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WEEKEND SPORT Inside



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Going for gold



Ireland's Christina Desmond and Melissa Gemini of Italy trade blows in their light middleweight 70kg semi-final bout during the Women's European Boxing Championships in Montenegro. The Cork native, a garda based in Dungarvan, won a unanimous decision. Five Irish boxers go for gold today. SEE Sport: 6&7

HSE spends €15.5m but cannot say how many agency staff hired

Elaine Loughlin
Deputy Political Editor

The HSE has paid €15.5m to private recruitment firms since 2020 but does not know how many staff have been hired as a result. The amount paid to recruitment agencies jumped from €2.88m in 2020 to €9.78m last year. That included payments of more than €2.5m each to two companies. A further €2.6m has already been paid out in the first five months of this year. Labour TD Sean Sherlock has accused the HSE of continuing to pay millions of euro of taxpayer funds to private companies with no clear return on investment. He said it is "frustrating and mind-boggling". "We need to grasp the nettle in respect of the recruitment issue," he said. "For two years now we are being told the issue is

TD demands clarity on the HSE's 'mind-boggling' outsourcing bill

recruitment and that we cannot recruit the staff. "I do not think the public are buying that anymore, with over €15m spent on companies to recruit." A breakdown of spending in each of the HSE regions shows that the North West and Mid-West (NW MW) finance area — which takes in Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, west Cavan, Clare, Limerick, and north Tipperary — spent €1.36m on recruitment firms in 2020. That was by far the most of any region. That spending rose to €7.36m last year, while €645,231 had been paid out up to June of this year in NW MW. The HSE cited the outsourcing of certain recruitment services to TTM Healthcare in relation to Ma-

norhamilton, Co Leitrim, as well as additional staff requirements in the intensive care and high dependency units at Limerick Hospital as a reason for this spend. More generally, winter plan initiatives were given as an explanation for the increase in costs in 2021 compared to 2020. The HSE said information relating to the number of staff that have been hired through recruitment agencies is "not centrally available" as it is held in "disparate HSE Regional Finance Ledgers". A spokesperson said gathering information on the amount spent across the country on private recruitment firms is "time consum-

ing and resource intensive". They said the funds were paid out for recruitment advertising costs, placement fees, and some agency pay. Responding to parliamentary questions posed by Mr Sherlock, the HSE said: "It is not possible to identify within the finance systems the specific areas for which the recruitment firms were recruiting other than to provide the finance region from which the payments were made. "The shortcomings in the HSE legacy financial systems are well acknowledged and their replacement by a single standard financial system for the health sector is at the core of the Finance Reform programme initiated by the Department of Health." Among the firms used by the HSE in 2021 was Kate Cowhig International Recruitment which received

€2.68m and TTM Healthcare which was paid €2.55m. CPL Solutions was paid €665,592 last year. CPL Healthcare received €553,910 and Tappa Holdings, trading as Red Group got €381,204. Mr Sherlock said the spend on recruitment firms needs to be explained. "The Government, through the HSE, has spent €15m in the last two years giving money to recruitment agencies," he said. "What are they doing for that money? That is the question. The minister cannot just wash his hands of this." He added: "We have been quite patient and people have understood that there is a recruitment issue but it is time for us to start drilling down and getting into the weeds of why we cannot recruit staff in a way that meets the demand and the needs of people who are affected."

Call for urgent response as famine looms in Somalia

Eamon Timmins
Concern



A famine is expected to be declared in Somalia in the coming weeks. It will make headline news, but news reports will fail to capture the horror that famine entails. This time 30 years ago, as a reporter for the then *Cork Examiner*, I went to Somalia to report on the famine in which up to 300,000 people died. My memories of three visits to the war-torn, drought-stricken country are the stuff of nightmares. Now, three decades later, famine looms again. A famine is something that nobody should witness, let alone live through. It should be something consigned to history, but it isn't. One of my abiding memories from 1992 was the silence of a

clinic in Baidoa filled with mothers and sick infants, too ill to cry. Rows of women with their babies sitting on the floor waiting to be seen by nurses, glad they had got this far, but worried about their children's condition. Huge rooms of listless children, their eyes rolling in their heads, their mothers stroking their cheeks to comfort them. They were the lucky ones. Many families did not make it that far. The dusty roads to the major towns were littered with dead livestock and occasional bundles of rags — people who had died on their way to get help. Nurses were tasked with the unenviable job of screening the crowds gathered outside feeding centres and clinics each morning and only being able to admit the sickest. Even for some who were admitted, it was too late. One nurse told me she regularly worked with children who were too sick to be saved.

"You have to prioritise your human resources when you are here. You have to realise when somebody is going to die and accept it," she said. She would deal with the personal trauma when she returned to Ireland, she said. The hardest cases to deal with were the small children and orphans. Nurses pointed to children who had been found in huts, alongside the bodies of their dead parents and siblings. Older children had buried their last remaining relatives before walking to the local town for help. My other lasting memory from 1992 was the "death cart" as it did its daily rounds in Baidoa. Pulled by a donkey, it collected bodies of those who had died overnight. The proper burial of bodies was essential to stop the spread of diseases in the crowded camps which had sprung up in the town. Grave diggers had stopped digging individual plots and switched to trenches for mass burials. In one camp of 8,000 people, they were burying 60 people each day. Baidoa is again the epicentre of the current drought and impending famine. Organisations such as Concern have been working with communities in Somalia since 1992 and there



A Turkana woman fetches water for goats from a shallow well. Picture: Tony Karumba/AFP

have been major improvements over the years. Communities are more resilient. However, Somalia and neighbouring countries are experiencing their fifth failed rainy season. Nobody can survive more than two years without proper rain. So famine is looming once again. An earlier and greater response by the international community would have saved thousands of lives in 1992. An urgent and major response by international donors is needed today, if thousands of lives are to be protected and untold suffering averted. Eamon Timmins is media relations manager for Concern Worldwide

Aldi sees cost pressures rising

Aldi may be forced to put up its prices this year to absorb the huge rise in costs. The discount grocer also said that it does not intend to cut opening hours to save on its energy bills. Some rival stores across Europe have announced plans to curtail winter opening hours. "Our priority is to insulate, as far as we can, the customer from what's coming," said Niall O'Connor, group managing director at Aldi Ireland. Business: 20

Leadership bid by Mordaunt

Penny Mordaunt has become the first candidate to throw her hat into the race to succeed Liz Truss as British prime minister, with a pledge to reunite the bitterly-divided Tory Party. The leader of the House of Commons, who finished third in the last leadership election, said she had been encouraged by the support she had received from fellow Conservative MPs. Earlier, defence secretary Ben Wallace ruled himself out as a candidate, indicating that he was ready to back Boris Johnson if he enters the race. World: 12

Special investigation

Catherine the Fake: Suspected horse sale fraudster in hiding

Ann Murphy



Gardaí believe a woman at the centre of a major fraud investigation in the horse racing industry is hiding out somewhere in Ireland. Corkwoman Catherine O'Brien, originally from Buttevant but with an address in Dungarvan, Co Waterford, is wanted for questioning by gardaí investigating allegations of fraud in the sale of racehorses over the last three to four years. She has not lived at her Dungarvan address for several months but gardaí do not believe she has left the country. Detectives are appealing to anyone who may have been a victim of fraud in the industry, and who hasn't reported it, to come forward, as they seek to expand their case. They are also hoping that people with knowledge of Ms O'Brien's whereabouts will come forward.



Catherine O'Brien was convicted of 34 counts of animal welfare legislation breaches in 2021 and gardaí believe somebody is facilitating her while she hides in the country.

Irish Examiner
Special Investigation with four-part podcast
See Forum and irishexaminer.com

her conviction in June 2021 for 34 counts of animal welfare legislation breaches relating to horses seized in Co Wexford. A bench warrant was issued for her arrest following her conviction. Gardaí describe her as a "person of interest" in their investigations into fraud in the sale of horses. One Garda source said: "We don't believe she has left the country. How she is hiding out, we don't know. She is obviously being facilitated by somebody because she has no obvious means of income or anything like that. It is an unusual one for us. "She is very much gone

off the radar at the moment and we are actively looking for her and we are looking for any information on her." Ms O'Brien has not been claiming any social welfare payments, and there has been no bank account activity that can lead detectives to her whereabouts. She failed to appear in court in Waterford in April in a case taken by the State, in which she was the main witness, against two men accused of a single count of demanding money with menace from her in September 2019. A Garda spokesman appealed to people in the horse racing industry who have been victims of fraud to come forward. "If somebody has been subject to what they believe to be criminal activity or been subject to some sort of a fraud by anybody, including Catherine O'Brien, then they should come forward and report it to us." Forum: Pages 13-15

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NESTLED away in a busy estate on the edge of Dungarvan, the house barely merits a second glance.

It seems to be just another home lying empty during the day while its occupants are out at work.

But this is not the home of any ordinary nine-to-five employee. This detached house at An Griainín in Ballinroad is the home of businesswoman Catherine O'Brien. In a built-up area of uniform houses, there is one subtle indicator of the passions of the person who lives here — a name plate with the number of the house nestled between two horses.

However, that is the only sign of pride at the house now. Hanging baskets and plants outside the door and along the front of the house contain plants which have not seen attention for many months. Along the side of the house, behind a timber gate, are five rubbish bins of various colours, slightly hiding a bicycle parked against a timber railing. Along the railing that runs parallel to the gable end are old tyres painted brightly in pinks and purples, also holding dead plants.

There are some indicators at the property of normal life in suburban Dungarvan. But there are also clear indicators that life as Catherine O'Brien knew it has come to an abrupt end. These include utilities such as the electricity supply having recently been disconnected.

