

Timeline of the Hillsborough disaster and cover-up as it unfolded (1989-2021)

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April 15, 1989

An estimated 54,000 people attend the FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest. Ninety-four men, women and children are killed and 766 injured. Two more subsequently die as a result of their injuries. They were crushed and suffocated to death after police gave the order to open Gate C at 2:52 p.m., just before kick-off. As a result, thousands of fans were directed into two already dangerously overcrowded pens.

The Football Association selected the Hillsborough ground for the semi-final despite it not having a valid safety certificate and two previous incidents when the games had to be delayed due to crowd congestion.

April 16, 1989

Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and her press secretary, Bernard Ingham, visit Hillsborough. Ingham said he was informed the deaths were caused by a “tanked-up mob.”

April 19, 1989

The *Sun*, owned by Rupert Murdoch, publishes the front-page headline, “The Truth”, claiming that as people were dying Liverpool supporters stole from them, urinated on police officers and beat up “brave cops.”

August 1, 1989

Lord Justice Taylor’s official report blames police mismanagement of the event and criticises South Yorkshire Police for blaming Liverpool supporters instead of accepting responsibility. No one is charged and made to stand trial, or even disciplined.

November 19, 1990–March 28, 1991

An inquest into the deaths is held and the jury returns a majority verdict of accidental death.

October 29, 1991

David Duckenfield, the chief constable of South

Yorkshire Police, retires on a full pension escaping imminent police disciplinary action.

January 13, 1992

Disciplinary action against Superintendent Bernard Murray, the police control box commander at Hillsborough, is dropped.

November 5, 1993

An application by six of the families for a judicial review to quash the perverse inquest verdict is rejected by Lord Justice McCowan.

December 5, 1996

ITV broadcasts a drama documentary, *Hillsborough*, written by Jimmy McGovern. This contains new evidence pointing to police responsibility for the disaster and an orchestrated cover-up.

June 30, 1997

Labour government Home Secretary Jack Straw orders the “scrutiny” of new evidence by Lord Justice Stuart-Smith. It emerges that South Yorkshire Police changed 164 officers’ accounts of the disaster before sending them to the Taylor inquiry. Regarding calls for a new public inquiry into Hillsborough, in light of the revelations, incoming Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair writes, “What is the point?”

February 18, 1998

The Labour government rules out a public inquiry into Hillsborough. Straw claims new evidence looked at by Lord Justice Stuart-Smith had not added “anything significant” to the material available to the Taylor inquiry.

January 2010

In response to widespread anger at the cover-up, the Labour government finally establishes the Hillsborough Independent Panel (HIP) and agrees to release previously confidential documents.

September 12, 2012

The Hillsborough Independent Panel, which has reviewed 450,000 documents disclosed to it, publishes its 394-page report. It collected documents from more than 80 organisations, including the South Yorkshire Police, Sheffield City Council, the South Yorkshire coroner and the fire and ambulance services.

New medical evidence reveals that 58 victims “definitely or probably” had the capacity to survive beyond 3:15 p.m. South Yorkshire West District Coroner, Dr Stefan Popper, had ruled in 1991 that those who died had already received their critical injuries by 3:15 p.m., so evidence beyond that point was not required as to the cause of death. This resulted in no evidence ever being heard regarding the role of the police and failings of the emergency services after that time.

Michael Mansfield, the legal representative of the Hillsborough Family Support Group, describes what followed the Hillsborough disaster as “the biggest cover-up in British legal history.”

Theresa May, the Conservative home secretary, is forced to accept the HIP report and orders a criminal inquiry into the disaster, the now concluded *Operation Resolve*.

December 19, 2012

The “accidental death” verdict of the first inquests is quashed in the High Court by three judges.

March 31, 2014

The new inquests begin in Warrington, northwest England.

April 26, 2016

After two years, the longest case ever heard by a jury in British legal history, the jury delivers its verdict that the 96 men, women and children who died at Hillsborough were unlawfully killed.

June 28, 2017

The Crown Prosecution Service announces, more than 28 years after the Hillsborough disaster, the first prosecutions of anyone involved in the deaths and subsequent cover-up. David Duckenfield is charged with the manslaughter of 95 people; five others are handed lesser charges.

August 21, 2018

Charges against Sir Norman Bettison, a chief inspector in the South Yorkshire Police force at the time of Hillsborough, were dropped. He faced four counts of misconduct in a public office over his role in

trying to blame the fans for what happened. The CPS withdrew the case after one witness died and contradictions came to light in the evidence of another two.

April 3, 2019

The jury in the trial of David Duckenfield, the former police chief superintendent in charge of policing at Hillsborough, was dismissed after failing to reach a verdict.

November 29, 2019

South Yorkshire Police match commander, David Duckenfield, is found not guilty of gross negligence manslaughter for the deaths of 95 Liverpool fans, in a retrial, by a majority of 9-1. He was not tried over the death of the 96th victim, Tony Bland, as he died more than a year and a day after the disaster.

May 26, 2021

The collapse of the prosecution of retired police officers Donald Denton and Alan Foster, and South Yorkshire Police (SYP) solicitor Peter Metcalf ends any possibility of bringing to justice anyone responsible for the deaths of 96 people in the Hillsborough football disaster and the decades long-cover-up that followed. Denton (aged 83), Foster (74) and Metcalf (71) were accused of changing statements by police officers prepared for Lord Justice Taylor’s 1989 public inquiry into the disaster, to withhold evidence implicating South Yorkshire Police for the loss of life at Hillsborough.

July 27, 2021

Andrew Devine, the 97th victim of the Hillsborough disaster dies aged 55. Andrew suffered lifelong injuries at Hillsborough that left him with severe and irreversible brain damage requiring 24-hour care. The following day, Senior Coroner Andre Rebello said that Andrew was the Hillsborough disaster’s “97th fatality” and, as with the other 96, was unlawfully killed.



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