

## The IRA man.

Next door to us on the Springfield Road lived the Pritchard's. Annie and Lily. The two old ladies were Protestant spinsters. We had other protestant neighbours but we were especially involved with the Pritchard's.

They were a force to be reckoned with. They would have given off to us or even given us a clout with an umbrella if they thought we were up to mischief. They were also thoughtful and often sent my mum in sweets or small eggs at Easter for us. They were god-fearing folk and went regularly to church up on the Shankill Road. They were well off. They had nice furniture, a piano in the front parlour and used lace doilies on their table. Phones were rare yet the Pritchard's had one long before anyone else. In fact we had to share their line for many years.

As they got older they became less mobile and so we were sent in to do their messages. They would give me a list and off I would go to the Co-op. They never failed to reward any of us for our efforts.

When Lily died mum would spend some time with Annie to give her company. I was also sent in to sit and have a chat with her. She was an interesting lady and loved to hear all the stories about school and what I hoped to do after school. She worried about the Troubles. They were both very aware that they were some of the last Protestants on the Springfield Road. When Annie was on her own she worried about being attacked by the IRA.

Perhaps that was what was on her mind when one night she phoned the police and reported an IRA man standing at our house, in our passage, inside our gate, with a beret on!

Of course the police were only too glad to put on a show. It didn't matter that they could have asked the barracks four doors down to look out and see who was standing at our door. No, they decided to get this IRA man with a full force. So two Saracens were dispatched to scream up to our door. Out they jumped to arrest the IRA man – my dad standing with a beret on watching the comings and goings on the Road! They put him into one of the Saracens, which then parked up across the street.

Another neighbour, who had been standing in his own passage came to our house to let us know dad was arrested. Not being too happy with that I raced out of the house lifting some milk bottles as I ran. Other people had begun coming out of their houses as news of my dad being lifted spread. I ran over and banged on the Saracen's door shouting at them to let my dad go. When I didn't get an answer I hit the doors with my milk bottle. That started a flurry of bottles hitting the armoured troop carrier. All of which smashed on the truck and did no damage whatsoever.

God knows what my dad thought as he heard the Saracen being bombarded by bottles and then bricks and anything else that was thrown. I'm sure it created a racket inside the troop carrier.

After a few minutes the Saracen drove off with dad inside. With nothing left to throw at we slowly went back home.

A few hours later dad came home. He told us he had been taken to Tennents Street barracks and then let go to make his own way home. After a cup of tea he again donned his beret and went out to stand in the passage to watch the comings and goings.

This episode was repeated several times until finally the RUC Inspector drove dad home and asked my mum to get him to throw away the beret!



Martin Meehan (centre) with Gerry Adams at a funeral in Belfast in 1971 of a Belfast IRA commander.