

Teacher Resource

KS3+



Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles

22 March – 29 September 2024
IWM North

The Troubles in Northern Ireland lasted from the 1960s through to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. It was a complex and multifaceted period of history with continued relevance to many people to this day. This teacher resource is designed to provide context for the Imperial War Museums exhibition, *Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles* and help facilitate discussion with your KS3+ class.

The exhibition explores four themes:

- The Night of 27–28 June 1970
- Descent into Violence. The heightened violence of the 1970s and 1980s
- Hell in a Wee Place. The everyday experience for those affected by the Troubles
- Today and the Future. The legacy of the conflict within Northern Ireland today.

Discussion points for each zone are provided and can be used to stimulate individual, group or whole class discussions on this topic. There is also the opportunity to link this exhibition to Seamus Heaney’s poem, *Storm on the Island*.

A student discussion booklet designed to be taken around the exhibition by students is also available to download on our website.

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AIMS OF THIS EXHIBITION



The *Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles* exhibition is not intended as a comprehensive history of the Troubles. It focuses on a few key moments within the conflict and highlights the multiple different perspectives on what took place. There is often no single story that everyone involved can agree on. This exhibition utilises objects from the Imperial War Museums collections (including new acquisitions) and recently collected oral histories to emphasise these conflicting narratives.

This exhibition aims to encourage the visitor to engage with these differing perspectives, challenge their own preconceptions of the conflict and ultimately empathise with the stories of the real people who either lived through the conflict or were brought up in the aftermath.

IWM does not endorse or align with any of the views or opinions expressed in the first-hand testimonies featured in this exhibition.

If you have questions or concerns about anything you have seen in this exhibition, you can get in touch with us at www.iwm.org.uk/contact-us and the relevant team will get back to you.

The Troubles can be a difficult conflict to untangle. The definitions provided below are not all encompassing but hopefully give an indication as to some of the key terminologies and groups discussed in this exhibition.

IDEOLOGIES

Sectarianism – A strong adherence to a particular sect (political, ethnic, or religious), often leading to conflict with those of different sects or holding different beliefs.

Loyalism – Allegiance to the British crown and the United Kingdom. Loyalism is primarily working class in nature. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) is a loyalist group, and the term is often linked with paramilitary violence. However, not all loyalists agree with the use of violence.

Irish Republicanism – A political ideology that aims for a united Ireland free from British involvement. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) is one republican group that used 'armed struggle' as well as politics to further its aims.

Unionism – The political policy of maintaining Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom.

Irish Nationalism – A political movement that aims for a united Ireland through non-violent means.

The Orange Order – A protestant organisation, formed in 1795. Known for its 'marching season' that culminates in large scale parades on 12 July each year. The marches are often controversial and sometimes lead to violence between the marching bands and nationalist/republican communities.

Armed Struggle – Irish republican principle of armed resistance to Britain. The desired outcome sees Britain leaving Ireland and the country united as a 32 county socialist republic.

COMBATANTS

Paramilitaries – A trained and organised armed force that is like an army but is unofficial and often illegal.

Below are a few of the main groups involved:

The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) – The main armed republican group during the Troubles. It split from the main IRA in 1969 over disputes around defence of catholic communities and the political direction of the IRA at the time.

The Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) – After the split in 1969 the remaining group

became known as the Official IRA. They moved towards Marxist politics and away from armed struggle. Nevertheless, they continued to come into conflict with both the PIRA and the INLA.

The Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)

– A splinter group who broke from the OIRA in 1974. They disagreed with abandoning the group's armed campaign. Although destructive and deadly, they were often split by internal disagreements and feuds.

The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) – Formed in 1966 over a perceived threat the IRA would stage a major insurrection. One of the main loyalist groups active during the Troubles. Its membership provided many of those who would contribute to the peace process in 1998.

The Red Hand Commando (RHC) – A highly secretive loyalist paramilitary group formed in 1970. It was linked with the UVF and incorporated into that organisation, to some extent. However, it retained its own independent command structure.

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) – The largest of the loyalist groups. Formed in 1970, it amalgamated many community defence groups formed in the wake of the Troubles. Although not an illegal organisation, it carried out shootings and bombings under the cover name the Ulster Freedom Fighters.

