



ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS NORMALITY: Shoppers in Belfast as lockdown restrictions have eased PICTURE: Mark Marlow/PA

ON THIS DAY

MAY 25 1971

Revellers Blasted

TWENTY people were in hospital – some of them in a serious condition – early today after a bomb was lobbed into a crowded hall in the Suffolk area of Belfast. The horror happened at a British Legion Hall where a dance and social was in progress. Earlier today a British soldier shot in the Cromac Street district of Belfast died in hospital. The Suffolk explosion was the worst in the present spate of bombings.

Paisley Threat

SIR Robert Porter, QC, former Minister of Home Affairs, told the Scarman Tribunal yesterday that on August 14 and 15, 1969 there were already signs of a fierce Protestant reaction and if British troops had not intervened the consequences would have been very ugly. Sir Robert agreed with Mr Justice Scarman that without military intervention, the situation on the 15th would have deteriorated and the Protestants would not have taken it lying down. [Taoiseach] Jack Lynch's speech on the 14th had a very bad effect.

Sir Robert said that James Callaghan, British Home Secretary, indicated to the PM, Chichester-Clark that extensive use of troops would involve consideration of the constitutional position of NI by Westminster. Both he and the Prime Minister were worried about a report in the Financial Times which stated that troops would only be used to restore order if the Northern Government agreed to surrender its authority to Westminster. He then travelled to London for talks.

There was evidence that the IRA had been involved in Derry and Belfast, he said. He did not assume that the violence in August was a planned insurrection but there were various bodies involved. They all had one aim – the overthrow of the state. The Cabinet met at noon on August 15 and within 25 minutes it was decided to ask for troops.

Sir Robert recalled that on August 4 he received a deputation led by the Rev Ian Paisley who protested against discrimination against Protestants. Paisley said: 'I am going to get the support of the Protestant people to preserve what is left of NI'. Sir Robert said that the following day he became aware that Catholic houses and licensed premises needed protection. He was not attempting to associate [this] with Paisley.

THE lobbing of a no-warning bomb into a British Legion Hall at Suffolk was seen as a nakedly sectarian IRA attack. Meanwhile, the liberal unionist former minister 'Beezer' Porter disclosed turmoil at Stormont, a threat by Paisley to mobilise Protestants and Stormont's fear of an IRA insurrection and civil war if troops were not deployed.

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I'm already missing the advantages of lockdown

YESTERDAY marked the resumption of what passes for normality in this benighted place. Having devised a pleasant routine that consisted of doing very little and resting afterwards, I feel vaguely unequal to this sudden restoration to real life and already mourn the loss of the advantages of lockdown.

I'd evolved a comfortable pattern of living, viz. shouting at the Nolan Show over a leisurely breakfast, applying an unburied cosmetic face so I could open the door to the postman bringing perhaps a little something ordered online, reading the newspapers thoroughly rather than tearing out interesting-looking articles for further study and making lengthy pointless calls to exchange inconsequentialities with like-minded friends. As days lost their shape, dinner became a moveable feast, but, I'm proud to say, cooked from scratch (though there was rather a lot of salad) but nary a ready-meal passed my lips. Truth to tell, high-minded principles are laudable but nobody relishes cauliflower two days running. I can also attest that Jamie's 30-minute meals cannot be cooked in 30 minutes unless you've a staff of kitchen elves with lethal knives and asbestos fingers.

During lockdown I suffered little or no stress – if you discount the loss of hairdressing facilities. (As weeks went by, my resemblance to a dandelion clock grew ever more marked.) I luxuriated in unaccustomed self-indulgence, closing the doors of unused rooms, thereby cutting the housework by two-thirds. Relieved of feverishly whisking around with a feather duster and Febreze every time the doorbell rang, I dedicated my increased leisure to curating my personal Museum of Broken Things

Anita ROBINSON



and Forgotten Treasures – a motley collection of unstable furniture bought for its looks and chipped china and glassware displayed with its damage turned to the wall.

As a specialist in the accumulation of 'stuff' I have few rivals – my twin criteria for purchase being that the item is both beautiful and useless. Failing that, quirky and cheap. I don't understand people who, on a fashionable whim, turf out the entire contents of a room and re-do it to resemble a sterile display in a furniture store that reflects the character of nobody. Minimalism is all very well, but I'm an unapologetic maximalist. The late Loving Spouse used to observe sardonically, "Can't you find something to cram into that wee space?" Maybe I set too much store by inheritance and fond association, but I like things that spark memories, family history, or a bygone style

that is aesthetically pleasing – like the antique sofa I bought in the early days of marriage that was too fragile to sit on and had to be parked on the landing for its own protection. The marriage survived – and so did the sofa, un-sat-upon to this day, but an elegant statement piece.

I confess during lockdown I developed a heretofore undeclared addiction to 'Salvage Hunters', a television series in which a small pugnaeous Welshman and his hapless assistant drive round the country in a white van buying wrecked things, timeworn and unsteady on their legs (much like myself) which, when restored, are sold at an eye-watering profit. His philosophy is simple: "There's no such thing as junk. Just stuff that's owned by the wrong people." A sentiment I heartily endorse. When not squeaking in disbelief at his prices, I made 'to do' lists, knowing full well that only the single most urgent task might be accomplished that day, but more probably postponed till the morrow.

Unlike many of my peers, I did not join the Gadarene rush of those who took advantage of temporary suspension of sanctions to flock and founder at outdoor tables in the drizzle for the dubious delight of a professionally brewed americano and an overpriced blueberry muffin. Now that real freedom beckons, a friend suggests a celebratory visit to Ikea. Assailed by doubt, I see it as a discomfulating test of character.

Might I see something I LIKE? Maybe even BUY? I comfort myself that despite dangerously seductive prior visits, I've never come out of Ikea with anything more than tea-lights and a tin-opener. But I do like the meatballs.

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