There is nothing ordinary about Catherine O'Brien, a woman described by neighbours as someone who kept herself to herself, and who did not mingle with others in the estate. She is known to many as Catherine, while those who thought themselves close to her call her Kate or Katie. She is ultimately a Walter Mitty-type character, someone with many different personas.

One neighbour, who has been living just a few doors down from Catherine's for two years, says she has never seen her. Another who knows her vaguely says she has not been seen for several months.

He says gardai have also been looking for her and says that there have been people in and out of the house in the months since Catherine's death seen. They include an older man and two women.

In a house a few kilometres outside of Dungarvan, a man who knew her well says he has not seen her for "five or six months" and says he does not want to talk about her.

The more you talk to people, the more you find out that people who once thought they knew her well never really knew her at all.

But one person who thought he knew her pretty well said: "She would come out with fantastical things and believe it. You would never know what was real and what was true."

Currently the whereabouts of Catherine O'Brien are not known. But she is a wanted woman. Many people are convinced that she is lying low, with just a few trusted people knowing of her whereabouts.

Given that the plaque on the wall outside her front door shows two horses, there is a certain irony in the fact that horses have helped played a role in her downfall.

The Buttevant native is currently the subject of a bench warrant issued at Gorey District Court in June of last year, following her conviction on 34 counts of animal cruelty under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2003. This related to the seizure of thoroughbred horses in a malnourished state in Ballygarrett in Wexford in 2019.

The horses included two seven-year-old bay mares, a four-year-old grey filly, and a dam million year-old filion. A six-week-old colt was also among the seized animals.

The animals were thoroughbreds and the seizures shocked people, with photos of the animals showing them in an emaciated state. The judge opted not to sentence her in her absence when the case was in court over a year ago, and the bench warrant remains live.

Catherine, who has two grown-up daughters, also failed to turn up in court in February for a Proceeds of Crime hearing in the High Court in Dublin. A decision was made in favour of the Criminal Assets Bureau, allowing the retention by the State of a 2015-registered Land Rover Discovery.

She appealed the decision by Mr Justice Alexander Owens and it was lifted after she turned up in court of Appeal in Dublin on June 24.

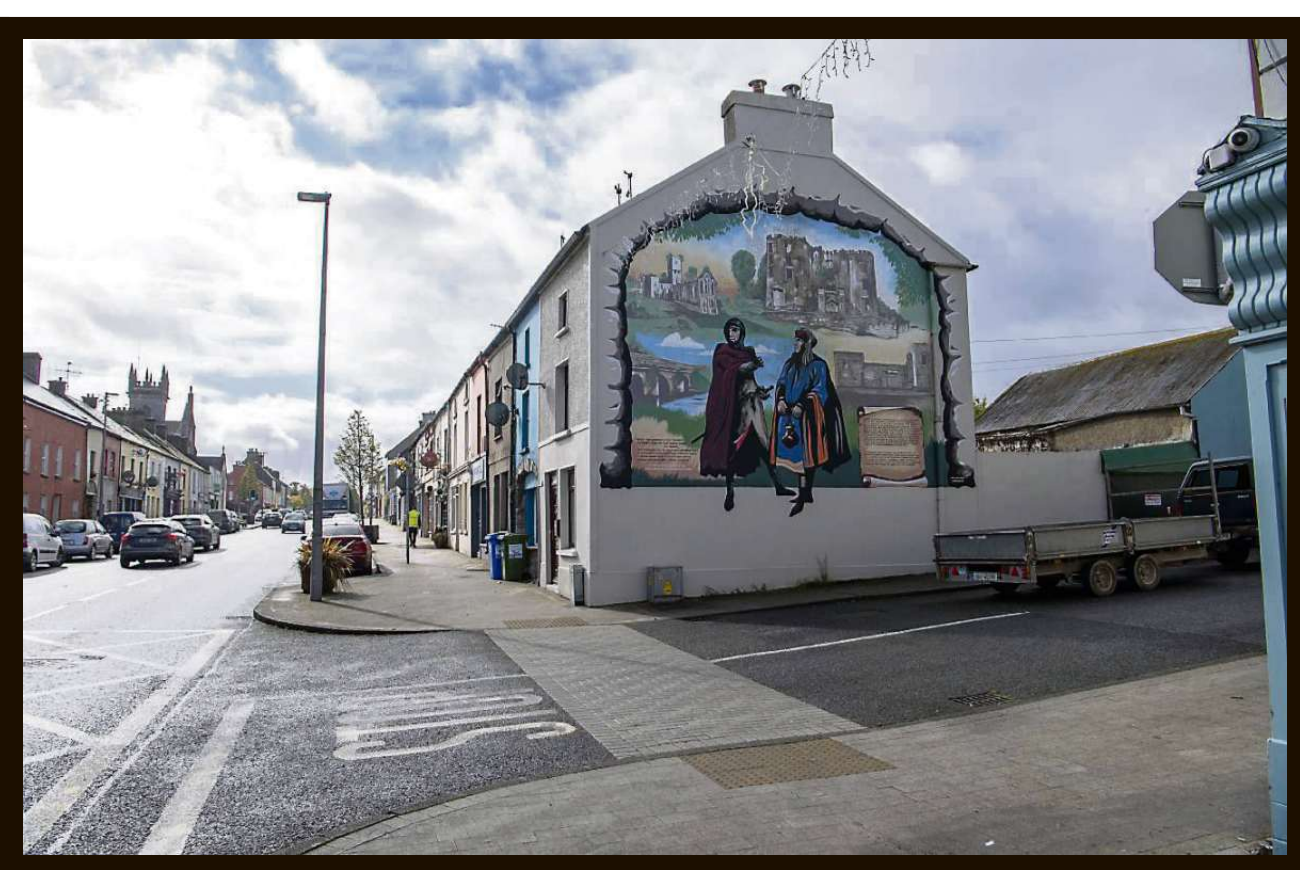
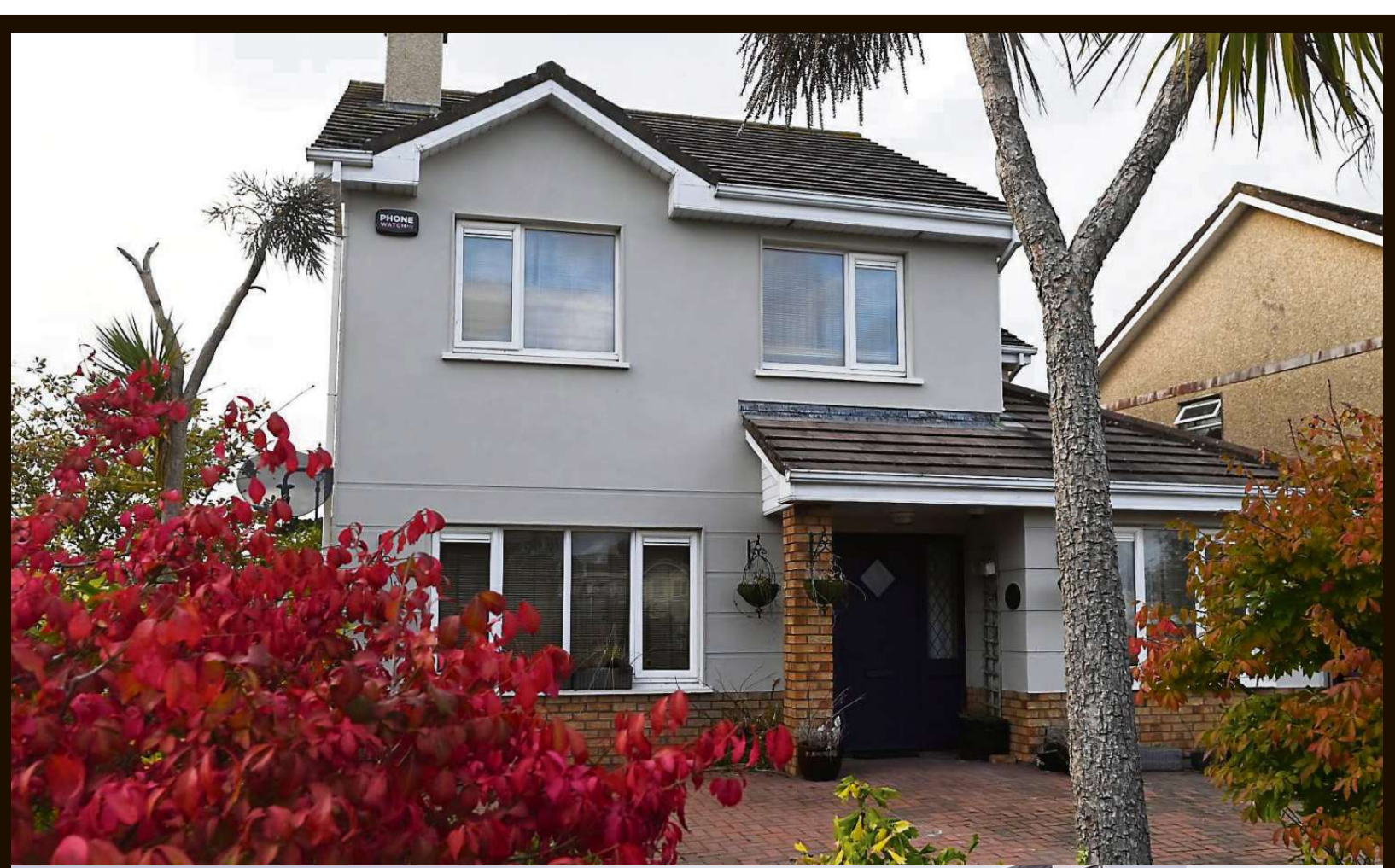
However, a spokesman for the Courts Service said she had not turned up for her appeal in Dublin on June 24. Instead it was struck out, subject to an "order of the Court" on "no-asset order", on July 15.

