

THE RIOT ACT. A WORK IN AUDIO BY AIDEEN DORAN. 2020-21.

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PRODUCTION CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Script consultation.

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Script consultation.

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Additional research on the 1641 Deposition Project.

The 1643 deposition of Elizabeth Price is reproduced courtesy of the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

CAST

THE VOICE FROM ABOVE: PERFORMED BY FRANCIS MCKEE

This character's dialogue draws upon official inquiries and reports of events of the 1641 Rebellion in the country of Armagh and the 1879 Lady Day riots in Lurgan.

THE VOICE FROM BELOW: PERFORMED BY BETH DYNOWSKI

This character's dialogue is drawn from oral history, songs, poems and testimonies of women, children, and the dispossessed. It quotes from the 1643 deposition of Elizabeth Price, a refugee of the 1641 rebellion in the county of Armagh. Reproduced courtesy of the Library of Trinity College Dublin. It also quotes from The Song of the Low by Chartist poet Ernest Jones (1852).

JIM CONWAY

Lurgan-based historian, Conway is expert in the history of the town and the surrounding lands.

AIDEEN DORAN

The author/creator. Occasionally overhead in conversation with interviewees.

ANN DORAN

The Authors mother. Recounting an oral history of the NICRA rent and rates strike in the 1970s, which she lived through as a child.

TRANSCRIPT

EXCERPT OF INTERVIEW WITH ANN DORAN:

Quality of the sound changes. It now sounds slightly distorted and lower quality, as if played out of a tape deck. Both voices are those of women, one younger (AIDEEN DORAN), one older (ANN DORAN), both with soft Northern Irish accents.

AIDEEN DORAN:

So, what about the rent strikes that you remember?

ANN DORAN:

Well, the rent strikes that I remember were in the 1970s, and we lived in what was a council house at that time. Rent was paid for the houses and I do remember the Rent Man, I remember him distinctly. I even remember what he looked like, calling every week to collect the rent.

Low atmospheric sound, rising and falling, starts to play underneath Ann's words and continues until the end of the clip, and through into the next.

AIDEEN DORAN:

Can you describe the rent man?

ANN DORAN:

What he looked like?

AIDEEN DORAN:

Yeah, tell me about the rent man.

ANN DORAN:

[Laughing] Well, I can recall he was bald and small, and you know an overcoat and he arrived at your door with like a satchel over his thing you know with money in it, and he collected the rent. Now that's how old fashioned that was he collected the rent in cash, went around the whole housing estate and collected the rent.

AIDEEN DORAN:

Every week?

ANN DORAN:

Every week. Every week, it wasn't monthly or anything like that, people didn't work monthly in those days it was all weekly.

AIDEEN DORAN VO:

The River Bann, An Bhanna in gaelic, has its source in the mountains near the border between North and South of Ireland. As it winds toward the Atlantic Ocean, it slices through the province, dividing East from West.

Lurgan, the town where I grew up and where my parents and extended family still live, sits just east of the river and is sometimes described as one of the most divided towns in the province; protestants and Catholics living almost exclusively on the North and the South sides of the town.

This fissure spans at least four centuries. The town was an important staging point in the Rebellion of 1641, when the Gaelic Irish rose in a violent revolt against the confiscation and colonisation of their lands by settlers from Britain. Tensions rose again in the nineteenth century as a march for Irish Home Rule sparked a deadly shooting still remembered on the Catholic side of town today.

The shadow of eviction stretched into the 1970s, when a mass rent strike was initiated as part of a campaign for increased Catholic civil rights. During the subsequent years known as The Troubles, Lurgan and its neighbouring towns became known as the 'murder triangle' due to the extraordinary concentration of sectarian violence

November 1641, Portadown.

Irish confederate rebels imprisoned over 100 Scottish and English settlers, seizing their land and possessions. According to depositions from the time, the

settlers were marched from a prison camp to a bridge over the River Bann, from which they were cast into the freezing waters to their deaths. The memory of this event has particular resonance with the Protestant communities in Portadown and nearby towns, and the massacre is commemorated on banners and murals to this day.

A low, bass tone plays underneath the Voice from Above.

VOICE FROM ABOVE:

The voice sounds older, male. It speaks with a confident authority, with a soft Northern Irish accent.