THE SECURITY FORCES

The British Army – Deployed in force in late 1969 in response to the start of the Troubles. Operation Banner (1969-2007) was the longest continuous deployment of British soldiers in British Army history. Their role was difficult, dangerous, and controversial.

The Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) – The largest regiment in the British Army, formed in 1970. The regiment only served in Northern Ireland and all its personnel were from Northern Ireland. It included both men and women in full and part time roles.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) – The only armed police force in the UK and the main peacekeeping force in Northern Ireland. Praised by the security forces for their bravery and professionalism, over 300 RUC officers were killed, and many thousands injured. It was reformed and renamed the Police Service of Northern Ireland in 2001.

Please be advised that this timeline is not intended to detail every event which led to the Troubles. It aims to provide context for the *Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles* exhibition by highlighting some of the key moments which laid the foundation for the later conflict.



1600s

In 1603, the English defeated an Irish alliance of chiefs and gained control of the whole of Ireland.

Plantations run by Scottish and English Protestants were established in the region to put down rebellion. Over the decades the Protestant community became the majority in Ulster. This community later supported William of Orange's claim to the British throne against the Catholic James II. James II was beaten at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690,

and finally defeated at the Battle of Aughrim in 1691.

1700s

Due to systematic resettlement and land seizure, by 1703 90% of the land in Ireland was owned by Anglo-Irish nobility. The early years of the 1700s also marked the introduction of the Penal Laws, which severely restricted the rights and opportunities of Irish Catholics. This period of growing Protestant power was labelled the Protestant Ascendency. In response to this, by the end of the century a nationalist movement was growing amongst the Irish population, inspired by events in France and the USA.

1800s

On 1st January 1801, the Act of Union abolished the Irish parliament and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was formally created. The first half of the 1800s saw mass evictions of Irish tenant farmers, protests and rising poverty levels in Ireland. Between 1845-1848 the Potato Famine decimated

the population. Due to the British government sending inadequate aid while also continuing to export meat and grain from Ireland, over 1 million people are believed to have died from starvation.

1886–1912

Throughout the late 1800s and into the early 1900s efforts were made to reverse parts of the Act of Union and establish Home Rule in Ireland. The first and second Home Rule bills were defeated but the third was passed in 1912. However, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 meant the change was never enforced. Protestant communities voiced their strong opposition to Home Rule and the Ulster Volunteer Force, a militia of over 100,000 men, was raised to resist it, by force if necessary.



1916

In April 1916, Irish republican volunteers in Dublin staged an uprising against British rule. Hundreds of people died and many more were injured in the fighting which lasted five days. This event came to be known as the Easter Rising.



1918–21

Sinn Fein, a republican party, came to power and declared Ireland independent from Britain. This declaration led to the outbreak of the Anglo-Irish war fought between the newly formed IRA and the British Army. Eventually, a treaty was signed and Partition was established to create the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland.



1922–23

A civil war was fought over conditions stipulated in the treaty which had ended the Anglo-Irish war. The Pro-Treaty forces won, with British backing. This led to the confirming of the border between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland.



1960s

Inspired by protests in the USA, a civil rights movement began in the 1960s

to tackle issues of inequality and discrimination within Northern Irish society. Marches continued despite the ban on them by the Northern Ireland Government.



1968

The Royal Ulster Constabulary attacked a civil rights protest march in Derry/Londonderry. Anger and outrage intensified in response.

1969

The Apprentice Boys march incited the nationalist community of the Bogside in Derry/Londonderry. The escalating violence led to the British Army being deployed to Northern Ireland. This marked the beginning of the Troubles.

ZONE 1: THE NIGHT OF 27–28 JUNE 1970

In 1964, a civil rights campaign started by Northern Irish Catholic communities faced increasing opposition from loyalist groups who feared that their goal was less about reforming the system and more about deconstructing the Northern Ireland state completely. These conflicting views led to tension in Northern Ireland gradually building throughout the mid to late 1960s. The first event examined in this exhibition occurred on the night of 27-28 June 1970. This event highlights the contradictions and conflicting opinions which define many aspects of the Northern Ireland conflict.

On the night of 27–28 June 1970, violence broke out near St Matthews church in Belfast. This Catholic church sat at the junction between the loyalist Newtownards Road and the republican Short Strand area of Belfast.

