

Crumlin Road Gaol (jail)

On March 31, 1996 the Governor of Belfast's Crumlin Road Gaol walked out of the prison and the gates closed for the final time. The closure ended a **150-year history of imprisonment**, conflict and executions.



For most people in Belfast and across the island of Ireland, Crumlin Road prison **evokes memories of conflict**. Around 25,000 people were imprisoned there, whether as a result of internment, or on remand of sentence as political prisoners.

to evoke = to bring to conscious mind/ to recall

to intern = to imprison someone (to put someone in prison) for political or military reasons

to remand = to imprison someone while they wait to have a trial.

sentence = the punishment for committing a crime

In Northern Ireland, there is a long political history between Catholic and Protestant people.

The new Belfast gaol became the first prison in Ireland to be designed for 'The Separate System' of confinement, in which prisoners were separated from each other and never allowed to talk to each other.

to confine = to restrict/imprison/enclose someone within certain limits of space or time

The gaol was built to hold between 500 and 550 prisoners in single cell accommodation, each cell measuring 3.5 by 2 metres, and 3 metres in height.

In later years, up to 3 prisoners might have lived in a single cell, as was the case during the early 1970s.

(prison) cell = a small room in which a prisoner lives in

In the early years of the gaol, children were also imprisoned for stealing items of food or clothing in a city where there was a lot of poverty in the working-class areas. Sentences for children ranged from one week to one month and could include a whipping.

whipping = a beating with a whip (a rope)



In the gaol's lifetime 17 men were executed by hanging, their bodies buried within the prison walls in unconsecrated (unholy) ground. The only indication that they were there was the men's initials, scratched into the wall against the year of execution.

to execute = to carry out a death sentence

to hang = to kill someone by tying a rope around their neck and removing the support (the floor) beneath them

Today, people from Belfast and beyond are queuing up to pass the gates of Crumlin Road prison. With its cells vacant, wings silent and yards empty the only echoes come from the builders, who are trying to make the institution a friendly place for the many visitors wanting to explore the building's 'colourful' past.

to queue = to wait in line

wing = part of a large building

yard = an area of land