

Sermons, Speeches & Addresses

Hillsborough Independent Panel Report – Introduction

12th September 2012



Below is Bishop James's introduction to the Hillsborough Independent Panel report.

The fourth-century philosopher, Lactantius, wrote:

'The whole point of justice consists precisely in our providing for others through humanity what we provide for our own family through affection'.

The disclosed documents show that multiple factors were responsible for the deaths of the 96 victims of the Hillsborough tragedy and that the fans were not the cause of the disaster. The disclosed documents show that the bereaved families met a series of obstacles in their search for justice.

The Hillsborough Independent Panel, in accepting its terms of reference from the Home Secretary, acknowledges the legitimacy of the search for justice by the bereaved families and survivors of Hillsborough through the disclosure of documents relating to the disaster and its aftermath.

The Panel was asked to consult with the Hillsborough families. We decided to meet with the three established groups on the very first day that we met as a Panel. Our meetings with the groups that day were the foundation of the Panel's work in the intervening two and a half years. In that period, we have made contact with at least one member of each of the families bereaved by Hillsborough. This includes a number of families who are not affiliated to any of the established groups. We should like to pay tribute to the individual families and to the representative groups. Their comments have informed the work of the Panel. But, more than that, the Panel has been impressed constantly by the determination of the families and survivors and by their dignity in their search for justice. This came to the fore when, in 2009, the Hillsborough Family Support Group met the Home Secretary, who then took the decision to appoint the Hillsborough Independent Panel.

The Panel has overseen full public disclosure of information relating to Hillsborough. The new Hillsborough website makes this information available publicly. Most of it is now being published for the first time.

The Panel was also asked to illustrate how the information disclosed adds to public understanding of the tragedy and its aftermath. The Panel does so through this Report, firstly by providing an overview of what was previously known and then by explaining, in 12 chapters, how the disclosed information changes public understanding.

When the Panel began its work in February 2010, it could not and did not know whether the information it would reveal would add to public understanding and change that understanding. Over the intervening months, we have discovered that the information disclosed will add significantly to public understanding.

The Panel was also asked to consult with statutory agencies in securing maximum possible disclosure of the documents. The Panel is grateful for the cooperation of over 80 organisations who made available their own records, and especially to South Yorkshire Police who set an example for the process of disclosure.

When over 30,000 came to Anfield for the 20th Anniversary of Hillsborough, it showed that the wound of grief was still sore because so many questions were yet unanswered. These disclosed documents address many of those questions. The Panel, which was set up deliberately and distinctly from an inquiry, produces this Report without any presumption of where it will lead. But it does so in the profound hope that greater transparency will bring to the families and to the wider public a greater understanding of the tragedy and its aftermath. For it is only with this transparency that the families and survivors, who have behaved with such dignity, can with some sense of truth and justice cherish the memory of their 96 loved ones.

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