Accounts of how the violence started vary dramatically. Loyalists say that it was the Provisional IRA who fired first. Firing into a crowd

during a riot that had started in response to marches led by the Protestant Orange Order. Republican accounts state that the loyalists were the ones who started the violence by attacking St Matthews church, forcing them to defend themselves.

The truth of the situation is impossible to ascertain, however, what is certain is that many people were wounded in the altercation and one republican and two loyalists were even killed. This event came to foreshadow the descent into violence that would take place in the 70s and 80s.

Exhibition Details

In this zone, there is a map of the area of Belfast surrounding St Matthews church, with colour coded areas to indicate predominantly loyalist and republican communities. You will also hear audio files collected by the curator which present the two sides of this altercation.

Discussion points...

Take a moment to look at the map and listen to the audio testimonies of two people who witnessed this event.

1. What differences do you notice about the two recollections of the events? Why do you think their accounts differ?
2. How do you think it would have felt to live in a community with such clear divisions?
3. How might the divisions shown on the map have affected how people lived and interacted with each other in this area?



The heightened violence of the 1970s and 1980s

Although there had been violent altercations during the 1960s, it is during the 1970s and 1980s that the situation escalated significantly. Shootings, bombings and violent clashes became an all too frequent occurrence amongst the various groups involved in the dispute. In 1969, after the clash between republicans and loyalists in what came to be known as the 'Battle of the Bogside', the British Army was deployed to Northern Ireland as part of 'Operation Banner'. This increased direct involvement from the British government was a controversial move and added a new dynamic to political tensions in the region throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

The period of the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates how increasing feelings of resentment and distrust between the major groups involved in the conflict led to losses for everyone involved, with no party coming out unscathed. The violence of this period came to dominate the

media coverage of the conflict, and events such as 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972 have remained ingrained in the social memory of the Troubles across the world.

Exhibition Details

This zone presents objects from the IWM collections which demonstrate the reality of the violence of this period from the perspectives of the numerous groups involved. Once again, the aim is to highlight the conflicting narratives of this time and the escalating tension between the communities and groups involved.



Discussion points...

As you walk around this space, consider how every object and photo can be interpreted in multiple ways and will evoke different reactions based on an individual's own history.

Find an object that resonates with you.

1. Which object did you choose? What is its story?
2. Why have you chosen this object?
3. How does seeing this object make you feel?
4. Based on what you have learned about the different groups involved in this conflict, how do you think each of those groups would view the object you have chosen?

The everyday experience for those affected by the Troubles

Throughout the period of the Troubles, the everyday lives of the people of Northern Ireland were significantly altered. People saw the familiar streets of their communities become the battleground of political, social and sectarian conflict. A great deal of disruption, uncertainty and violence became the reality of day-to-day life. At the height of the Troubles, heavily armed police, paramilitaries and British soldiers patrolled the streets, regular checkpoints and bag searches were set up and bombings and shootings became an all too regular occurrence. Despite all this uncertainty, the audio testimonies and objects within this part of the exhibition provide glimpses of how normal life attempted to persevere despite these distinctly abnormal surroundings.

During the 1990s, the opposing groups in the conflict became more willing to negotiate. As the potential

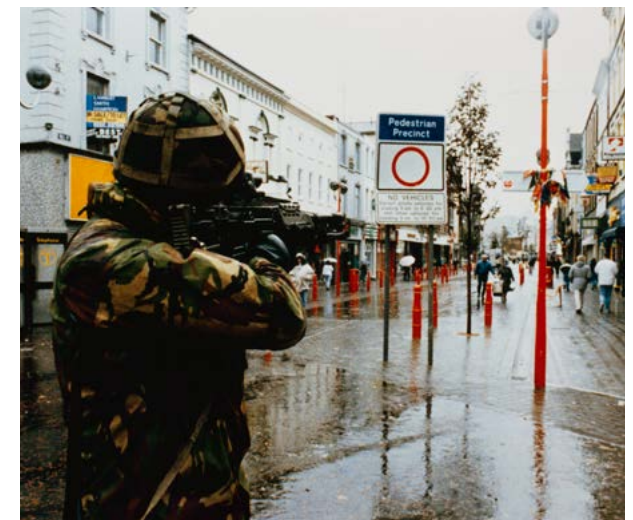
for a lasting peace grew, the restrictions on daily life were scaled back. However, violence continued throughout this period. Finally, despite several setbacks throughout the process of peace talks, the Good Friday Agreement was signed on 10th April 1998. There were those on both the loyalist and republican sides who opposed the agreement, but the overall response was positive, with 71.1% of Northern Irish voters voting in favour of it.