There is a certain irony in Catherine having been the subject of high-profile media attention, while she herself once studied law in the area. It was her own lawyer who she thought she did not go on to become a solicitor, she has previously written that she believes she is a solicitor or legal mediator, providing legal advice to some.

One of that family describes Catherine: "She is like an eel — moving around and nobody can catch her." She adds: "She is a very clever, cunning, and manipulative person."

"She was 19 years old when we met through a mutual acquaintance and she arrived in the area with her dog. The family say that while cars were important to Catherine, clothing and other material trappings did not appear to be.

The son says: "She was never dripping with jewellery or fancy clothes." This family recalls when Catherine moved across the Cork Water-ville border to relocate to the quiet little village of Stradbally, on Waterford's Copper Coast.



opened but is at the heart of the judgment made in favour of the Criminal Assets Bureau in February about whether a 151-registered Land Rover Discovery which was bought in January 2015 was purchased through the proceeds of "criminal frauds" by Catherine.

Advanced Vetmed Ireland Ltd had no visible connection to Catherine, and a Clare dairy farmer, who recently passed away, was the 100% shareholder.

When the company was incorporated in 2013, the business address was in Dublin, belonging to a company which helps company startups, the directors of AVMI at that point were attached to the Dublin company, which has not been involved in any wrongdoing.

Five days after the company was incorporated, new directors were listed on a B10 form for the Companies Registration Office, with Nicola named as the company secretary. She was also named as a director, along with the Clare dairy farmer.

In the memorandum of association for the new company, the objective of AVMI was "to carry on the business in providing veterinary and agri sales."

On documents related to the company, Catherine was neither a shareholder or a director of AVMI.

In his judgment, Mr Justice Owens stated: "Catherine O'Brien was not a director of that company (AVMI) or a signatory to the company bank account which was opened in December 2014. She was not entitled to buy or sell motor vehicles on behalf of that company or to hold herself out as having authority to engage in these transactions."

The ownership details for the 2015 vehicle were changed in a declaration to the Department of Transport in Shannon in April of that year, with her uncle's name, Ned Howe, placed on it. However, the insurance was in Catherine's name, with no reference to her uncle on the insurance documents.

She claimed she gave her uncle ownership of the 2015 Land Rover Discovery as security for a loan of €30,000. However, the February judgment outlined that Catherine's paper trail to substantiate the loan claim. Sworn affidavits disclose neither the source of funds, the method of payment, receipt of the money, or how it was spent.

It added that Catherine O'Brien was not a signatory on the company bank account for AVMI.

The judgment further stated that the paperwork submitted to the motor tax authorities for the 2015 Land Rover Discovery showed AVMI Ltd as the owner of the vehicle. A change of ownership of the vehicle was declared in April 2015 in favour of Catherine O'Brien's uncle, Ned Howe.

The judgment continued: "The signature of the owner in manuscript is 'Nicola Beresford (sic) Advanced Vet Med; Kate O'Brien'. The purported signature of Nicola Beresford was not genuine."

The judgment added that Catherine O'Brien "was not entitled to sign a change of ownership form for Land Rover Discovery 151 C 267 and it was not authorised to put the signature of Nicola Beresford on that form."

Catherine O'Brien had become acquainted with the Clare farmer through a vet she had met through an online dating site. The High Court judgment by Mr Justice Owens said that the Buttevant woman had introduced the dairy farmer "to a project of opening a veterinary business and of buying property for that business."

But she has held on to the piano she played as a child in Woodhouse in Stradbally, which her father, Lord William Mostyn de la Poer Beresford, had inherited. Her father had served as aide-de-camp to the governor and commander-in-chief of Malta, and had also fought in the Second World War. He was also the son of the sixth Marquess of Waterford, Henry de la Poer Beresford.

She also has some other pieces, including a military chest "which used to be in my dad's bedroom — that will be the last piece I will ever get rid of."

The last time she met Catherine was more than five years ago, after she was interviewed by gardai about her involvement in the veterinary business which Catherine had planned to open in Buttevant.

The business, called Advanced Vetmed Ireland (AVMI) Ltd, never

‘Where is Catherine!’

...sister when approached by the Irish Examiner.

One family who knew Catherine as a teenager and in her early 20s recall their experiences of her involvement in their lives on condition of anonymity. A member of their family is listed on company documents relating to both a pub and a genology company called Emerald Roots.

The company for the legal mediator, providing legal advice to some.

One of that family describes Catherine: "She is like an eel — moving around and nobody can catch her." She adds: "She is a very clever, cunning, and manipulative person."

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Listen to the podcast at irishexaminer.com and read part 2 in next week's 'Irish Examiner'

Leafy trees, picture-postcard type thatched houses and a spools square make the friendly village almost otherworldly.

It has had many successes in the National Tidy Towns competition, as well as the International Entente Florale competition.

It also has a mystery lurking in its heritage — the disappearance of postman Larry Griffin from Kilmachomas who disappeared on Christmas Day 1929. He had been on his rounds in the beautiful area around Stradbally, and his bicycle was found a short distance away the following day. However, efforts to establish what had happened to the father of three failed and his body was never found. Ten people were charged with murder but all were acquitted. They included two gardai, a teacher, and a publican. The case against them did not proceed after the chief witness in the case withdrew his evidence.

A plaque commemorating Mr Griffin was unveiled at the post office in Kilmachomas village three years ago as a lasting memorial to the missing postman.

And in this little corner of west Waterford, another mystery lurks: the legacy of Catherine O'Brien, whose shadow falls long over the area even though she only lived there for a very short time.

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However, that business did not last while the one in Main Street in Dungarvan also closed. She subsequently opened a florist at the junction of Mary St and the Square in Dungarvan but Nicola describes it as the "invisible shop" — people would easily walk past it.

The nearby village of Kilmachomas was another location Catherine turned to with her floristry business. Kilmachomas opened on the main street in the village in 2007, and the registration form filed with the Companies Registration Office in June of that year gave Catherine's address as Bellinagh in Dungarvan. It also stated her occupation as a florist and stated a company called Linden Lea Ltd as the company name.

Accounts for Linden Lea Ltd for the year up to August 2007 were signed by both Catherine and Nicola, with both named on the accounts as directors of the company. Catherine was listed as the company secretary. At that time, Stradbally House — Nicola's home at that point — was also used as the registered office for the company.

Nicola says the business in Kilmachomas was successful at the start but then became unviable, as reflected in the accounts.

Catherine's interest in landscaping and floristry had seen her do a horticultural course in Waterford IT. But after a number of ventures in floristry, she turned her hand to other endeavours.

The timing was right for Nicola, who wanted a change from the life she had at that time.

She explained: "At the time, I was living and working on a farm in Englishtown, looking after chickens, hens. And I had come to the end of my tether with that because it was hard work."

The opportunity to do something else was something she couldn't refuse, and she happily took on her new role.

And, as time went on, Nicola even looked after the little girl at times if Catherine was away.

What Nicola thought of as a bond of friendship was growing between her and Catherine. And it appeared that Catherine felt she could trust Nicola in her business — she decided to get

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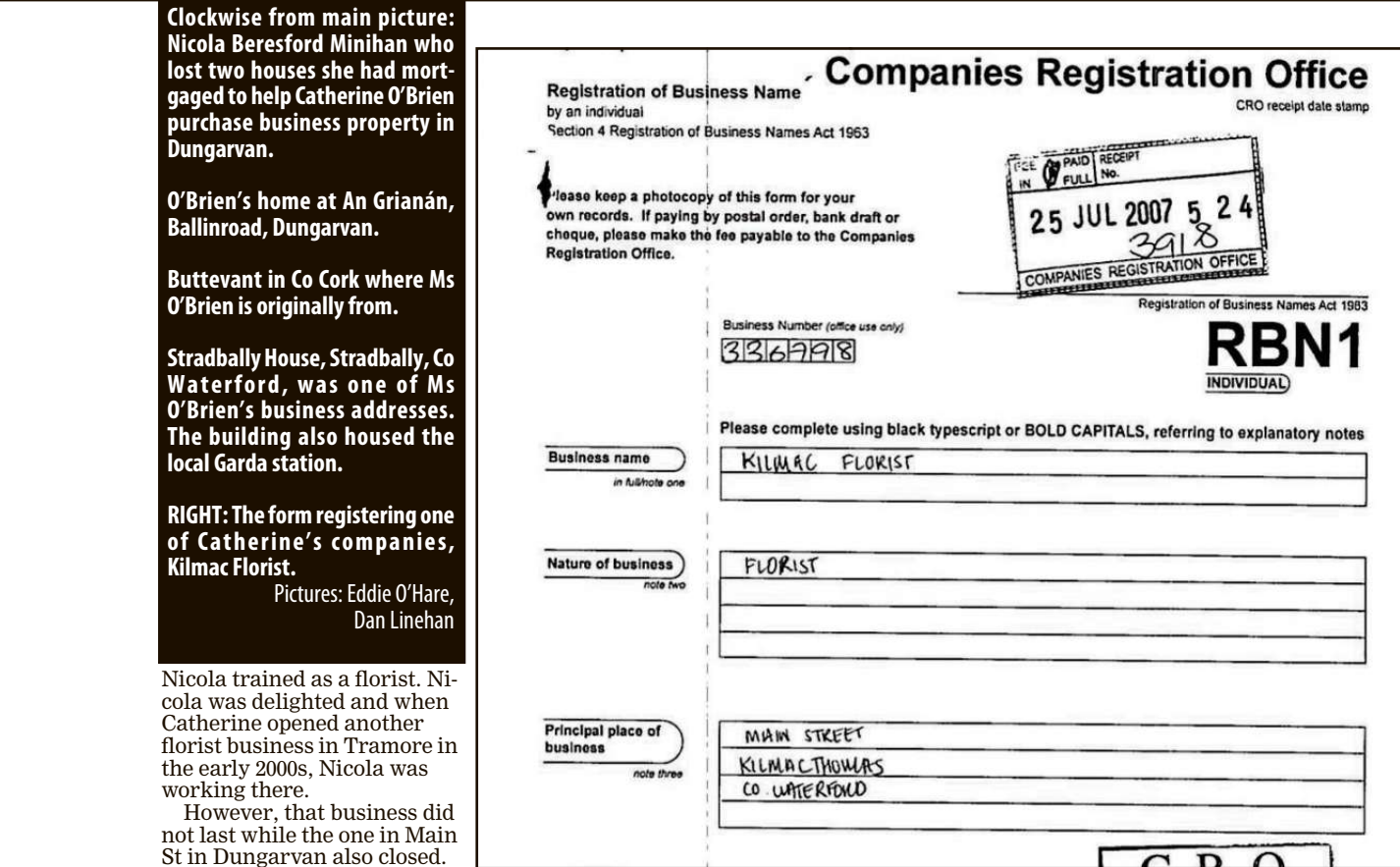
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'At that stage I trusted her'

