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## **Bloody Sunday: Scenes From The Saville Inquiry, Tricycle Theatre, London** ★★★★★

### **A necessary triumph**

**By Adam Scott**

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The Saville Inquiry was commissioned by Tony Blair in 1998 to re-examine the findings of Lord Widgery on the events of Sunday 30 January 1972. On that day, 13 civil rights marchers were shot dead by British soldiers during an anti-internment march in Londonderry. Widgery's findings, that there were "strong suspicions" that the army had been fired upon first, have been fiercely contested by the Irish Catholic community of Derry for 30 years.

This long, lingering Nuremberg on our doorstep is due to publish its findings later this, or early next year. Until then, Richard Norton-Taylor has pieced together the shards from Lord Saville's inquiry into a piece of political theatre.

Witnesses from Derry's Catholic community are first before the tribunal - and are represented in a series of well-observed performances. Bishop Daly (Michael O'Hagan) speaks with most confidence, accustomed as he is to addressing large numbers of people. Sorcha Cusack's MP Bernadette McAliskey weighs her words as one well used to the syntactical parlour game of politics.

The other witnesses and victims, ordinary men and women, movingly fight their feelings of inadequacy in the surroundings. One woman, Alice Doherty (Carole Nimmons) pleads to the gallery of bereaved families for forgiveness should her memory fail her. The male witnesses affect a staccato bravado, their hard monosyllables failing to cover their fear that one slip, one misrepresentation of the merest detail, could discredit the entire process.

When the British Army's top brass appear in the dock, however, it's like we've suddenly delved into some of the more outlandish passages of a Flashman novel. There is little that directors Nicolas Kent and Charlotte Westenra can do to prevent this change in atmosphere, and snorts of laughter arrive with such lines as General Sir Robert Ford's assertion that a few "ringleaders" of the stone-throwing Derry Young Hooligans should be "selected and shot". With such lines from life, there is little chance the directors or editor (as Norton-Taylor is billed) can be accused of manipulation.

A key line is almost thrown away as the picture dissolves and flickers in the snow and static of selective memory loss: "My war". This from a commander - Major General Andrew MacLellan, John Castle on bluff form - of a force that had been sent in by the then Home Secretary James Callaghan, ostensibly to protect the Catholic communities of Northern Ireland.

The derisory laughter leaves abruptly when the soldiers suspected of perpetrating the atrocities - the men described by Tom Paulin on Late Review as "thugs sent in by public schoolboys to kill innocent Irish people; they were rotten racist bastards" - appear in the dock.

Named here as "Soldier S" and "Soldier F" (The Daily Mail retains a campaign to protect their identities), David Beames and Charles Lawson invest them with the same qualities as the witnesses - a mixture of fear and resentment.

As in earlier plays of this nature at the Tricycle, no curtain call is taken. But the measured performances throughout - representing men and women who have lived with these horrific events into a fourth decade - deserve high praise.

The same is true of Norton-Taylor. The first enquiry, fudged as it was, was eclipsed by the violence begot by the army's actions on Bloody Sunday. The inquiry at hand fell off our front pages in the wake of September 11. Norton-Taylor's achievement in taking this story into the public domain where it belongs is an important one, indeed.

*To 7 May (020 7328 1000)*