

# Bloody Sunday (Northern Ireland 1972)

On Sunday January 30, 1972, in an incident since known as Bloody Sunday, twenty-seven people were shot by British soldiers during a disturbance that followed a civil rights march in the Bogside, area of the city of Derry, Northern Ireland. On 30th January 1972, 13 Catholics were killed when soldiers of a British paratroop regiment opened fire during a civil rights march in Londonderry. The day became known as Bloody Sunday.

Its impact led to a resurgence of violent opposition to the British presence in Northern Ireland.



The demonstration was held in protest at the policy of internment without trial. It was organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. The march began shortly after 15:00 and the intended destination was the city centre. About 10,000 people gathered in the Creggan Estate planning to walk to Guildhall Square in the centre of the city, where a rally would be held. The march itself was illegal because the Stormont Parliament had banned all such protests.

In order to avoid trouble the march organisers led most of the demonstrators towards Free Derry Corner in the Bogside. A group of protesters stayed behind to confront the soldiers at the barricades. Stones and other missiles were used to bombard the soldiers who responded with rubber bullets, CS gas and a water cannon. The gas forced many of the remaining protesters to take refuge in the Bogside.

What exactly happened next is not clear. The soldiers say they were fired upon from the Rossville flats as they moved in to make arrests and that they returned fire. The Catholic community says soldiers on the ground and army snipers on the city walls above the Bogside shot unarmed civilians.



Just before 16:00, stones were thrown and soldiers responded with rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannon. Two men were shot and wounded. At 16:07, paratroopers moved to arrest as many marchers as possible. At 16:10, soldiers began to open fire. After 25 minutes of shooting, 13 civil rights marchers were dead. An inquiry by Lord Widgery reported that the paratroopers' firing had "bordered on the reckless". It also concluded the soldiers had been fired upon first and some of the victims had handled weapons. The Catholic community rejected these findings and began the long campaign for another inquiry. In 1998 a fresh inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday was announced.



## The Widery Tribunal and The Saville Inquiry



Two public inquiries have been carried out into the events of Bloody Sunday.

The Widery Tribunal, which was announced shortly after Bloody Sunday, largely cleared the soldiers and British authorities of blame.

The Saville Inquiry, published in 2010, found none of the casualties was posing a threat or doing anything that would justify the shooting.

Ahead of the 50th anniversary, ex-prime minister David Cameron said his 2010 apology for Bloody Sunday made it clear there was no doubt what happened was wrong.

When the Saville Inquiry was released, Mr Cameron apologised for the "unjustified and unjustifiable" deaths.

The prevailing view across the two communities is that the much more thorough Saville Tribunal is throwing new and disturbing light on the behaviour of the Parachute Regiment in Derry that day. The Impact of 'Bloody Sunday' on Northern Ireland Divisions.

## The years after Bloody Sunday : The Impact of 'Bloody Sunday' on Northern Ireland Divisions

In the following twenty years, the Provisional IRA and other smaller republican groups such as the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) mounted a campaign of what they described as 'war' on the 'British' and the Protestant and Unionist community.

With rival paramilitary organisations appearing on both the nationalist/republican and unionist/loyalist communities (the Irish National Liberation Army, a republican rival to the Provos, the Ulster Defence Association, Ulster Freedom Fighters, etc on the loyalist side), a bitter and brutal war took place that cost the lives of thousands.







With the official cessation of violence by some of the major terrorist organisations, and the creation of the power-sharing executive at Stormont Parliament Buildings in Belfast under the Good Friday Agreement, the Saville Tribunal's re-examination of what remains one of the blackest days in Northern Ireland for the British Army offers a chance to heal the wounds left by the events of the notorious 'Bloody Sunday' in January 1972.

### Artistic Reaction : the murals and others....

This incident has been commemorated in the popular protest song by U2, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday" in which the song begins by expressing the anger of the singer at the events before evolving into a call for all Christians, both Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland to abandon sectarianism. The events of the day have also been dramatized in the 2002 film, Bloody Sunday. Its portrayal of events is much closer to the opinion of the protestors than the official explanation of events offered by the British army



### Bloody Sunday: Families remember victims on 50th anniversary

Hundreds of people have attended a commemoration event to mark the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday.



As part of the commemorative event, the Irish taoiseach, Micheál Martin, laid a wreath at the Bloody Sunday memorial.

Earlier, relatives of those killed and injured on Bloody Sunday took part in a remembrance walk and retraced the steps of the original march. The crowd gathered at Creggan Shops before making their way to the Bloody Sunday Monument in Rossville Street, where the annual memorial service and wreath-laying ceremony took place.

The names of those who were killed and injured were read out during the 45-minute memorial service.



Following the service, Martin met families at the Museum of Free Derry.

Speaking afterwards, he said: "It was a privilege to be here and meet with the families of Bloody Sunday on the 50th anniversary of the terrible atrocity.

I thanked them for their extremely dignified, persistent and courageous campaign to pursue universal principles of justice, truth and accountability."

Later on Sunday, the president of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, will deliver a recorded message to the Bloody Sunday families. The president's message will be shown publicly during the commemorative event. Beyond the Silence, which will take place before a limited audience in Millennium Forum theatre. His message will be broadcast on a large screen and the occasion will be livestreamed to an online audience. The event will feature tributes to the victims, as well as music and public performances.



## **Food for thought to go further**

For those of you who are interested in reading more, please browse the following web pages.

<https://www.derryjournal.com/news/people/bloody-sunday-families-walk-of-remembrance-in-derry-on-50th-anniversary-3547485>

[https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/royaume-uni/bloody-sunday-50-ans-apres-en-irlande-du-nord-c-est-come-si-c-etait-hier-confient-des-familles-de-victimes\\_4934205.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/royaume-uni/bloody-sunday-50-ans-apres-en-irlande-du-nord-c-est-come-si-c-etait-hier-confient-des-familles-de-victimes_4934205.html)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-60130409>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/30/bloody-sunday-hundreds-pay-respects-derry-50-years-after-atrocity>

