

Belfast Telegraph - IPR Website of the Year

Search Site

Advanced Search

- Loadzajobs.co.uk
- Propertynews.com
- Sunday Life**
 - Home
 - News**
 - Sport
 - Features
 - Archive
- Other Services**
 - Jobs
 - Training
 - Dating
 - Gaming
 - Reader Offers
- Other Titles**
 - Belfast Telegraph
 - Ireland's Saturday Night

Sunday Life Your Life, Your Paper

Belfast Telegraph ONLINE ARCHIVE

- Search from over 400,000 articles
- Dating back to 1995

[Home](#) > [News](#)

News

Bloody Sunday

Poppy Massacre

Sunday, November 11, 2007

By Pauline Reynolds

AT 10.43 on the morning of November 8, 1987, Stephen Ross heard an earth shattering sound he never wants to experience again.

"The noise was horrendous, it was just like a canon going off from behind. I think the split second it happened I knew what it was," he remembers vividly.

Stephen was 15 when he was caught up in the carnage of Enniskillen's Poppy Day massacre.

The no-warning IRA bomb claimed 11 innocent lives, and 63 men, women and children suffered terrible injuries. A 12th victim never recovered and died 13 years later.

This evening on the 20th Remembrance Sunday anniversary of that fateful event, survivors and the bereaved relive their trauma and talk of how their lives were changed forever.

They feature in a moving and powerful hour-long documentary - The Poppy Day Bomb - produced by DoubleBand Films and aired on BBC NI.

And their message is quite clear - they want lessons to be learned from the past.

Stephen was standing just seven metres from the seat of the blast and suffered horrendous facial injuries.

As he recovered he realised he was left with two choices: he could stay where he was, feel sorry for himself and continue to reflect on what had happened. Or, he could decide to move on.

"It was important to try and put it behind me," he explains.

"It's not that I don't think about it and it's not that it brings back bad memories, but if you sit and dwell on these things you can develop a morbid attitude towards it.

"An awful lot of people have had to go through similar experiences in Northern Ireland."

Stephen talks of how there have been sacrifices on both sides, but is confident the situation here has progressed.

And he believes lessons should be learned from our troubled history to help us move forward.

"People need to bear in mind what happened in the past as an incentive to work to the future," he says.

And his thoughts are echoed by David Bolton, a counsellor with the Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation.

On the day of the bomb he stood in for the local Methodist Sunday School teacher Wesley Armstrong, who was attending the Cenotaph for the Remembrance Day service.

Both Mr Armstrong and his wife Bertha died in the blast.

Said David: "For those who are directly caught up in these events it's not possible to no longer remember. It's not helpful to expect of people that they should forget. I think the question is how we remember and what we do with our memories.

"Enniskillen has shown itself to be capable of dealing with a terrible event in its history.

"It lays down a reservoir of memory and of experience for the future of this community.

"Beyond that, I think the way in which the town coped with the tragedy stands there for those who want to see it as a metaphor for how the wider community can deal with the tragedy of the Troubles which has

- Email Article
- Print Version
- Search

Related Articles

- Poison pen letters that pured bile upon grief
- Film director's personal journey

ADVERTISEMENTS

ADVERTISEMENTS

befallen us all."

Julian Armstrong was with his parents when they were killed in the explosion.

He describes the immediate aftermath as being "like something from a horror movie".

At just 16, he and his siblings had to learn to grow up very quickly. He bears no malice towards those responsible for the atrocity.

"We didn't have the security of our parents. We had to learn to do things for ourselves," explains Julian.

"I don't feel any bitterness or hatred against anyone in particular.

"I don't think hatred or bitterness is the way forward for me, it only eats you up."

These are just a few of the many personal experiences traced in the documentary.

It begins with the moving accounts of how individuals and their families prepared for the Remembrance Day service.

The programme progresses on an emotional journey through the pain and heartache of rebuilding shattered lives.

It manages to personalise rather than sensationalise the events of 20 years ago through the eyes of the bereaved, the injured, the clergy and hospital staff among others.

And it draws the viewer into the heart of the town by exploring the close relationships of its people and how they coped with dignity after the bomb exploded.

But it also examines the political tension and unease which followed and the impact the bomb had on the Republican movement.

∫ The Poppy Day Bomb will be shown on BBC NI tonight at 10.40.

More articles in News

- [A flash in the Bann?](#)
- [Press banned from tranny job bias case](#)
- [Choke shops selling cigs to minors](#)
- [Identified: The main player in card game](#)
- [Compo shock for NIO](#)

ADVERTISEMENTS