Exhibition Details

In this zone, objects from the IWM collections are used to illustrate how the conflict affected the day-to-day life of the people of Northern Ireland. You can also listen to audio-testimonies of people who experienced this altered existence and hear how they viewed the situation and each other. Ultimately, this room aims to show the heavy price that ordinary civilians paid during the Troubles.

Discussion points...

1. Walking around the space, what evidence can you see of how the conflict affected the everyday life of ordinary people?
2. How do you think it felt to live under these conditions?
3. How do you think an individual's personal beliefs might have shaped how they viewed the everyday experiences they had during the Troubles?
4. Why do you think some people opposed the Good Friday Agreement?



The legacy of the conflict

The Good Friday Agreement was signed on the 10th April 1998 by the British and Irish governments alongside eight political parties from Northern Ireland. It was a monumental moment which finally brought an end to the violence which had become such a part of everyday existence over the period. The Good Friday Agreement set up the Northern Ireland Assembly and established cross-border co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It also recognised Northern Ireland as part of the UK but established a principle of consent to this status. The UK agreed to recognise a united Ireland if a majority in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland voted for it in a referendum.

Although the Agreement was widely welcomed, there were still underlying issues which remained unresolved. Some felt that there was a lack of accountability from British soldiers for their actions during the conflict, which has led to inquests

being launched. Additionally, those who had previously been charged with terrorist offences were released and some have gone on to participate in political discourse. Ultimately, little was done to address the societal divisions which had grown deeper throughout the Troubles. As a result, many who grew up in the aftermath of the conflict have continued to feel the effects upon their own lives.

Britain's vote to leave the EU in 2016 gave rise to a renewed sense of uncertainty over the future of Northern Ireland and threatened to shake the peace brought about by the Good Friday Agreement. With questions still left to be answered it is more vital than ever to recognise the importance of learning from the past to provide for a better future.

Exhibition Details

This final part of the exhibition examines the continued impact of the Troubles to this day. In this room you can watch video testimonies from people in Northern Ireland as they discuss the ongoing relevance

of the conflict to them as individuals and to their wider community.

Discussion points...

1. In what way do you think the Troubles still affect those who lived through them?
2. Why might the Troubles still feel relevant to those born in Northern Ireland after the Troubles ended?
3. Why is it so important to discuss the Troubles?
4. Why do you think the curator chose to include multiple perspectives in this exhibition?
5. Has there been anything you have seen, heard or read in this exhibition which challenged a preconceived idea you had?

Seamus Heaney was born in Northern Ireland in 1939. Brought up in a Catholic household, his early years were spent living a rural life in County Derry before later moving to the Republic of Ireland. When discussing the Troubles in an interview in 1974, Heaney stated that the divisions of the conflict were deeply rooted in Northern Ireland society long before the Troubles began.

Storm on the Island was published in 1966 as part of his first collection of poems. The topics of nature and rural life appear regularly in his poetry and are often used to reflect his experience of growing up during the Troubles. This poem equates the Troubles to a 'storm' that rages around the narrator's home. The narrator starts off appearing somewhat arrogant in their sense of preparedness for the situation, but by the end a questioning uncertainty has crept into their narrative.

STORM ON THE ISLAND

We are prepared: we build our houses squat,
Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.
This wizened earth has never troubled us
With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks
Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees
Which might prove company when it blows full
Blast: you know what I mean - leaves and branches
Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale
So that you listen to the thing you fear
Forgetting that it pummels your house too.
But there are no trees, no natural shelter.
You might think that the sea is company,
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs
But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits
The very windows, spits like a tame cat
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives
And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo,
We are bombarded with the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

Seamus Heaney



Discussion points...

Take a moment to read through the poem.

1. Underline a line or phrase from the poem and choose an object in the exhibition which you feel relates to it. Which phrase and object did you choose and why?
2. In this exhibition you have seen and heard multiple perspectives, and you have seen how there is no one way to interpret the events that unfolded during the Troubles. What insight might the final line of this poem, '*Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear*', give into Heaney's own interpretation of the Troubles?
3. Has the exhibition you have seen today changed how you interpret this poem?