

Queen Visits Bomb-Hit Town Of Enniskillen in Northern Ireland

The Queen makes a groundbreaking church visit as she tours one of the towns hit hardest by Northern Ireland's Troubles.



For the first time, the Queen has stepped inside a Roman Catholic church on the island of Ireland in what is being seen as a hugely symbolic moment.

It came as she visited the town of Enniskillen - the scene of one of the worst atrocities of The Troubles - during a two-day Diamond Jubilee tour of Northern Ireland.

Her Majesty was cheered as she waved to the crowds outside St Michael's Church and then those inside clapped as she entered the building.

Earlier in the day, the Queen attended a thanksgiving service at an Anglican cathedral in the town, on the eve of her historic handshake with Deputy First Minister and alleged former IRA commander Martin McGuinness.

Eleven people died in the IRA bombing of the war memorial on Remembrance Sunday 1987.

After the thanksgiving service, the Queen was thought to have met the families of some of the victims.



Mr McGuinness has always denied involvement in the 1987 bombing

Her arrival in the province was delayed by almost an hour after bad weather forced the royal flight to divert from Enniskillen to Aldergrove Airport, near Belfast.

Hundreds of people lined the streets of Enniskillen to greet the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh as they made their way to the cathedral in a chauffeur-driven car.

A trumpet fanfare marked their arrival in St Macartan's Cathedral through its west door, where they were welcomed by the Dean of Clogher, the Very Reverend Kenneth Hall.

Church of Ireland Primate, Archbishop Alan Harper, said her conciliatory words and gestures had allowed many to throw off the "shackles" that had been loosening since 1998's Good Friday Agreement, and to "positively" be themselves.

Relatives of the Enniskillen bombing victims have said they are relieved the Queen's controversial meeting with Mr McGuinness is taking place in Belfast, and not in the border town.

Stephen Gault, who lost his father, said: "Nobody has been brought to justice for Enniskillen so it's very hard for the families to accept Mr McGuinness shaking the Queen's hand."

Rev David Cupples, the local Presbyterian minister, lost seven members of his congregation in the explosion. He said people had mixed views on what has been billed as a breakthrough.

He said: "Until there is an apology, there'll never be closure on an emotional level but when you look to the bigger picture, people probably can see that it would be worthwhile."

Mr McGuinness was the alleged commander of the IRA's northern unit. He has always denied any involvement in what became known as the 'Poppy Day Massacre'.

Liam Clarke, who has written extensively on the Northern Ireland conflict, said it was ironic Her Majesty was visiting Enniskillen on the eve of her encounter with Mr McGuinness.

"He denies being in the IRA at that stage but most historians would say that Martin McGuinness was effectively the leading figure, the OC of northern command at that time".

Peace has transformed Enniskillen, with the Protestant cathedral hosting a jubilee service and the Roman Catholic church, opposite, an informal gathering.

And no one here ever thought they would see the day when both communities welcomed the Queen.

Mr McGuinness has said of the meeting with the monarch - a scenario unthinkable until recently - that it will allow him to "symbolically" shake the hands of "hundreds of thousands of unionists".

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