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News

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Sport

Features

-----

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Home

News

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Features

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Home

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Features

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## West Belfast says slán to hero of Bombay Street

Andersonstown News

Anthony Neeson

14/12/2006

The funeral took place yesterday of popular and well-respected Bombay Street woman Rita Canavan.

Well known in the lower Falls area, Rita was no stranger to the pages of the Andersonstown News where she featured regularly over the years. Rita survived the burning of Bombay Street on August 15, 1969 and as recently as July 2004 recalled her memories of that fateful day in our paper.

The burning of Bombay Street on the Falls Road is credited by many as a key event in the recent conflict.

Three quarters of the houses in the street were burned to the ground by a loyalist and B Special mob while the RUC looked on.

Rita, her husband James and the couple's five children were left without a home and with only the clothes they stood up in.

Fifteen-year-old Gerald McAuley was shot dead during the burning of Bombay Street.

Recalling the events of that fateful night, Rita said, "About six o'clock it really started to happen.

"The crowds started to gather at the back of the houses, shouting. It was a very, very big crowd and there were men and women gathered.

"I remember there was one lad and he was stripped to the waist and he had a hatchet in his hand and he was calling us Fenians and things like that.

"They started to throw petrol bombs and the priest from the Monastery advised us to go over to St Paul's Hall and stay the night.

"The next morning the priest came over and said that the people could go home except the people who lived in Bombay Street, we were to stay where we were.

"But, of course, we couldn't get home quick enough, and when we got home the houses were burnt to the ground."

Rita was buried in the City Cemetery yesterday afternoon after Mass at St Paul's Church.

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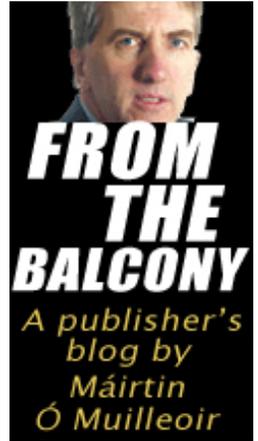
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