

# The British Theatre Guide

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## ***Bloody Sunday: Scenes from the Saville Inquiry***

Edited by Richard Norton-Taylor  
Tricycle, Kilburn

Review by [Bronagh Taggart](#) (2005)

If you log onto the website of the Saville inquiry, you will see the heading "The Bloody Sunday Inquiry". It is perhaps a mark of the enormity of the incident (where 13 civilians were shot dead by the British Army in Derry; 13 more were injured, one of whom later died) that after more than thirty years, this phrase has stuck so firmly in the public consciousness that it even appears on official documents. Initially named after a similar incident in Dublin in 1920, it was a turning point in the affairs of Northern Ireland in 1972. It was an effective recruiting drive for the IRA and led to several years of direct rule from London.

*Scenes from the Saville Inquiry* is a selection of interviews from some of the key players in the event. As the Security Correspondent of The Guardian newspaper, Richard Norton-Taylor is well-placed to be the editor of such a vast and unenviable task. He has collaborated with The Tricycle before on similar themes: In 1996, he dramatised the Nuremberg Trials, in 1999 the Stephen Lawrence inquiry and this is the second production at the Tricycle of the Saville Inquiry. It is perhaps unusual this time though that, although the Inquiry finished in November last year, Lord Saville has not yet issued his report. This is therefore a pre-emptive strike for Norton-Taylor.

Though everything we see on stage is from the transcript of the Inquiry itself (even down to the characters' hesitations and overlapping speech), he has necessarily used his own judgement as to what bits we should see. He does an admirable job of presenting the events from several angles by letting us hear the testimony of the soldiers who shot some of the victims, their superiors, Bernadette McAliskey who was a Catholic MP at the time, an IRA quartermaster, a bishop and first-aider who witnessed the shootings, and a surviving victim. This means however that other evidence - including that of forensic scientists, intelligence officers, the 1555 written testimonies and the damning account given by Soldier 027 of the actions of his colleagues that kicked off this second Inquiry - necessarily had to be omitted. This performance, valid though it is, should be viewed as a small part of a much wider picture.

The key questions that need an answer include: whether the soldiers were fired on first, whether the IRA were active on the day, whether the victims were involved in any violence, or whether it was part of a deliberate government policy to bring the nationalist community into line.

Though there are obvious drawbacks to having an inquiry thirty years after the event (notably people's failing memories, whether real or conveniently induced), the distance has in some ways served to prick the conscience of many and, with the exception of some senior army members, the witnesses from all sides seemed prepared to reveal truth: a soldier said his evidence had been doctored by the Military Police in order to present the army in a better light, the IRA quartermaster confirmed that he had fired a weapon at the army (though it had jammed), an eyewitness said that an unarmed man was shot and killed, despite clearly waving a white handkerchief. The performance clarified that the Inquiry has its hands full in trying to make sense of it all and presumably explains why the report has still not been issued.

Claire Spooner's set, with its interactive computer monitors, imposing desks and copious box-files was not only authentic, but also gave the impression of being cluttered and oppressive, which the enquiry must surely have been at times. The up-to-date technology served to separate it in time from the earlier Widgery enquiry, later largely dismissed as a whitewash.

The whole play was a challenge for the cast, many of whom had only short speeches and had to sit quietly for the rest of the time, again mirroring the real thing. Sorcha Cusack gave an assured performance as Bernadette McAliskey, former MP for the area. She was a reluctant witness and said so, believing the Inquiry was ineffective and the whole issue was a matter for the International Court of Justice at the Hague. However, she appeared strangely vulnerable too, when describing the sheer terror she experienced on the day.

The combative style of Michael Mansfield Q.C. (Terrence Hardiman,) who represented the victims' families to the best of his considerable abilities, contrasted with the measured but no less assertive style of Christopher Clarke (Thomas Wheatley), the Inquiry's counsel who had all the appearance of a dog with a bone that he was not going to let go.

The Army comes off worst of all. At best those represented appear incompetent and arrogant. At worst, gung-ho soldiers who were spoiling for a fight. The senior officers all speak with received pronunciation, all of which adds to the general alienation and sense of mistrust.

Nicholas Kent's direction made the sometimes weighty facts accessible and the two and a half hours flew by as all the different sides fill in the picture of what went on. Morally, it can be questioned as to whether it is right to present something like this publicly before the official report has come out. But without a clear idea of when this might be, at least Kent and his team are keeping the issue in the public eye.