Elizabeth, the wife of Captain Price, late of the parish and county, sworn and examined, sayth that since the present rebellion began, this deponent's husband and she were deprived, robbed or otherwise despoiled of their goods, chattels and estates:

Young beasts, horses, hay, sheep, jewels, rings, moneys and other goods and chattels worth three thousand one hundred and seven pounds at least, by the grand and wicked rebel Sir Phelim O'Neill, from whom her husband bought his lands, and the said Sir Phelim O'Neill, forcibly repossessing the same, taketh the profits thereof, which her husband and she are sure to be deprived.

Bass sound fades out and we hear a glitchy repeated sound, like distorted birdsong. We then hear two voices; one we have heard before (AIDEEN DORAN) and a new voice JIM CONWAY. Mr Conway is an older male, who speaks quickly and excitedly, with a strong Lurgan/Northern Irish accent. This segment is recorded outdoors, and the sound of wind, birds, feet walking on gravel and distant traffic can be heard in the background.

JIM CONWAY:

Who's this, sorry?

AIDEEN DORAN:

Was Phelim O'Neill really thinking he had a realistic prospect of reclaiming his land? Or do you think he was just looking for...

Crosstalk between JIM CONWAY and AIDEEN DORAN.

JIM CONWAY:

He was broke! He had lost everything, y'know, the different policies that the English had brought in meant that it was you know, it just wore away at anything they had, they had nothing. They'd lost everything. But they did think. They were under the belief that they were, that they were fighting for the King. There was an order came out in Newry calling the Irish to rise on behalf of the King. The academics say it was fake and in fact I think they blamed Wentworth on it.

AIDEEN DORAN:

Really?

JIM CONWAY:

Was it Wentworth they blamed on it? They said he made this fake thing calling for the Irish to rise, rise up, y'know. You have to remember the King at that time, his mother had been Catholic, and they thought that he was going to give concessions to the Irish. They thought this new King coming was gonna give back lands and all to the Irish and they thought this was their saviour.

Glitchy, musical sound repeats.

VOICE FROM ABOVE:

Said Rebels and confederates, and other partakers also robbed all the Protestants in the country thereabouts and committed bloody, barbarous and divellish cruelties upon them. And amongst their cruelties, they took and seized on her, this deponent, and five of her children, and threescore more Protestants, and having stripped them all of their clothes, cast them into prison.

These poor prisoners being about one hundred and fifteen, having been driven like sheep or beasts to market to the bridge of Portadown, were then and there forced off the bridge into the water and most barbarously drowned.

VOICE FROM BELOW:

The voice from below now sounds slightly distant and distorted as if playing from a radio. A low, ghostly, echoing tone plays in the background.

And hearing of many diverse apparitions, that were ordinarily seen near the Portadown bridge since the drowning of my children, I, this deponent and my companions, being women whose husbands were murdered and slain, came to the bridge aforesaid about Candlemas last. Being together at the waterside there, about twilight in the evening there appeared unto us a vision or spirit, assuming the shape of a woman waist high in the water, naked, with elevated and closed hands, her hair dishevelled and very white, her eyes seeming to twinkle in her head and her skin as white as snow.

Which spirit or vision, seeming to stand straight upright in the water, divulged and often repeated the word, REVENGE, REVENGE.

Repeated glitchy distorted beat leads into:

AIDEEN DORAN VO:

August 1879. The Catholic community of Lurgan and neighbouring towns have gathered in large numbers to march through the town in support of Irish Home Rule. The nature of what happened that day, a riot or a peaceful protest is disputed still, and a young boy lost his life when the police opened fire on the crowd.

The sound of wind is more pronounced in the background of this segment with JIM CONWAY.

JIM CONWAY:

Our Lady's Day, 15th August, is the Catholic celebration of Our Lady and em..

AIDEEN DORAN:

It's also known as the assumption, isn't it?

JIM CONWAY

And em so.. and traditionally the Catholics would celebrate it and it would be a religious march or parade in celebration of our lady. However, at that time we were in the middle of the Home Rule crisis and it became, it became a wee bit political as they were carrying home rule banners. So, this guy here...

Sound of feet walking on gravel

JIM CONWAY:

He's mentioned on here, Redmond. He was the magistrate for this area, and he read the riot act, which meant if you didn't clear the area, they were allowed to shoot you. So, he didn't give much time for the crowd to disperse, and he started shootin' and so, both John Smyth from Tullalish was shot and John Furfey was shot, and his sister was shot, his sister was shot through the neck.