Sitting in her current home, she recalls her association with Catherine O'Brien as being almost familial, describing herself as having been almost like a second mother to Catherine. The corner shop next door made sense, but having a florist there made no sense whatever.

The nature of the business in Stradbally was described as a garden centre, landscaping, and florist, the latter being something she would be well known for around both Stradbally and Dungarvan. Called Farnio flower shop, the business address was given as Stradballybeg on the company documents, and her occupa-

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Court judgment

The judgment by Mr Justice Alexander Owens, in February, said: "Catherine O'Brien was not a director or shareholder of AVMI Ltd. She set up this company but she did not want to be a director. She arranged for Nicola Beresford to act as a director. This lady who was in her 60s had previously been involved in a business venture organised by Catherine O'Brien."

The judgment noted that the previous venture had failed, proving to be costly for Nicola and her family.

It added that Catherine O'Brien was not a signatory on the company bank account for AVMI.

The judgment further stated that the paperwork submitted to the motor tax authorities for the 2015 Land Rover Discovery showed AVMI Ltd as the owner of the vehicle. A change of ownership of the vehicle was declared in April 2015 in favour of Catherine O'Brien's uncle, Ned Howe.

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Advanced Vetmed Ireland Ltd had no visible connection to Catherine, and a Clare dairy farmer, who recently passed away, was the 100% shareholder.

When the company was incorporated in 2013, the business address was in Dublin, belonging to a company which helps company startups, the directors of AVMI at that point were attached to the Dublin company, which has not been involved in any wrongdoing.

Five days after the company was incorporated, new directors were listed on a B10 form for the Companies Registration Office, with Nicola named as the company secretary. She was also named as a director, along with the Clare dairy farmer.

In the memorandum of association for the new company, the objective of AVMI was "to carry on the business in providing veterinary and agri sales."

On documents related to the company, Catherine was neither a shareholder or a director of AVMI.

In his judgment, Mr Justice Owens stated: "Catherine O'Brien was not a director of that company (AVMI) or a signatory to the company bank account which was opened in December 2014. She was not entitled to buy or sell motor vehicles on behalf of that company or to hold herself out as having authority to engage in these transactions."

The ownership details for the 2015 vehicle were changed in a declaration to the Department of Transport in Shannon in April of that year, with her uncle's name, Ned Howe, placed on it. However, the insurance was in Catherine's name, with no reference to her uncle on the insurance documents.

She claimed she gave her uncle ownership of the 2015 Land Rover Discovery as security for a loan of €30,000. However, the February judgment outlined that Catherine's paper trail to substantiate the loan claim. Sworn affidavits disclose neither the source of funds, the method of payment, receipt of the money, or how it was spent.

It added that Catherine O'Brien was not a signatory on the company bank account for AVMI.

The judgment further stated that the paperwork submitted to the motor tax authorities for the 2015 Land Rover Discovery showed AVMI Ltd as the owner of the vehicle. A change of ownership of the vehicle was declared in April 2015 in favour of Catherine O'Brien's uncle, Ned Howe.

The judgment continued: "The signature of the owner in manuscript is 'Nicola Beresford (sic) Advanced Vet Med; Kate O'Brien'. The purported signature of Nicola Beresford was not genuine."

The judgment added that Catherine O'Brien "was not entitled to sign a change of ownership form for Land Rover Discovery 151 C 267 and it was not authorised to put the signature of Nicola Beresford on that form."

Catherine O'Brien had become acquainted with the Clare farmer through a vet she had met through an online dating site. The High Court judgment by Mr Justice Owens said that the Buttevant woman had introduced the dairy farmer "to a project of opening a veterinary business and of buying property for that business."

But she has held on to the piano she played as a child in Woodhouse in Stradbally, which her father, Lord William Mostyn de la Poer Beresford, had inherited. Her father had served as aide-de-camp to the governor and commander-in-chief of Malta, and had also fought in the Second World War. He was also the son of the sixth Marquess of Waterford, Henry de la Poer Beresford.

She also has some other pieces, including a military chest "which used to be in my dad's bedroom — that will be the last piece I will ever get rid of."

The last time she met Catherine was more than five years ago, after she was interviewed by gardai about her involvement in the veterinary business which Catherine had planned to open in Buttevant.

The business, called Advanced Vetmed Ireland (AVMI) Ltd, never

What did she spend it on?

During the Garda investigation, Nicola recalls seeing her in Dungarvan on two occasions after that but they have never met since.

She describes Catherine as a charming, and says her personality is an odd mixture.

While on the one hand Nicola lost touch with Catherine, she is sorry for the fact that Nicola's life has been changed irrevocably by her dealings with Catherine.

And she has one rain of thought which keeps going through her head: "Where is the money? Where did it go? What did she spend it on?"

She is frustrated that people who had suspicions about Catherine O'Brien never tried to warn her when they knew the pair were in business together.

She says: "I wish somebody had told me. Why didn't somebody tell me? It would have been nice if someone had said not to get involved with her."

Of Catherine, she reflects: "I was like a beach overtake now, being the girls and I think that is what kills me more. Somebody I considered a friend could go that to me."

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The Bank of Ireland went to the High Court in 2009 in relation to a loan the bank had given her on security provided relating to land in North Cork.

Meanwhile, earlier this year, Catherine O'Brien was to be the chief witness in a case against two men accused of a single count of demanding money with menace from her under the Criminal Justice Public Order Act 1994.

The alleged incidents were made in the Dungarvan district, in September 2019. However, at a court sitting in April, the defence queried whether the case "will ever come to trial", as the main witness was nowhere to be found. It was also heard that she is a suspect herself in a number of active cases involving €100,000 and lesser amounts.

The progress of the trial is now dependent on the chief witness — Catherine O'Brien — turning up to give evidence.

There has been an evolution of Catherine O'Brien's life over the past decades from a young mother to an apparent businesswoman whose exploits has led to a proceeds of crime judgment.

In between, she has taken lots of different routes in different businesses — in the Buttevant area, genealogy, numerous attempts relating to floristry businesses in west Waterford, veterinary-related operations and, most recently, connections to the thoroughbred horse world. She is in essence the mistress of reinvention.

As one person put it, "she was dizzy in keeping up with herself".

But in her schemes were people like Nicola Beresford-Milnehan, whose lives were a million miles away from where Catherine led them — into debt, losing property, and having a fight for their good name.

For example, as the activities of Catherine came under the radar of gardai, the paper trail with Nicola's name led to her being interviewed by investigators. She was glad to be able to show gardai her bank account with "cash in it", to prove there was no wrongdoing on her part.

After both women were interviewed about the Buttevant business operations, Nicola says Catherine called to visit her. Nicola refused to allow her in, telling her former employer and friend that gardai and her solicitor had advised her against having anything to do with Catherine.

Nicola recalls Catherine putting her foot in the doorway to stop her closing the door but the meeting ended quickly.

She is frustrated seeing her in Dungarvan on two occasions after that but they have never met since.

She describes Catherine as a charming, and says her personality is an odd mixture.

While on the one hand Nicola lost touch with Catherine, she is sorry for the fact that Nicola's life has been changed irrevocably by her dealings with Catherine.

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Irish Examiner



Contrasting fortunes

West's rants cost \$2bn
Musk's \$44bn Twitter gamble

Forum Page 14 | News Page 10



Superstar quality

Fehdah returning to her roots

Weekend Pages 12-13



Star power

Top gongs for Byrnes and Clifford

Weekend Sport Pages 2-3

Saturday, October 29, 2022

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Board inquiry finds 'no case'

Mick Clifford

An inquiry into allegations of conflict of interest by a senior staff member at An Bord Pleanála has found the official has no case to answer.

The inquiry also found the allegation was based on "inaccurate media reports", according to a statement from the board's chairman, Dave Walsh.

As revealed by The Ditch website, the official, director of planning Rachel Kenny chaired a planning meeting and had other involvement in a planning case in which her husband was part of the applicant team.

Both were present at a meeting on October 19, 2020, to discuss an application for a housing development.

