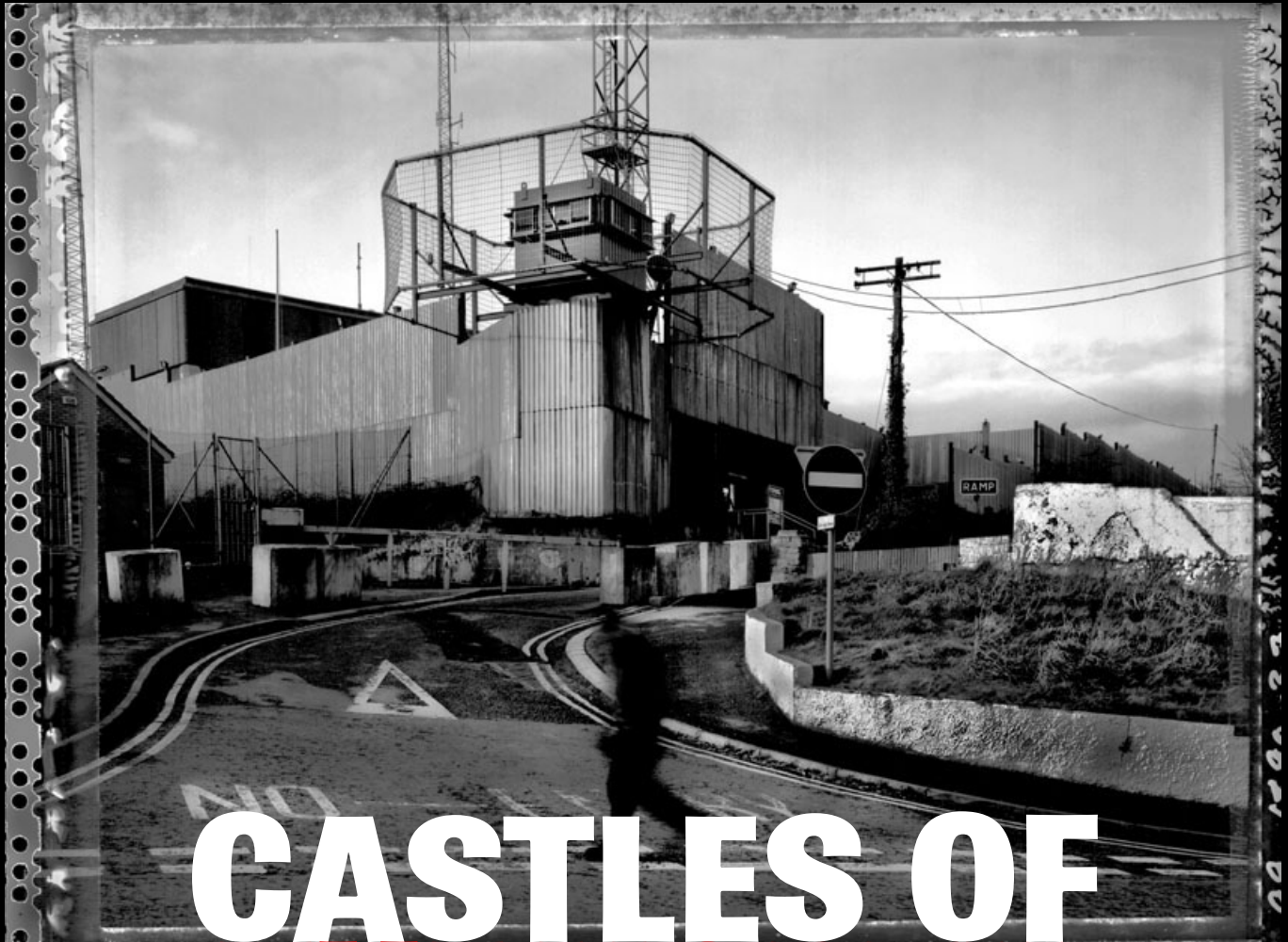


A PHOTO ESSAY BY JONATHAN OLLEY



CASTLES OF THE NORTH

ColdType

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Journalists, photographers and camera crews have followed the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland closely for years now, but attention has rarely been given to the consequences the conflict had for the urban environment. Photographer Jonathan Olley photographed the British army's heavily-armed observation posts and forts which define the street scene in Northern Ireland. They loom up over shops, pubs and fish and chips shops like modern castles. Now that the army is withdrawing as a part of the peace process, the buildings and towers are being demolished brick by brick.

INTRODUCTION | *By Liam Clarke*

THE British army bases in Northern Ireland have been closing, but the future of the fortresses set up by the British in Northern Ireland is less certain. With a fragile peace in progress, they continue to stand in towns and strategic areas, reminders of a violent past.

