



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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The Lower Ormeau is a small residential area of about 2,500 people situated in South Belfast. It is bounded by the River Lagan and the Dublin-Belfast railway, leaving the main Ormeau Road as the only means of entering or leaving the area. On 12th July 1995 the RUC blockaded the people of the Lower Ormeau Road area in their houses and streets so that an Orange parade could pass through the area in defiance of the clearly expressed wishes of the vast majority of the residents. By blocking access to the Ormeau Road for five and a half hours, the RUC prevented people getting to work, visiting friends and relations or using the shops concentrated along the front of the Ormeau Road. This blockage was implemented and sustained using considerable force and threat of force. The RUC denied the media access to the area, creating a sinister and worrying feeling among residents that the authorities did not want the media to witness events as they unfolded.

Sequence of events on 12th July 1995.

- 5.30 am RUC seal off the top of each street in the Lower Ormeau Road with land rovers and police in riot gear. The closure of the area is accomplished using significant force. Access to and from the area is denied or severely restricted for the next five and a half hours.
- 9.30 am Orange parade passes along Lower Ormeau Road. Immediately afterwards, residents make their way in protest to Cooke Street, with women carrying placards calling for the curfew to be lifted and access to the Ormeau Road shops restored. The people are stopped at Cooke St by an RUC cordon and held there for over an hour after the parade had passed.
- 11.00 am The people in Cooke Street are finally allowed onto the Ormeau Road, but are stopped almost immediately by the RUC. The RUC are told that the protestors wish to make their way to the Ormeau Bridge before dispersing peacefully. The RUC say that the protestors must go back into the side streets to disperse. A sit down protest results.
- 12.00 noon The protestors make their way singly to the Ormeau Bridge. The first to arrive are beaten with batons by the RUC and another sit down protest ensues. The protestors remain seated where they are until almost 7.00pm when the Orange parade returns along Stranmillis Embankment and crosses the bridge. The protestors disperse peacefully.

Throughout the whole day the RUC presence is aggressive, intimidating, provocative and at times violent. Only local stewards prevent the provocation leading to serious trouble.

Individual statements.

Jennifer, Balfour Ave.

I was standing at the door of my house at top of Balfour Ave, having been wakened by the noise as the RUC sealed off the area. An RUC man came up behind me and hit me across the back with a baton. He lifted me off my feet and threw me against a land rover, causing bruising to my shoulder. He gave me verbal abuse - "this is our parade and it is coming down this f***ing road".

Anne, Farnham Street.

I heard the noise of landrovers as the RUC took up position at the top of Farnham Street and came out. A woman was outside my house trying to wake people up to tell them what was happening. A land rover drove straight at the woman and I had to drag her over her garden wall to prevent her being crushed against the wall.

Susan, Balfour Ave.

I went to top of street to find my husband who had gone to see what was happening. This was first thing in the morning. We were abused by RUC who pushed my husband and hit me on the mouth with a baton. An ambulance had to be called to take me to the hospital for treatment.

Lorraine, Farnham St, care worker in old peoples' home.

I was due to start work at 7.30am, along with my mother who works in the same home. At 6.15am I went to the RUC cordon at top of Farnham Street. I was in my white uniform. I explained where I worked and asked would I be able to get out. The RUC man laughed and replied "No chance". The parade passed at 9.30am but RUC kept the street blocked until 10.45am. My mother and I finally got to work at 11.00am.

Marie, Farnham St, worker in an old peoples' home.

I was due to finish the night shift at 7.00am, but my husband phoned at 6.00am to say that the streets were sealed and he was not able to get out to collect me. I asked the nun in charge of the home to run me home. The nun contacted Ballynafeigh RUC station and when we reached the Ormeau Bridge we were allowed through. However the RUC at the top of Farnham St would not let us in, and we only gained access when an ambulance arrived at Hatfield St to collect injured people and we were able to follow it in. When the nun tried to leave again she had to argue for over 10 minutes at top of Farnham St before the RUC would let her out.

B., Artana Street.

