



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

The Kingsmills Massacre — 30 years on



A group of relatives and friends gather at the scene of the murder on the 30th anniversary of the atrocity.

Ten workmen were murdered by the IRA in the south Armagh countryside while returning home from their work in a bus on January 5, 1976. Even to this day the 1976 Kingsmills massacre is difficult to comprehend. The atrocity took place on a quiet country road in what had become known as “bandit country”! The murdered men were Protestants.

Mr. Alan Black, 62, was one of just two occupants who lived to tell the tale. He was 32 years old that day and was returning home with his 12 colleagues, following a day’s work in Glenanne. Among their number was a Sunday school teacher, an Orange Lodge chaplain and a young man about to start Bible College to train as a

missionary.

Ten workmen were murdered by the IRA in the south Armagh countryside while returning home from their work in a bus on January 5, 1976. Even to this day the 1976 Kingsmills massacre is difficult to comprehend.

The atrocity took place on a quiet country road in what had become known as “bandit country”! The murdered men were Protestants.

Mr. Alan Black, 62, was one of just two occupants who lived to tell the tale. He was 32 years old that day and was returning home with his 12 colleagues, following a day’s work in Glenanne. Among their number was a Sunday school teacher, an Orange Lodge chaplain and a young man about to start Bible College to train as a missionary.

The bus was halted shortly after 5.30pm, close to Kingsmills crossroads. A group of around 12 armed men, their faces blackened and wearing combat jackets, surrounded the vehicle and ordered its occupants out on to the road.

When a gunman with an English accent asked for the one Roman Catholic to identify himself, his colleagues feared for his life. Mr. Black, speaking after the recent funeral of that man, said that his Protestant workmates on either side of him put their hands over his hands as they leaned against the side of their workbus as instructed to do by the armed men. They thought that the gunmen were loyalists and that they were going to shoot their Roman Catholic workmate, Richard Hughes. By holding his hands they hoped to restrain him and stop him identifying himself. But the gunmen were not loyalists and they knew precisely the religious make-up of the work-bus crew. The Roman Catholic workman was pulled out of the line and ordered to run down the road and not look back. It was now clear who the targets were!

The gunmen then opened fire on the remaining workmen, not stopping until they believed all were dead. Mr. Black was hit eighteen times! “It was all over in a minute and after the initial screams there was silence. I was semi-conscious and passed out several times with the deadly pain and the cold,” he told a local newspaper.

“A man appeared on the scene. He was in a terrible state and was praying loudly as he



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

passed along the rows of bodies. He must have heard my groans and came across to comfort me. I was lying at the roadside waiting for an ambulance for about 30 minutes. It was like an eternity." Despite being hit 18 times, Mr. Black survived.

"Sometimes it seems like 50 years ago and at other times it seems like only last week. When it gets dark and dreary at this time of the year it seems a lot clearer to me," he said. "But on a good summer's day it seems like it happened to somebody else in a different part of the world. But it's always there, you are never free from it. Robert Chambers, my apprentice, was only 19, he would have been almost 50 now and grown up with a child of his own. Two weeks later John McConville was accepted into Bible College. His ambition had been to be a missionary." "It was so awful that life could be taken like that."



Newspaper headline following the massacre.

Up to 2,000 people gathered in Bessbrook for the funerals, but exactly 30 years on the pain still lingers. Ironically, Richard Hughes, the Roman Catholic workman who was spared by the gunmen, died just a few days after the 30th anniversary gathering, aged 86.

No one has ever been prosecuted for the murders.

The memorial to the 10 innocent victims in Bessbrook is a stark reminder that part of the village died that dreadful night in 1976. The names on the memorial read:

- John Bryans**
- Robert Chambers**
- Reginald Chapman**
- Walter Chapman**
- Robert Freeburn**
- Joseph Lemon**
- John McConville**
- James McWhirter**
- Robert Walker**
- Kenneth Worton**