Ms Kenny's husband, Dan Egan, was representing his company, The Big Space Landscape Architects, which was part of the applicant team.

It was also reported last May that Mr Egan had involvement in two other cases in which Ms Kenny represented the board in her official capacity.

The reports resulted in the chair of An Bord Pleanála Dave Walsh commissioning the HR firm, Resolve Ireland, to investigate the matter.

The existence of this inquiry was not publicly known until it was revealed by the Irish Examiner last Tuesday.

Yesterday, Mr Walsh issued a statement saying the inquiry concluded that "the issues raised had been the subject of materially inaccurate media reports, and that there was no case to answer in respect of breaches of the board's code of conduct or conflicts of interest in decision-making."

A spokesman for The Ditch said the website stood over what was published.

"An Bord Pleanála has never responded to our requests for comment on the particular stories to which they refer, nor have they ever raised objections to the veracity of our reports," he said.

Questions were submitted by the Irish Examiner about the terms of reference of the inquiry and details of alleged inaccurate reporting but a spokesperson for An Bord Pleanála said there would be no further comment on the matter.

Separately, it has emerged that the planning board has now conceded 29 judicial review cases so far this year in relation to challenges to board decisions.

The concessions all incur legal costs for An Bord Pleanála and represent admissions, even before High Court hearings get underway, that the board's decisions were defective in some respect.

The work of the planning appeals authority has been under the spotlight throughout much of 2022, when allegations first emerged of conflicts of interest in relation to the former deputy chair of the board Paul Hyde, who has since stood down from his position.

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has instigated a criminal prosecution against Mr Hyde.

News: 8

Beat on the street



The Lamarotte Jazzband plays on the streets of Cork in preparation for performances around the city and in Kinsale this weekend during the Guinness Cork Jazz Festival.

Picture: Darragh Kane

Helmet would not have saved teen hurler

Seán McCárthaigh

Wearing a helmet would not have saved the life of a Kilkenny teenager who died after being hit by a sliotar while hurling with his classmates, an inquest has heard.

Autopsy results showed the sliotar which struck Harry Byrne, 13, caused a tear in an artery in his neck which resulted in fatal internal bleeding in the brain.

The county coroner for Kilkenny, Tim Kiely, said he did not believe that wearing a helmet could have prevented the boy's death.

The inquest heard the second-year student at St Kieran's College in Kilkenny had been hurling with friends at lunchtime on a pitch in the school's grounds on November 8 last year.

One of the students hit a sliotar towards the goal without looking and it hit Harry, who was standing about 5m away.

This was confirmed by CCTV footage that had captured the incident.

"The incident appears to be a really, really, genuinely, unfortunate accident that caused Harry's death," said the coroner.

The coroner said it was clear from comments made at the time of Harry's death that he was "a fantastic child and fantastic son" and was loved by many people, particularly those in the various clubs with which he participated.

"He was a wonderful young boy," the coroner said.

A teacher at St Kieran's College, Simon Reidy, had been supervising the students during the lunchtime break when he was alerted by one of the boys that Harry had been hit and was lying on the ground.

Mr Reidy said that he found Harry about 20 yards behind a goal, where he had been placed in the recovery position by one of the students.

News: 6

Refugees to pay for their food

Daniel McConnell and Paul Hosford
Political Staff

■ 'Accommodation only' and no second offer for those fleeing war

Refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine are to be offered "accommodation only" and will have to pay for their food and day-to-day expenses out of their welfare payments, the Government has agreed.

A plan which will see refugees made only one offer of suitable accommodation has also been agreed but is being "fleshed out" after yesterday's Cabinet meeting.

The Government wants to speed up the movement of Ukrainian refugees out of hotels and into more community-based accommodation.

However, there has been

difficulty in getting some of those who fled the Russian invasion to agree to relocate as they are reluctant to be moved out of towns and cities. The Irish Examiner understands that refugees will not be made a second offer of suitable accommodation if the first offer is declined, though the details of how this plan will work have yet to be decided.

Plans to double the payment for people hosting Ukrainian refugees from €400 to €800 have also been approved by ministers, to take effect from December 1.

It is understood a study of how EU rules governing the treatment of people fleeing Ukraine are enforced in the bloc is to be undertaken by the Department of Justice.

Ministers here believe other EU member states are giving Ukrainian refugees fewer supports in terms of accommodation and welfare benefits, or the supports are for shorter periods of time.

Justice Minister Helen McEntee's department will examine how the temporary protection directive, which governs the rights afforded to Ukrainians here, is

applied across EU countries. A Government statement following the meeting said that 56,000 men, women, and children from Ukraine have arrived in Ireland since February, with thousands of children now enrolled in schools and more than 10,000 Ukrainians working here.

The measures agreed by Cabinet to help with accommodation efforts include:

- Doubling of the recognition payment to €800;
- A €50m community fund to "recognise local efforts";
- Expansion of the rapid-build and accommodation refurbishment programme;
- Maximising the number of places available by allowing for the use of dormitory-style accommodation to avoid any

person being turned away; ■ A new State-led vacant homes call.

Sources said yesterday's moves recognised that the war could last well into 2023. A Government statement noted that Cabinet had agreed that a "move from an emergency response to a more mainstreamed approach is appropriate in light of the high numbers of people seeking asylum, the need to maximise all existing capacity, to bring greater consistency, and to ensure equity for all those who rely on State supports".

The Government also considered an assessment of future housing needs arising from the population changes prompted by the Ukraine crisis.

Meanwhile, Larysa Gerasko, the Ukrainian ambassador to Ireland, told her compatriots in a message on Telegram that Ireland "does not guarantee to provide accommodation for refugees".

Sinn Féin housing spokesman Eoin Ó Broin said Ireland has the capacity to meet the needs of those arriving quickly, and to ensure equity for all those who rely on State supports".

The Government also considered an assessment of future housing needs arising from the population changes prompted by the Ukraine crisis.

News: 4

Fraudster O'Brien wrote to Polish horse buyers to say animal was stolen

Ann Murphy

The Polish owners of a horse purchased in Ireland a year ago have received correspondence from wanted woman Catherine O'Brien alleging that the animal was stolen.

The stallion was one of a number of horses linked to a horse investment scheme which is currently being investigated by gardai as part of a live probe into the activities of Ms O'Brien.

Sources in the horse racing industry in Ireland and Poland say, however, that the sale of the horse last year was legitimate.

A spokesperson for the new owners said: "We have carried out all our activities in accordance with the law." She added that correspondence had been received from Ms O'Brien almost six months ago in relation to the horse.

"We have nothing to hide,



Catherine O'Brien is wanted for questioning by gardai.

but it's been a year since we bought the horse."

Today, the Irish Examiner continues its investigation into Ms O'Brien, who has issued judicial review proceedings against the Director of Public Prosecutions following her conviction, in her absence in June 2021 on 34 counts of animal welfare legislation breaches relating

to horses seized in Co Wexford. A bench warrant was issued for her arrest. The judicial review case was up for mention at the High Court last Tuesday and was adjourned. It will be up for mention again on November 29.

Ms O'Brien, who has an address in Dungarvan, Co Waterford, is wanted for questioning by gardai investigating allegations of fraud in the sale of horses.

She has not lived at her Dungarvan address for several months.

The complaints under investigation relate to horse investment schemes through a website set up to target people interested in thoroughbred horses. Another relates to a scheme involving investment related to a property which was for sale in France, also related to horses.

The website, which no longer exists, carried a list

of services including race-horse purchase and management, and investment opportunities.

The blurb regarding investment opportunities read that private clients were being provided with "the opportunity to acquire permanent residency in Ireland through the Government-backed 'Immigrant Investor Programme'".

It added: "We currently have a small number of opportunities for our clients to invest in Ireland, gaining residency in return."

The website also offered select "equine consignment for private clients to ensure that each horse will be well presented at sales".

The website gave an address in Merrion Square as the "global offices". A phone number on the website no longer belongs to Ms O'Brien, but is one she was known to use in the past.

The Big Read: 13-15

CervicalCheck campaigner dies, age 34

Denise O'Donoghue

Vicky Phelan paid tribute to her fellow CervicalCheck campaigner Lynsey Bennett, who has died aged 34.

Ms Bennett, a mother of

two from Longford, was diagnosed with an invasive form of cervical cancer in 2017. She settled her High Court action over the alleged misinterpretation of her cervical smear slides in 2021.

At the time, she said: "To my daughters Zoe and Hailie, I hope I have done enough to secure you both a future free of financial worries and that even with me not here to guide you, you can pursue your dreams."

Campaigner Stephen Teap, whose wife Irene died from cervical cancer described her as a "beautiful person and mother".

News: 7



Lynsey Bennett died yesterday from invasive cervical cancer.


Jerry Lee Lewis dies at age of 87

Rock 'n' roll pioneer Jerry Lee Lewis has died at 87.

The American musician, whose hits included 'Great Balls of Fire', was one of the last survivors of rock 'n' roll's golden age, which included Elvis Presley and Little Richard.

Lee Lewis was as known for his controversial private life as his music.

World: 12



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RALPH MCTELL'S famous ballad, 'It's a Long Way from Clare to Here', tells of life as an Irish emigrant in London.

The ballad's chorus could just as easily have been written about Catherine O'Brien, for whom Clare became a playground for several years, even though she lived almost 200km away in Dungarvan.

A romantic online connection with a Clare vet, Sean (the name has been changed to protect his identity), led to her spending weekends regularly in west Clare, with her social life revolving around the new friends she was making there.

And when she advertised positions in a pub which she said she had bought, those friends eagerly looked forward to fun nights in a premises owned by one of their own.