I couldn't get out to my waiting taxi to go to work at 7.30am. I phoned the depot and was told that taxi had failed to get into area and had returned to depot. I didn't get to work that day.

Peggy, elderly resident living alone in Hatfield St.

I phoned my son Gerard who lives outside the area as I was very frightened. My son was not allowed into the area to see me.

John, Farnham St.

After the parade had passed and the sit down had taken place at the Ormeau Road/Cooke St junction people made their way in small numbers to Ormeau Bridge. I was among the

first to arrive, there were only a few on bridge at this point. An RUC man came at me with baton drawn. I sat down with my arms folded, offering no resistance. Four RUC dragged me off the bridge while a fifth beat and kicked me. My glasses were smashed. Three other people in this first small group required hospital treatment for their injuries. All had sat down peacefully when approached by the RUC.

Jim, Balfour Ave, keyholder of his workplace.

I couldn't get to work all day, someone else had to open up the shop (a Bookmakers). I have lived in area for 25 years and have never seen anything like the RUC operation.

George, Glengoland.

I heard about the events on the Lower Ormeau and went to see friends in Farnham Street. The RUC stopped me at University Avenue at 7.30am and told me that no one was allowed into the area under the Public Order Act. Journalists were also being stopped. I asked about my friends and was told people would not be allowed out of area until after 10.00am.

Doreen, New Lodge Road.

I drove to the area with my newborn twins when I heard the news. It was early in the morning. The RUC stopped me at Rugby Avenue and when I insisted on seeing my sister in Dromara Street, they made me leave the car and walk with the twins, and two of them escorted me all the way to the top of Dromara Street. I felt like I was visiting a prison and my sister was a prisoner. She had not been able to get any milk but luckily I had brought some for the twins.

Patricia, Dromara Street.

I was in my bedroom and heard [protest organiser] Gerard Rice speaking to the people gathered behind the RUC lines just below my house. I looked out the window. Gerard was saying something like "we shall not be moved". An RUC man outside my window said "We'll move you, you Fenian bastards". I took his number and said "I'm going to report you". I came down to the door but he was gone. I asked who was in charge. An RUC man replied "The Chief Constable but he's not here". I asked for a senior officer but was told there weren't any. I eventually had to give the RUC man's number to a local priest.

Michael, Balfour Ave.

I came out of my house when I heard the land rovers. The noise they were making was unbelievable. An RUC man grabbed me and pushed me hard against a land rover. My clothing got caught on the land rover so when the RUC man tried to drag me further he couldn't move me. He started beating me on the legs with his baton. I was dazed and I think I blacked out for a moment. Some neighbours grabbed me and were able to get me back inside my house.

Mrs M. M., Balfour Ave.

I was awakened as the RUC were sealing off the street. I dressed and went to the top of my street. I was forcibly removed by an RUC man who pushed me, bruising my left arm. I saw [Unionist MP] on GMTV saying that we were not being hemmed in. I went to the RUC and told them this and demanded access to the Ormeau Road. I was verbally abused and officer No. 974 told me to "F*** Off", in full blast. I phoned RUC Headquarters, but got no satisfaction. Throughout the rest of the day, I was continually sworn at, jeered at and mentally abused.

David, Farnham Street.

I received a phone call to tell me that my girlfriend Sharon was going into labour. I immediately went to the top of Farnham St., and asked to be allowed out. It was 7.50am. I explained the situation, but was told by an RUC man to "F*** off". I asked for the officer in charge, and was again told to "F*** off". I walked to Hatfield Street and again explained the situation to the RUC there. They told me that no-one was allowed in or out. An RUC officer in riot gear said "F*** off, scumbag". I tried every street and after a lot of begging I was eventually allowed out at Shaftesbury Avenue - I later found out that the hospital staff had phoned Donegall Pass RUC station to request that I be allowed out, and I think the message had come through to the Lower Ormeau by the time I reached Shaftesbury. I finally got out of the area at 9.30am. When I got to the hospital my girlfriend was extremely distressed and upset.

All these statements were taken in the Lower Ormeau area in the days immediately following the events of 12th July.

Lower Ormeau Concerned Community
18th July 1995