

Belfast today

May 2009

Belfast's partitions have outlived the Berlin Wall. While the Berlin Wall came down after 28 years, Belfast's continue to stand, and there is little likelihood, at present, of them being demolished.

There are over 20 'Peace Lines' in Belfast. Many were built as temporary structures in the early 1970s to separate Catholic and Protestant areas at the height of intercommunal violence. Welcomed by most residents then, they are still seen by residents as fulfilling an important function in keeping apart 'warring factions'. Some of the walls are over a kilometre long and 20 feet high.



Mural on the 1969 riots –burning of Bombay St during the sectarian pogroms of 15 August 1969



Catholic homes in Cupar Street on the interface



Peace Wall in comparison to a lamp in height



Previous damage to the wall during riots in recent years



Clonard Martyrs garden backing on to the Shankill Road interface

Trouble erupted across the Six Counties in 1969 following an Apprentice Boys parade in Derry and the Battle of the Bogside.

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On 2 August, there was serious rioting in Belfast, when Protestant crowds from the Crumlin road area tried to storm the Catholic Unity Flats. They were held back with difficulty by the police.

Disturbances flared in the Clonard area on 14 August, when intense street battles led to the burning of homes in Catholic Bombay Street, when a unionist mob armed with petrol bombs and sticks came from the loyalist Cupar Street area.

Catholic homes were also set on fire by loyalists in Conway Street, Kashmir Road, Clonard Gardens and in Cupar Street.

The rioting petered out by Sunday, 17 August. Eight people had been killed and 750 injured, of whom 133 (72 Catholics and 61 Protestants) were treated for gunshot wounds. Since many people would have been unwilling to report bullet wounds for fear of police attention, the true total may be higher again.

In addition a total of 1,505 Catholic families and 315 Protestant ones were expelled from their homes, either through burning or intimidation. A further 275 commercial premises were badly damaged or destroyed, of which 83% were Catholic.

Bombay Street was rebuilt the following year, aided by local donations and contributions from the US, and with the free labour of local volunteers.



In Clonard garden a plaque honouring the dead civilians from the area



Homes with grills on the back of the house for protection on the interface on Bombay Street – there are no back yards – the children play in the alley along the wall



The home of Tom Williams – executed by the British Government and hanged in the Crumlin Road jail

At Easter 1942 the government of Northern Ireland had banned all parades to commemorate the anniversary of the Easter Rising. An IRA unit of six men and two women staged a diversionary action against the RUC to allow three parades to take place in West Belfast, but in this clash an RUC officer was killed and the six IRA men were captured.

The RUC officer, Constable Patrick Murphy, a father of nine children, from the Falls Road, was one of a minority of Roman Catholics serving in the RUC.

There has been some debate over the years about who actually fired the fatal shot. The six IRA members were convicted and sentenced to death for murder under the law of common purpose. Five, Henry Cordner (19); William James Perry (21); Sean Terence Oliver (21); Patrick Simpson (18); and Joe Cahill (21) (who went on to become a senior figure in the IRA) had their sentences commuted.

Williams, who acknowledged that he was the leader of the IRA unit involved, and took full responsibility for the actions of his men, was not.

Williams was hanged in Crumlin Road Gaol Belfast, and his body was interred in unhallowed ground in an unmarked grave within the grounds of the prison. His remains were only released in January 2000 after the closure of the prison in 1996 and a lengthy campaign by the Belfast National Graves Association.



Clonard Monastery – home of Belfast Redemptorist Community <http://www.clonard.com>



Bobby Sands mural on Sevastopol St along the side wall of the Sinn Féin offices



Loyalist mural entering the Sandy Row in Belfast



Republican plot in Milltown Cemetery Belfast



The grave of Hunger Strikers Bobby Sands and Joe McDonnell



The plaque commemorating the 1981 Hunger Strike



Kieran Doherty's grave – Hunger Striker



Grave of the Gibraltar 3 murdered in 1988 by the SAS



Republican plot after Easter Commemoration



Irish Proclamation on the Republican Memorial



Grave of Marie Drumm – Vice President of Sinn Fein

Máire Drumm (22 November 1919-28 October 1976) was the vice president of Sinn Féin and a commander in Cumann na mBan. She was killed by loyalists while recovering in Belfast's Mater Hospital. After she was released from Armagh prison raids on her house by the security forces escalated, her health began to fail and she was admitted to the Mater Hospital, Belfast and was killed by Loyalist paramilitaries, as she lay on her hospital bed.



Marie and Jimmy Drumm grave



American citizen Gerard Collins asked to be interred with the Drumm's in his final resting place. The Drumm family agreed to this and his ashes have been buried in the plot



The Drumm Plot



The Gibraltar Three mural in Twinbrook outskirts of West Belfast



A mural dedicated to the volunteers from the Colin area including Hunger Striker Bobby Sands