But looking through the judgement made in favour of the Criminal Assets Bureau against O'Brien earlier this year, it is clear the connections she made in Clare were treated not as friends but as acquaintances useful to her business plans.

To those acquaintances, including the vet, O'Brien was a solicitor — or at the very least, worked in legal circles and was an expert in any crisis requiring legal assistance.

The reality that she was a florist in Dungarvan was a secret she hid well. One acquaintance, businessman Paddy O'Donoghue, recalls: "I would have met her half a dozen times. You would swear butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

Even now, he has to ask himself if O'Brien was ever a solicitor: "She has an uncanny way of sucking you in. She said she was doing law and she would never answer a question only with a question. She would get around you very quickly."

He came to know her through Sean, with whom O'Brien appeared to be in a relationship.

Mr O'Donoghue, who runs a veterinary supplies business and supplied Sean, also subsequently supplied O'Brien when she set up her own veterinary business.

He says: "I used to meet her and she used to talk a big game about what she was doing. She was very persuasive, very charming."

Sean, was hoping for a happy-ever-after when he turned to online dating to meet someone. Living and working in west Clare, he loved country life and socialising, but wanted someone to share it with.

He had hoped for a life-changing meeting through the site but he hadn't expected the changes to be quite so dramatic and impactful, not just on himself but also on family and acquaintances.

Before they met in person, the two had chatted online before swapping phone numbers and finally meeting up about a month after the first connection was made.

Sean describes himself as a "devil may care" sort of person, who takes someone at their word, even now.

He reflects: "We talked on the phone a bit and the very first time I rang her, I noticed she was very cagey and I asked was she a solicitor. She said she was. So I thought, 'she is a solicitor. I met her in July 2011. She came up to my house. I would be kind of easy going and devil may care. She came to my house and we went to Doolin for something to eat, came home to my place."

The two got on well and O'Brien stayed in Sean's house that night. The following day, the two of them — a couple went on an excursion to the Aran Islands. So far, so very normal.

However, Sean says, "now, I just didn't fancy her", but felt trapped. Having thought that O'Brien was a solicitor, he told her about speeding fines he had racked up. She had agreed to get them "sorted" and he believed she had the contacts to do so.

He admits: "She kept coming back to me and I had the speeding tickets so I felt if I did not keep in touch, she would not sort them."

And as time went on, O'Brien became a central part of his life, even though he is, even now, reluctant to admit they became a couple of sorts.

Yet O'Brien was a regular visitor to his home in Clare, even buying some items for the house.

Looking back, Sean recalls that he never travelled to O'Brien's adopted hometown of Dungarvan. There were arrangements made for such a visit but they never happened. Something always "came up".

He has kept emails and receipts and invoices from their time together — both personally and in business — and they showed that their connection was not all plain sailing.

For him, it was not a "nappy ever after" relationship but he says he does not feel they were a couple, they went on holidays to France, Spain, and Italy over a year after meeting, in July 2012.

Despite their continued relationship, he still did not know a lot about O'Brien. He says now: "She was always saying she had so much money in the bank and she was going retiring. She told me she had two offices in Dungarvan, one in Fermoy. I am a very trusting person. I don't question. I take people at face value. I would be a person to check someone out to the nth degree."

As a result, when he encountered difficulties in his business life in late 2012, Sean once again looked to O'Brien, as he had when she had promised to sort his speeding tickets.

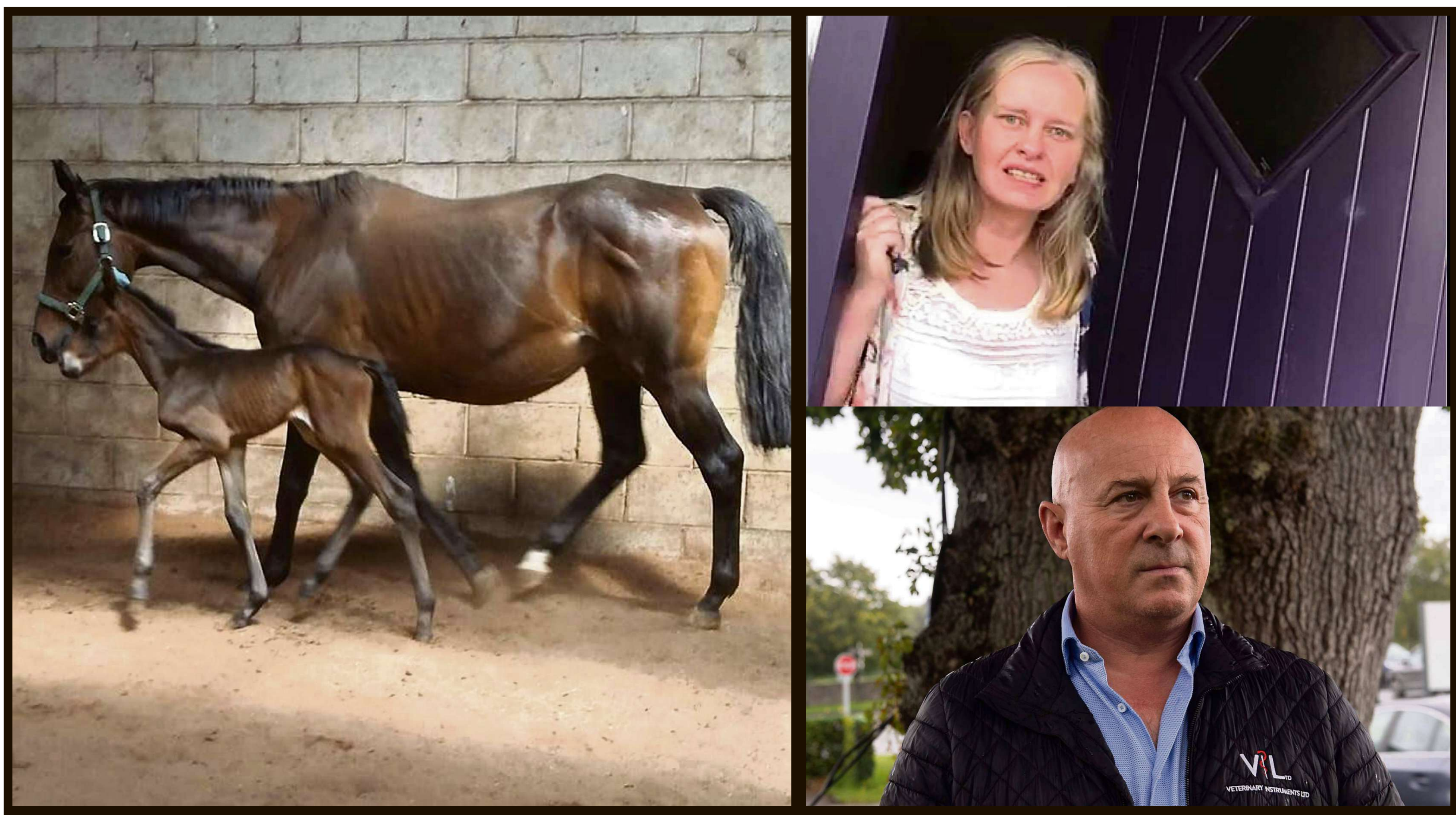
He explains: "I rang her because she sorted everything — whatever you wanted, she would do it."

In the meantime, the two began to look at going into business. Sean was an Ailsop auctioneer leading to the acquisition of a premises in Buttevant for a veterinary-related business.

He recalls her enthusiasm at the time: "She said she had loads of money and we could set up two premises around here, one in Dungarvan and one in Buttevant."

He now reflects that his move was a mad one, having been told that he had been impossible. "How were we going to manage — it is impossible to get vets so how would I have been able to manage it from here, an hour and a half away. It was madness."

He also got involved in business with her in her own backyard — Dungarvan. He became involved in her plans to set up two veterinary-related businesses, Abbeyside Veterinary and the Animal Emporium.



Main: Emaciated horses in Wexford. Staff and volunteers at the Wicklow-based Irish Horse Welfare Trust are caring for 25 horses which were seized in Ballygarrett in June 2019. Picture: Mail on Sunday

Top: Catherine O'Brien: A bench warrant remains live following her conviction in her absence last year for 34 counts of animal welfare legislation breaches relating to the horses. Picture: Mail on Sunday

Above: Paddy O'Donoghue: 'I would have met her half a dozen times. You would swear butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.' Picture: Don MacMonagle

Top right: Buttevant, Co Cork, where O'Brien and Sean acquired a premises for a veterinary-related business in December 2012.

Fraudster a long, long way from Clare

According to the CAB judgement, she would later deny to gardai that she owned the business in Dungarvan, saying that she was operating it on behalf of the Clare-based vet.

Anonymous letter

In March 2013, an anonymous letter arrived in the post to Sean, containing an article which had been printed in a newspaper some years previously, focusing on serial debts she had run up with financial institutions.

He confronted her on the phone about the letter and she managed to persuade him not to worry about it. However, his relatives were not convinced and tried to convince him to cut his ties with her.

In an email to him in April 2013, she talked about her confusion about the status of their personal relationship, and refuted what she saw as an implication by him that she "took money for myself out of the account" of the business in Dungarvan.

She also wrote: "Do I need to list able to make it from here in Clare and put a value on it, do I need to get back everything I put into your house? Are we going down the road where you want to give me back every memory of me from your life? You say you want us back together but you are doing everything to make sure it



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won't happen."

However, by then, he says they were involved "fairly big" in business dealings: "I had to be careful. I'll broke ties with her straightaway, I could have been caught for a lot of money."

