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Trial & Error, by Robert Kee

1. The book is unsettling in its initial structure. It opens with an account of the bombing. This is followed by an overview of the police procedures used to gain a picture of who had been where in the Horse & Groom, and to thus come to the conclusion that a young man and a young women (the only two un-interviewed) had been responsible. It then shifts to an account of the lives of Armstrong & Richardson, lending most attention to Richardson, who is the most sympathetic of the Guildford 4. Richardson's version of events is given almost automatic credence.

2. Having taken us through Richardson's life, Kee flashes back to the initial arrest of Paul Hill, his confession to the RUC of his part in a killing in Belfast, and his subsequent statements to British police implicating himself and virtually everyone he knew. It then examines in some detail the contradictions between Hill's statements and those made by Gerry Conlon, following his arrest in Belfast. Conlon's statements tend to be hazier, more diffuse and less incriminating than Hill's. Unlike Hill, he alleges violence was used to extract them. Hill made 6 statements, each contradicting the last, itself and Conlon.

3. The movements of the Maguire family on 2.12.77 are examined in some depth, leading to the conclusion that for all of those convicted to have been handling explosives on the day in question would have been logistically difficult. [Of course this argument is based in part on two premises:
 - 1) that all should have handled roughly simultaneously

- 2) that all actually handled explosives; the charge was possession or control. Previous notes on forensics (in the Birmingham 6 case) have brought up the dangers of cross contamination - i.e., a person leaving traces on another person's hands through shaking hands or the like. It must be noted, as Kee does not, ~~that~~ the idea of a confirmed alcoholic who had sunk 10-12 pints handling the most notoriously sensitive explosive known to science, in conditions of haste and panic is not plausible. Put more simply, why didn't Paddy Maguire drop any?

4. The positive tests are explored. All of the defendants were questioned, but none made any incriminating statements. They all allege some degree of police ill-treatment (why?).

5. The interrogation of Caroline Richardson, and the way in which her statements came to be made is explored. The identification parade (which gave no positive result) is described, as is the violence alleged, and the vague, contradictory nature of her confession.

6. A chapter is included which analyses letters written by the various defendants and attempts to use them to establish their innocence: could guilty people have written such letters. This is neither probative or impressive.

7. The Guildford trial is examined. There is nothing very new in this, though an analysis of Donaldson J's summing up is included which makes it clear that Donaldson had no doubts as to guilt. This chapter examines allegations of brutality and threats, but to no real effect. Almost nothing is made of the Woolwich side of the convictions.

8. The chapter on the Maguire trial should be read in full: it treats the tests in some detail, and the problem of movenets is explored again. This is the most compelling chapter of the book.

9. The section "Conclusion" should be read in full. It contains a rather truncated account of the Balcombe Street Unit's confession of involvement, and the treatment of this problem at the Guildford Appeal. The early section of chapter 15, which explores the Maguire Appeal is perhaps not as important.

10. The book adds nothing new to the controversy, and it is quite candid about that. I have highlighted points which I feel are significant; either in being jarring, previously overlooked, or presenting a weakness in the case against guilt. Unfortunately, Kee makes no bones about his belief in the innocence of all concerned, and is frequently guilty of the sort of over-confidence of which he accused the trial judge. Often logical steps in argument are skipped, or unsupported evidence presented without apology as the definitive truth.

This does not detract from the book's larger usefulness: I suspect that it will not be brought by sceptics, *in any event.* Nonetheless, to the sceptical mind, particularly to a sceptical mind familiar with the case and the vagaries of the law, it fails to reinforce doubts about the cases.

11. The strongest points relate to the Maguire case. He exposes with skill the "missing nitro" problem at the heart of y serious investigation. He also exposes the problem of the people who could not be *prosecuted,* despite being named by Paul Hill; if they were innocent, why should Annie Maguire be guilty?

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