Nearly every police station and army base in Northern Ireland is protected by metal walls, anti-rocket mesh and airlock-style controlled entry systems. To a local, the ungainly fortresses soon blend into the background, adding to the nagging tension of the place, but they hit with a jolt of recognition after a period abroad – this is home.

The British Army is particularly proud of its ring of 10 watchtowers dotted through the rolling drumlins and smiling fields of South Armagh. The area, scene of mythological Bronze Age battles and now the epi-

centre of resistance to British rule, is known as God's own country to the locals, and bandit or ambush country to the squaddies who patrol nervously under helicopter cover. IRA road signs warn that the local snipers are only "on hold".

Some towers command strategic points, like the Moyry pass, used to control the natives since the plantation of Ulster in the 1600s. Others are more specific. In 1986, two towers, Golf Two Zero and Golf Three Zero, were built at a cost of millions to watch the home of the local IRA commander Thomas "Slab" Murphy, a millionaire terrorist grown rich on smuggling and extortion.

Murphy, who rose to become the IRAs chief of staff, masterminded its Libyan arms importation and its British bombing campaigns from the mid-1980s right up to the Canary Wharf bombing in 1996. His home straddles the border, but every car number plate entering his farm, and every face, is recorded and logged.

Even during a ceasefire, Tom Murphy is a man

worth watching and, in any case, republican dissidents are strong in the area. The maroon Cavalier used by the so-called Real IRA to carry the explosives that killed 29 people in Omagh, in August 1998, was logged moving north with its deadly cargo by two other watchtowers, Golf 50 and Golf 10, near Crossmaglen.

"The towers will be the last fortifications to go down. We'd lose bases first," a senior army source said. The towers are high-tech fortresses with rooms buried beneath, where soldiers can live for months at a time. Computer terminals are linked to the main military intelligence databases, Vengeful and Crucible, and video enhancing equipment allows soldiers to see for miles, even across the border to the Irish republic.

They are hated by the locals in this most republican of areas.

In Londonderry, one observation tower, perched above the city's historic walls at Bishop Street, was given a coat of stone cladding, like a suburban house, in a vain effort to make it blend into the Williamite fortifications.

Some towers are called 'sangars', a military term from the Raj era, meaning stone parapet. Blots on the landscape they may be, but some of Ulster's vanishing fortresses are now regarded with something

approaching nostalgia.

In 1998, Ivan Barr, the Sinn Fein chairman of Strabane council, campaigned to have an inelegant checkpoint called the Camel's Hump preserved as a tourist attraction. Barr wanted its watchtower used as a "viewing gallery", but the army was having none of it. "Does he think we were born yesterday?" one officer asked, arguing that the fortresses hold structural secrets, like anti-mortar measures, which must be protected by demolition.

Since the first IRA ceasefire in 1995, 31 of the British Army's 105 bases in the province have been closed.

Most have been knocked down, but six in Fermanagh have been mothballed, locked up and guarded.

Unionists regard them as a comfort blanket against the resumption of violence, but the army would rather bulldoze them.

There are other reasons for liking the forts. One man bought a house in the shadow of Bessbrook Mill barracks (home to Britain's biggest helipad) after the IRA threatened to murder him as an alleged drugs dealer.

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Designed by Tony Sutton for ColdType.net, October 2003



CROSSMAGLEN RUC STATION AND ARMY BARRACKS, SOUTH ARMAGH

Also known as Borucki Sanger Golf Five Zero, Named after James Borucki, 19, Parachute Regiment, who was blown up by IRA radio controlled bomb contained in a basket on a bicycle in the square, Crossmaglen as he returned from a foot patrol on 8th August 1976.



BRITISH ARMY FIRING RANGE, MAGILLIGAN POINT, LOUGH FOYLE, CO.LONDONDERRY

In an account of Red Hugh O'Donnell's journey north of Dundalk after his escape from Dublin Castle in 1591, a native Irish chronicler wrote of the "watches and ambuscades set by the English on the border in every remarkable pass and each road" to impede O'Donnell's progress.



OUTER DEFENCES, STRABANE RUC STATION, STRABANE, COUNTY TYRONE

"The fools, the fools they think that they have pacified Ireland. But they have left us our Fenian dead. And while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace." – Padraig Pearse.



MOUNTPOTTINGER ROAD RUC STATION, BELFAST: THE SARACEN FACTORY

"We would go out on patrol and the kids would throw paint bombs at us, so to defeat them we had guys painting the Saracen armoured vehicles 24 hours a day. So the locals, upon seeing the freshly painted vehicles assumed that we were manufacturing new ones and the barracks became known as the Saracen factory." – (Ex-captain Royal Logistics Corps, British Army).