The company was shortlived, lasting just nine months, having been registered on June 21, 2012. The business was located at Boithrin na Mhuilleann, in Dungarvan's Abbey-side, with Sean as the registered owner. There were no references to O'Brien on any of the documents relating to the company.

Aside from their business dealings, the personal side of their connection could be described as toxic at times, with one episode leading to an as-

sault charge being brought against Sean, which was later dropped.

On another occasion, Sean confronted her when a large sum of money disappeared from his house, believing she may have taken it.

However, she refuted the allegation and told him in an email: "It is my intention to report to the gardai the theft of the money from your house and that you accused me of taking it."

In May 2013, O'Brien's legal expert persona was deployed when she drafted a contract for members of Sean's family to sign, in which she called herself, Kate O'Brien, and requested that Sean's parents and brother "shall not under any circumstances in any way interfere with"

herself, or "conduct any drive bys" of Sean's house while she was there.

It also requested that the three should not "come within 50m" of O'Brien, or "use any upset whatsoever" to her.

And it further asked that Sean's parents and brother "will refrain from interfering in any way with any dealings" between her and Sean.

The contract was to be effective immediately, for a period of 14 months. Despite the heavy-handed approach O'Brien took with the contract (which his relatives refused to sign), Sean remained involved with her, even travelling with her to Dublin to an All Ireland final and subsequent return.

Several months later, towards the end of 2013, Sean decided to pull the plug on their business connection.

By then, he had decided that "it is only money" and has moved on with his life.

Though he remains out of pocket to this day, he reflects that "it is only money" and has moved on with his life.

Looking back, he feels he was governed by fear of what O'Brien had over him in relation to difficulties in his business and believes he would otherwise have cut ties with her far sooner.

He says: "I was afraid of her because she had too much information. If you stop [the relationship], she

the Companies Registration Office in July this year, by the dairy farmer and another farmer from Limerick. Both were directors.

Earlier this year, the High Court ruled that a 151-registered Land Rover Discovery could be seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau after it alleged O'Brien had bought it through the proceeds of criminal frauds. CAB's case was that she had altered and misused the vehicle from the farmer for the AVMI Ltd.

The judgment stated: "There is no evidence that AVMI Ltd traded in veterinary products. Catherine O'Brien was not a director of that company or a signatory to the company bank account which was opened in December 2014. She was not entitled to buy or sell motor vehicles on behalf of that company or to hold herself out as having authority to engage in these transactions."

In a statement of complaint made by the farmer to gardai, he said that a series of frauds had been perpetrated on him by O'Brien.

For example, the judgment said, "He gave an account of giving her money to buy pipes which were never delivered."

It added that the farmer claimed "that he paid what O'Brien had with money for horses which disappeared."

In the judgment against her, Mr Justice Alexander Owens also made reference to her claims to have bought a pig in Clare.

The judgment continued: "The investment in the public house was to be used in some way to balance up the money which he [the dairy farmer] had put into AVMI Ltd (the company he was involved in with O'Brien a number of years ago, it remains the only number some people have for contacting either her or a woman they knew as Amy Power.

He adds: "She was a very strange individual. It is very hard to put a finger on what was her motive — a very strange person. It was my own fault — I could have called stop at any time but I was afraid."

He has not met her for many years and she is now no more than a memory that crops up from time to time but is best left in his past.

Numbers don't add up

Further up the west coast, in Galway, lives a teenage boy who got a new phone last year. One day in recent months, he was a little perturbed to receive a call from this reporter asking if he knew a woman named Catherine O'Brien.

It was clear he had never heard of her, nor of Amy Power, a pseudonym believed to have been used on occasions by the elusive Corkwoman.

The phone number had been linked to both names in the past. The boy was so taken aback that he mentioned the call to his parents that night. They decided to check why someone was so adamant that the phone number of their son belonged to someone else.

The number has been in use by the boy for the past year or so, his mum told the *Irish Examiner*.

The family were unaware that the number previously belonged to O'Brien a number of years ago, it remains the only number some people have for contacting either her or a woman they knew as Amy Power.

The number has now been re-allocated because O'Brien changed it some years ago and abandoned its replacement in favour of a series of other phone numbers.

The most recently known number she was believed to have had no longer rings out, much to the frustration of many people desperate to get in touch with her — including the *Irish Examiner*.

Calls to people thought to be close to her are unanswered, while text messages and emails are also unreturned.

Some people know her as Catherine O'Brien, while others know her only as Kate or Katie. Others

knew her by different names completely, including the above-mentioned Amy Power.

Her home address at Ballinroad, in Dungarvan, remains unvisited, while another address in Cork she has given as her home has no link to her whatsoever.

Although that address is in the Buttevant area, no relative of hers

lives there. The occupants do not know Catherine O'Brien and a number of people who called to the house looking for her reached a dead end in their hunt.

In one case, one man who travelled from Leinster to the address never realised until afterwards that she had not lived in Buttevant for many years, and that she had a home in Dungarvan.

Although she is lying low, gardai believe some people close to her are still in touch with her.

At her abandoned home in Dungarvan, mail which had been stuck in the mailboxes in recent weeks was no longer there on a subsequent visit to the property by the *Irish Examiner*.

The Scarlet Pimpernel-type figure she has become — evading both the law and people who claimed to have lost hundreds of thousands of euro to her business schemes — has left a trail of destruction in her wake, from the west coast, across the midlands and south, to the east coast.

Among those whose paths crossed with hers are a small number who are either terminally ill or have died since losing money to her. In these cases, their families are still trying to comprehend the trail of destruction left by involvement with the infamous Catherine O'Brien. Friends have also broken down in cases where people blame each other for introducing her to them, while marital relationships have been put under pressure because of her.

And while there are currently six live fraud cases being investigated by gardai on foot of complaints made about O'Brien, the full extent of the losses that people have suffered — including the amount of money and the number of people affected — is still unknown.

The complaints under investigation relate to horse investment schemes through a website set up to target people interested in thoroughbred horses. Another relates to a scheme involving investment related to a property which was for sale in France, also related to horses.

The website, which no longer exists, carried a list of services including racehorse purchase and management, and investment opportunities. The blurb regarding investment opportunities read that private clients were being provided with "the opportunity to acquire permanent residency in Ireland through the Government-backed Immigrant Investor Programme."

The blurb added: "We currently have a number of opportunities for our clients to invest in Ireland, gaining residency in return."

The trust also offered select "equine consignment for private clients, where each horse will be well presented at sales, looking and feeling its best."

The website gave an address in Merrion Square as the "global offices" of the company. A phone number on the website no longer belongs to O'Brien, but is one of the numbers she is known to have used in the past.

Ms Power believes there is a weakness in animal welfare legislation in cases such as this, as there is no provision for individual cases which are not concluded in the courts.

"The horses cannot be put up for adoption until the case has concluded. She explains: "It is very difficult to keep looking after these horses at the moment with no sight of the end."

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“She was quite intimidating if you took her on in any way, shape, or form, that you may have doubted her or questioned her. She was well able to back herself up and she was not afraid to stand up. She was confident. She was never rude or threatening or abusive or anything like that, but she was so confident, she could hoodwink you very quickly



there are penalties of up to €250,000 and/or imprisonment of up to five years.

Also under the legislation, a convicted person can be the subject of an order from the judge disqualifying them from "owning, having any interest in, keeping, dealing in or having charge or control, directly or indirectly, of an animal."

It is not only the gardai waiting for closure in the horse welfare case. So are the staff at the Irish Horse Welfare Trust.

"It is an awful strain on a relatively small charity," says Ms Power, explaining the caring for 25 thoroughbred horses is much more expensive than caring for other horses.

She explains: "They are a high maintenance horse. We can't do anything with them until the resolution of the court case. To date, they have cost us about a quarter of a million euro to look after since 2019."

While the trust gets some State grant aid, the organisation also relies on donations and fundraising, which she said was non-existent during Covid-19.

Ms Power continues: "It also means that because of having horses we can't rehome yet, it limits our numbers that we can take in. We are still doing our best not to turn away rescue cases and deal with them, but it does mean that there is limited capacity for what we can actually house this year."

Typically, the trust cares for between 60 and 70 horses during the winter months and Ms Power explains the current situation means a third of their capacity is filled by the horses relating to the animal cruelty cases involving investment related to a property which was for sale in France, also related to horses.

Ms Power continues: "It also means that because of having horses we can't rehome yet, it limits our numbers that we can take in. We are still doing our best not to turn away rescue cases and deal with them, but it does mean that there is limited capacity for what we can actually house this year."

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One was very elderly while others were old and had severe health issues, including hoof problems.

Ms Power says that the fact that the horses are all thoroughbreds will also make it difficult to find homes for them because they are not typically used as riding horses.

But she adds: "We have not been even able to try [to find them homes] and I am sure there were homes lost there over the last three years for some of them but we couldn't put the horses forward for those homes."

In response to a query from the *Irish Examiner*, a statement from the Department of Agriculture said: "The department understands that the case in question was taken by An Garda Síochána and that the subsequent issues in terms of rehoming the animal are based on a ruling of the district court."

"Under section 38 of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, costs may not be recovered from the owner of an animal should the judiciary decide."

The statement added that the department constantly keeps legislation under review, including the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

A 'Problematic genius'

Back in her native Buttevant, a man who remembers O'Brien from her days growing up there says it has been a long time since he last saw her but he does recall her being "problematic".

Of the last time he saw her, he recalls thinking that she she appeared to be doing well for herself: "The last time I saw her was on the road from town, driving a new top of the range Range Rover at the time."

He does not want to be identified, out of respect for her family.

