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## Informer's tale on film

(Margaret Canning, [Irish News](#))

*The film cameras are rolling yet again in Belfast as the city turns its troubled past into a chance to look to the future. Margaret Canning reports*

Dark days appear to have returned to Belfast's Donegall Street, the scene of a number of bomb attacks during the Troubles.

But there was no permanent damage yesterday (Monday) when an imagined IRA attack on British soldiers socialising in a pub was filmed for a feature about a double agent.

*Man on the Run* stars Sir Ben Kingsley, below – who won an Oscar for the title role in *Gandhi* – as a Special Branch handler.

Written and directed by Kari Skogland, the film is loosely based on [Fifty Dead Men Walking](#), an autobiography of the real-life informer Martin McGartland.

The book title came from a claim by Ballymurphy-born Mr McGartland – who is not involved in making the film – that his efforts as an agent saved 50 lives between 1987 and 1991.

Among those were British soldiers socialising in a nightclub in Bangor – McGartland has said he informed his handlers of a planned IRA attack on the premises and it never took place.

The special effects team of *Man on the Run* yesterday recreated what could have happened had Brendan, the film's fictional informer played by Jim Sturgess, not foiled a similar plan.

McElhatton's, the scene of yesterday's filming, is a pub whose traditional appearance and ambience have consistently proved attractive to filmmakers, owner John McElhatton Jnr said.

"We had Mickybo and Me in 2003," he said.

"Adrian Dunbar played Mickybo's father and he was filmed inside the pub.

"There was also Billy Goat this year [part of a BBC series of reworked fairy tales] about a decadent and unpopular bar manager being attacked by a mob.

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"I think the crew of *Man on the Run* picked it because it is a traditional bar with an old look to it, though they have changed some of the fittings of the pub, like the beer pumps."

Part of *Breakfast on Pluto*, Neil Jordan's film adaptation of Pat McCabe's novel, was shot round the corner in the Frames restaurant and snooker complex on nearby Little Donegall Street in 2004.

Andre Graham, owner of a bar on Union Street and the Kremlin nightclub on Donegall Street, said filming felt like a "regular occurrence" in the area.

"It creates a real buzz and general excitement and enthusiasm among customers.

"It's great to have stars of the calibre of Julie Walters, Liam Neeson – who also appeared in *Mickybo and Me* – and Sir Ben Kingsley milling around."

Graham Longhurst, who is in charge of special effects on the set of *Man on the Run*, said yesterday's filming had been a "gruesome" business.

"Four men and a woman died in the scenes we were filming today," he said.

"Shots were also fired at tables full of glasses and bottles so it was mayhem."

He described the scene as a "jump-forward, where the hero was imagining what might have happened if he had not compromised the IRA hit".

In real life, McGartland's cover was blown in 1991 when the IRA discovered his role in foiling the Bangor operation.

The IRA took him to a flat in Twinbrook, where he was bound and gagged.

His captors let him use the bathroom, where McGartland noted a bath full of cold water.

Believing that they intended to torture him by plunging him in and out of the water, he escaped by diving head first through a third-floor window.

The flat above McElhatton's will not be the scene of a similar stunt, the pub owner confirmed.

However, it will be used for scenes featuring Brendan and his girlfriend Grace – played by Rose McGowan, who starred in

Quentin Tarantino's Death Proof, part of the Grindhouse double bill.

Sir Ben is not expected on set but last month he visited Mountpottinger police station in east Belfast, the model for a police station in the film.

### **Back to the cages**

McElhatton's has been fitted with a security cage while *Man on the Run* is being filmed.

Security cages fitted to the front of a building were a feature of many licensed premises during the Troubles.

The cages were a safety measure against paramilitary attacks but John McElhatton jnr said the Donegall Street premises did not have one during the Troubles.

"We just used security cameras and monitors but we also had a pub at 61 Durham Street in west Belfast, where there was a security cage," he said.

"There had been three bomb attacks at that premises."

Brendan Murphy, retired picture editor of *The Irish News*, owned a pub on the Falls Road.

"We didn't have a security cage but, like many pubs, we placed boulders around the pub to prevent car bombs," he said.

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