BESSBROOK MILL: BRITISH ARMY H.Q. FOR SOUTH ARMAGH.

"This unfortunate district of Crossmaglen has been to my own knowledge – having been in this circuit for the last 14 years – always a stain on the fair province of Ulster." – (Mr Justice Lawson at the Crumlin Road Courthouse Spring Assizes, 1883).



MILLTOWN CEMETERY AND RUC STATION, FALLS ROAD, BELFAST

On February 6, 1992 Fermanagh dog warden, Eric Glass, was called to a remote farm on the border to remove a black Labrador bitch that had bitten farm owner Pat Loughran's niece. Glass had just stopped his van at the farm gate when two masked men armed with a Kalashnikov rifle and a handgun ran towards the side of the van and began to scream. The report was bogus; Glass had been enticed into an IRA ambush. With seven bullet holes in one leg and the bone of the other shattered by a ricochet, Glass returned fire, killing 21-year-old Joe MacManus, an IRA volunteer. It is hard to think of a less glorious act., but MacManus was "accorded a funeral imbued with the symbolism of martyrdom" in the cause of Irish Freedom.



BRITISH ARMY FORTRESS, BELEEK, CO.FERMANAGH

Starting as little more than huts perched on flimsy scaffolding structures, the watchtowers developed into much more substantial installations housing sophisticated equipment such as video and still cameras, computers, telescopes, communications aerials and helicopter-refuelling facilities. Although watchtowers were also erected in other border and some city areas, the biggest concentration is in South Armagh. Their genesis lay in the early Army practice of setting up static observation posts (OPs) on high ground to monitor the routes between Crossmaglen and the border.



BRITISH ARMY FORTRESS, CLIFTONVILLE, CLIFTON PARK AVENUE, BELFAST

"I've been waiting for two years or more
Waiting for Major to settle this war
You have done nothing to prove you want peace
That's why your Army will R.I.P."

– (Sniper's Promise signs, Crossmaglen and Mullaghbawn, March 1997)



BRITISH ARMY FORTRESS, NEWTOWNHAMILTON, SOUTH ARMAGH

"From time to time, something like madness takes possession of a district, until it becomes a by-word. Among the districts having attained this unenviable fame was the district of Crossmaglen, in county Armagh."– (Attorney-General, Abraham Brewster, speaking at the Monaghan Assizes, 1853.)



BRITISH ARMY FORTRESS, FORKHILL, SOUTH ARMAGH

Forkhill Bridge where the Catholic Peter Murphy was hanged on 4th May 1791 for his alleged involvement in a "Defender" attack on Alexander Barclay, brother-in-law of James Dawson, a hated local bailiff.



BRITISH ARMY FORTRESS, BISHOPS GATE, LONDONDERRY

By the 1550s, the native Irish in the area we now regard as the border between Ulster and the Republic, were judged sufficiently troublesome for Sir Nicholas Bagenal, former marshal of Henry VII's army, to build and 'settle' a fortified town at Newry to prevent incursions into the Pale.



RUC POLICE STATION, GROSVENOR ROAD, BELFAST CITY CENTRE, BELFAST

"If I had a magic wand I might like to create a unified state on this island in which people lived harmoniously. But magic wands only exist in fairy tales. In reality there exists on this island groups of people with differing, ultimately irreconcilable, aspirations. Northern Ireland is not peculiar in this respect. The main thing we can reasonably hope for is that the various groups agree to differ without the use of violence. I am happy to see people work for the creation of a United Ireland so long as they do not resort to murder in trying to achieve their ideal. I do not want to see one more death in pursuit of this abstract concept." – (Eamon Collins, former intelligence Officer, South Down Brigade, PIRA. Subsequently executed as an informer by PIRA on 27th Jan 1999)



**BRITISH ARMY FORTRESS, SUGARLOAF HILL, STURGAN BREA,
CAMLOUGH, SOUTH ARMAGH.**

The main route to the north was through the Gap of the North and much of the land either side was either bog or wood, in contrast to the arable farms of the Norman manors lying in the Country Louth lowlands to the south. Faughart Hill, commanded entry to the Gap and it was here that Cuchulainn had slain 14 men. In May 1999, the graveyard at Faughart was chosen by the IRA as the place to give up the first bodies of "The Disappeared". A new coffin containing the remains of Eamon Molloy, an alleged informer from Belfast who had been shot dead 24 years earlier, was left beneath a holy laurel tree, adorned with religious charms, beside St Brigid's Well.