AIDEEN DORAN:

Oh, Jesus.

JIM CONWAY:

Younger sister actually, the younger sister survived, John Furfey died, basically outside his own house he died.

Low distorted sound of wind and distant voices plays.

VOICE FROM ABOVE:

Their Excellencies the Lords Justices, having been pleased to issue to us a Warrant, bearing date the 23rd day of September 1879 and having recited that certain *riots and disturbances* of a serious character had recently taken place in the town of Lurgan, have authorised us to hold a Court of inquiry at Lurgan, to inquire into the circumstances of the said riots and disturbances. We lay before you the results of our inquiry.

Voice from above fades out as the background tones become more distorted and musical.

VOICE FROM BELOW:

The voice is distorted again, sounding as if it's playing from a distant radio.

Of your charity, pray for the repose of the soul of JOHN FURFEY, aged 10 years...The victim of a dastardly outrage, committed by H D REDMOND, stipendiary magistrate, who on the 16th August 1879 at Lurgan ordered the police under him to fire upon an unarmed Catholic procession.

AIDEEN DORAN VO:

August 1971. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, NICRA, initiated a mass rent and rates strike, in response to the abuse of power that was Operation Demetrius, a programme of mass arrest and internment without trial, primarily targeted at Catholics. The strike ultimately failed in its aims, and the nonviolent civil rights movement would diminish in influence throughout the bloody decade that followed.

Glitchy musical tone repeats.

The sound of a radio playing in the next room is heard throughout this segment with ANN DORAN.

ANN DORAN:

Well on account of us coming from a mixed marriage, and mammys, you know, upbringing where she was you know brought up, you know, to believe in the rule of law and the institutions and the government and all the rest because of her unionist background and all the rest she could not contemplate or understand or accept what was being called for in terms of a rent strike. And she was determined that no matter what she was paying her rent. And that involved going to the rent office and paying it, in William Street but it got to the point where you know even people who went to the rent office you know were being fingered by people to say that they went and paid their rent. But a lot of people just took the SDLP at their call and stopped paying their rent.

VOICE FROM ABOVE:

The government of Northern Ireland reports that around 23,000 Catholic families are on rent strike, refusing to pay the rent on their local authority homes as well as withholding payments for electricity, gas and ground rent. The leaders of the civil rights movement claim the number of strikers to be closer to 30,000. The rent strike is costing local authorities dearly. In the hope of recovering these arrears, they have implemented emergency legislation in the form of Payment for Debt (Emergency Powers) Act, 1971.

The act mandates that anyone owing money to the state will have his debts paid for him by way of deductions from his state entitlements. For those strikers not in receipt of state benefits, the act gives the state the authority to garnish their wages and seize their property.

Glitchy musical tone repeats.

ANN DORAN:

Now if you can imagine what it was like in the 70s, people didn't set aside their rent to be paid at a future date, they were told to stop paying their rent and that's what they did. And as it turned out, subsequently, I can't recall, history, you'll have to check this out you'll have to check your records, I don't know how long that rent strike went on for, but I can tell you in our house the rent was paid every week. Mammy did not get into arrears, no matter what we had or what we didn't have, the rent was paid.

But the upshot of that rent and rates strike call from the SDLP was that some people ended up that they didn't pay their rent, they didn't set aside their rent and they ended up, at the end of the day, when the rent strike was over, and the SDLP said you know, we no longer call for a rent strike, people were left high and dry. They hadn't paid their rent, they, they weren't put out of their homes there was nothing like that, the arrears were added to the rent and they had to pay the arrears, but mammy never stopped paying her rent.

but I think what brought things to a head was I can't remember but again, if you research it properly and you looked it up what happened was in Belfast towards the end of the rent strike and all these tenants I think in these high rise flats or something like that, when the rent strike was over and the rent man was going around collecting all the rents and every tenant was given the money to pay the rent arrears and the man came around he collected the rent, he marked up the booked, rent was paid and when he walked out of the housing block or flat block or whatever it was, and everybody had their rent book marked up as paid, the rent man was robbed. (Laughing) You know so, everybody was giving him money to pay their rent, the rent man collected the rent, the books were marked up as paid, when the rent man was going back to his car he was robbed of the money. (Laughing) But that's what happened! That happened! People were giving the money to pay their rent and they paid it, their books were marked up as paid and the the rent man was robbed. I'll tell ye! (Laughing).

Glitchy atmospheric music plays out.

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