JONATHAN OLLEY

JONATHAN OLLEY was born in 1967 in London, where he studied Fine Art and design at the Chelsea School of Art. After attending a two-year post-graduate course in photography at the Newport School of Documentary Photography in South Wales, he began work as a freelance photographer regularly supplying the national press with news photographs.

Highlights of his career include:

1990. Wins Nikon Press Award for photo essay in the Independent newspaper on the men who scale electricity pylons in order to paint them.

1991-93. Covers the collapse of the Berlin wall and the 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia for the U.K. press. Spends six months living and working in New York City.

1993. Joins Network Photographers, a cooperative agency founded in 1981, and begins a project in New Mexico and Nevada, USA, on the atom bomb.

1994. Travels to Bosnia, living under siege in Sarajevo, taking news photographs for the Boston Globe, Paris Match, L'Express and The Guardian newspaper. His photoessay on the last Jews of Sarajevo published worldwide.

1995. Wins The Observer Hodge Award, Young Photojournalist of the Year, '94 for the photo essay 'The Last Jews of Sarajevo'. Also receives a bursary to complete Atom Bomb project in Hiroshima, Japan.

1997-98. Wins two first prizes at the World Press Photo awards: first prize, nature and Environment, for a photo essay on the 'Newbury Bypass' road protest, and first prize, Arts, for one on the Burning Man Festival in Nevada, USA.

1998. Olley takes part in a national photographic exhibition by seven of the UK's leading photo-journalists creating a visual record of the National Health Service in its 50th year. Sponsored by Glaxo-Wellcome, HSA, Hays DX, Fujifilm & Network Photographers Ltd.

1999. Travels to Macedonia during the refugee crisis and continues work in Kosovo during and after the liberation for

the Saturday Telegraph Magazine.

1999. Book 'Kosovo' – produced jointly with Sebastao Salgado – is published by Network Photographers and The Partners design agency. 10,000 copies are sold and the money donated to The International Red Cross.

2000. Kosovo book wins British D&AD (Design & Art Directors) Award for Olley's photography.

2001. Modern Castles of Northern Ireland exhibited at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) London.

2001. Begins colour landscape project 'Between Home & Heaven' on the uninhabited volcanic Island of Surtsey, Iceland. Continues to work in Iceland on the 'Fairy Stones', an examination of myth and superstition and its effects on modern Iceland.

2001. Modern Castles of Northern Ireland exhibited at Noorderlicht, Sense of Space, Photofestival Groningen, Netherlands. 2002. Working on a photographic book looking at engineering Nature, taking into account land use management, reclamation, leisure use of the landscape and car culture.

2002. Begins project on British Sea Defences and areas prone to flooding in England & Wales.

2002. Receives bursary from Picture House Centre for Photography, Leicester.

2002-3. Teaches courses in PhotoShop and digital workflow to Photojournalism students at The London College of Printing, London. Under Patrick Sutherland.

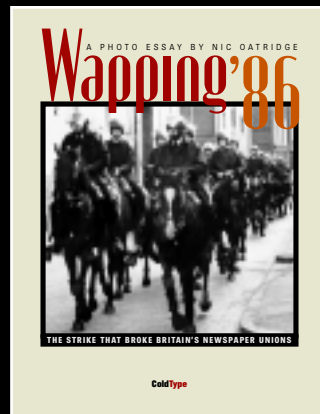
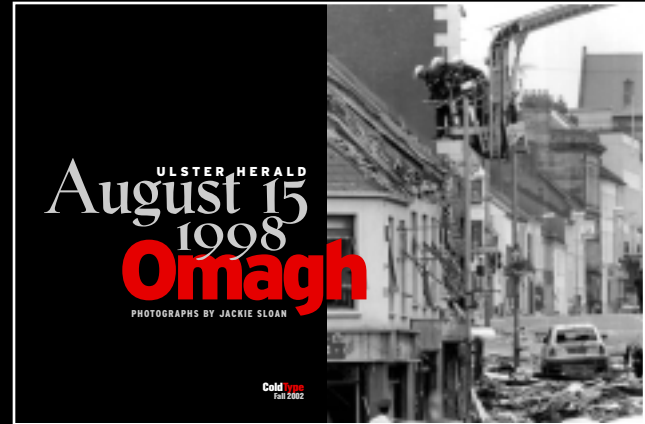
2003. Exhibition 'Canute's Island' opens in Leicester. Work based on the British Sea defences and inundated areas of the British coastline.

2003. 'Castles' work collected by the Public Records Office to become part of a collection of contemporary photographs of war for The Imperial War Museum, London.

Jonathan Olley is represented by Network Photographers Ltd. He may be contacted at jolley@talk21.com



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