A man who encountered the woman he knew as Kate O'Brien up to a dozen times describes her as appearing to be one of the most intelligent people he ever met.

He described her as "being very good at what she does", adding: "She comes across as self-deprecating and kind of insecure."

But he says that underneath this persona was a very different person, who has managed to mostly keep off social media platforms, making her more difficult to trace.

He adds: "I have never come across anyone remotely like her. She is a bit of a genius."

Back in Clare, Paddy O'Donoghue remembers O'Brien as charming and assertive, well able to persuade people to become involved in business opportunities she presented.

He says: "She was charming, seemed very smart and very able-minded. Nothing would be a problem."

He says she was well able to speak leviathan, persuading people that she was working in law.

He recalls: "She was assertive, she knew what she wanted, and to me, it seemed a perfect opportunity to do business with her and I did."

He felt that supplying her for her veterinary business planned for Dungarvan would be a good opportunity for him to expand his business into Waterford but he ended up not being paid for the products he supplied to her.

He says: "These type of people are very very well able to influence you and well able to hoodwink you."

He adds: "She was quite intimidating if you took her on in any way, shape, or form, that you may have doubted her or questioned her. She was well able to back herself up and she was not afraid to stand up. She was confident."

"She was never rude or threatening or abusive or anything like that, but she was so confident, she could hoodwink you very quickly."

He believes she knew exactly what she was doing, elaborating: "She knew she was able to get stuff and she was able to use the people around her and use the contacts that other people had in each other to benefit her."

Attempts have been made to contact Catherine O'Brien by phone, email, at her home, and through a number of solicitors who have acted on her behalf over the past 20 years. All attempts were unsuccessful.

thing awful happens that they have to be put down.

Indeed, eight of the horses which were seized initially had to be put down because of health issues.

One was very elderly while others were old and had severe health issues, including hoof problems.

Ms Power says that the fact that the horses are all thoroughbreds will also make it difficult to find homes for them because they are not typically used as riding horses.

But she adds: "We have not been even able to try [to find them homes] and I am sure there were homes lost there over the last three years for some of them but we couldn't put the horses forward for those homes."

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"Under section 3

Over 75 weeks for Cork City to re-let vacant council houses

Paul Hosford
Political Correspondent

Over 3% of council houses lie vacant at any one time as the turnaround for some councils to find new tenants has risen to over a year. In Cork City, it is taking the council 75 weeks and costs an average of €26,321.09 to re-tenant properties, the

annual report by the National Oversight and Audit Commission found. In Galway county, that figure is 65 weeks; in Limerick City and county, it is 56 weeks, and in Cavan, it is 55 weeks. The national average re-letting time, from the date the tenant vacated the dwelling to the date of the first rent debit in 2021, was 34.44

weeks, which is higher than 2020 when it stood at 32.69 weeks. The average letting cost was €19,653.39, compared to €19,065.30 in 2020, an increase of €588.09. Comparing the six main urban authorities of Cork, Dublin, and Galway cities and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, and South

Dublin county councils shows that the longest average reletting time across these six authorities was recorded by Cork City at 75.72 weeks, and the shortest at 18.44 weeks by Dublin City. Cork City also had the highest cost per unit, compared to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown's €15,897.41. Housing industry sources

say that the turnaround times are "frustrating" as it can lead to at least hundreds of homes not being in use in the midst of the housing crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crises. Sinn Féin housing spokesman Eoin Ó Broin said that the overall number of vacant homes can come down to movement in the market and

was not concerning in and of itself. "What is concerning is the time it's taking local authorities to refurbish casual vacancies," said Mr Ó Broin. "There are two reasons for this. Local authorities are not restocking maintenance crews, which leads to tendering out of work. This then leads to overly bureaucratic

processes in procurement, which slows things down. "The department has to step in and say that the turnaround time target is 10 weeks. "In South Dublin County Council, it's gone from 10 weeks to 22 weeks." A spokesperson for the Department of Housing said that local authorities will

always have a level of vacancy in their housing stock which "will fluctuate over time as tenancy surrender and re-letting of stock is an ongoing process". They added that through the voids system, 6,032 vacant social homes were brought back into use in 2020 and 2021. A further 2,450 are targeted for this year.

No ordinary men



Don O'Leary of Cork Life Centre with Christy Moore at the singer's concert in Cork Opera House last night, in tribute to Mr O'Leary and in support of the centre. Picture: Eddie O'Hare

French stud inquiry fears forged covering cert

Ann Murphy

French stud authorities contacted Irish authorities to establish if a horse being sold in France was the subject of a forged covering certificate.

The investigation by the French authorities included reference to Catherine O'Brien from Dungarvan, Co Waterford, the Cork-born woman wanted for questioning by gardai investigating allegations of fraud in the sale of horses in the past three to four years.

Irish authorities were contacted in 2018 about a colt that, it was claimed, was born in Ireland. However, there was no record of the animal originating in Ireland, said industry sources.

Ms O'Brien is currently the subject of an arrest warrant after she was convicted in her absence of breaches of animal welfare legislation. She is seeking a judicial review of the decision and the case is up for mention in the High Court on November 29.

Her whereabouts are unknown and she has not been seen at her home in Ballinroad, Dungarvan, for several months.

The complaints under investigation by gardai relate to horse investment schemes via a website set up to target people interested in thoroughbred horses. Another relates to a scheme involving investment related to a property which was for sale close to La Rochelle in France, also related to



The whereabouts of Catherine O'Brien are currently unknown.

horses. The website, which no longer exists, carried a list of services including race-horse purchase and manage-

ment, and investment opportunities. The blurb regarding investment opportunities read that private clients were being provided with "the opportunity to acquire permanent residency in Ireland through the Government-backed Immigrant Investor Programme".

The blurb added: "We currently have a small number of opportunities for our clients to invest in Ireland, gaining residency in return."

The website also offered select "equine consignment for private clients to ensure that each horse will be well presented at sales, looking and feeling its best".

The website gave an address in Merrion Square as the "global office" of the

company. A phone number on the website no longer belongs to Ms O'Brien, but is one of the numbers she was known to use in the past.

In February, the High Court ruled that a 151-registered Land Rover Discovery could be seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau after bureau officers alleged that Catherine O'Brien had bought it through the proceeds of criminal frauds.

She appealed the decision by Mr Justice Alexander Owens and it was listed for directions in the Court of Appeal in Dublin on June 24. However, a spokesman for the Courts Service said the appeal never went in for hearing. Instead, it was struck out, subject to an 'unless order', on July 15.

Parents fear for life of son with rare disorder

Ann Murphy

The parents of a Tipperary boy with autism and a rare eating disorder are fearful for his life because he cannot access the services he needs.

Riain Pliszka, 11, from Cashel, was diagnosed with autism in 2013, at the age of two, and also has anxiety.

His mum Caitriona says that her son ate well until he was about 18 months old. However, he then developed the first signs of food restriction and sensory aversions which over the years finally gave way to the diagnosis of avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (Arfid).

"He loved his food, especially sausages, which were his favourite, and he had loads of words but over the next few months everything happened quite rapidly," said Caitriona.

She says Riain became non-communicative but is now speaking again, through the use of Lámh and visuals both at home and in school.

However, he started to refuse food from about the age of three.

"He became a very ill, malnourished little boy and ended up in South Tipperary general hospital where his weight was off the centile chart and he ended up with a drip and the first insertion of a nasogastric [NG] tube."

By the age of six, Riain was in an ASD unit in a mainstream school and had to go to school using an NG tube. "We tried food after food after food of different types, textures, colours, but we also had to watch, and still do, the packaging must also not change. Play therapy, physiology through sessions with parents, and various other plans were tried but none have worked."

Caitriona said he is not a stable weight, adding: "Without the protein drinks it would be drastically low with major implications. He is always on the lower level of the centile chart and has

often fallen off the chart on weight measurements."

Arfid is a condition characterised by the person avoiding certain foods or types of food, or restricted intake in terms of overall amount eaten, or both.

However, Riain has not been able to access a service which will take a holistic approach to his autism, anxiety, and Arfid diagnoses.

Caitriona says his NG tube "has been a lifesaver for us as parents but is hard work and time-consuming, and extra care and attention is required".

He has been admitted on several occasions to paediatric wards.

"He'd often get so weak from not eating we'd have to carry him to bed or to the toilet and his energy levels were low and still low to this day. If he had something on, he will spare his energy for that and then in the evening he's literally thrown on the sofa and we cry."

She says that, almost a year ago, Riain's weight plummeted and a decision was made by his medical team that the NG tube had to stay in permanently, with tube changes when required.

"We aren't in anyone's catchment area, it looks like from our side."

His family feels they are

being thrown from "pillar to post" because they cannot find out if Riain can access services through Camhs or the Children's Disability Network Team.

In recent weeks, the family has been informed that Riain is on a waiting list for Camhs but Caitriona fears that each passing day is one that is being lost for Riain's health.

Riain's case was recently raised in the Dáil by Sinn Féin TD Martin Browne.

A spokeswoman for the HSE said a service for children with Arfid is provided from Tallaght Hospital, Dublin. It is delivered as part of the sequential oral sensory programme, which is an evidence-based programme for children with the disorder.

"Management of children with Arfid requires a collaborative working between a number of professionals and, depending on a person's needs and level of complexity, may involve joint working between the acute hospital sector and HSE community healthcare divisions such as primary care, disability, and mental health," said the spokeswoman.

According to Bodywhys, the eating disorders association of Ireland, 5% of contacts in 2021 related to Arfid, an increase on previous years.



Caitriona and Rafal Pliszka, showing what their son Riain eats on a daily basis. Picture: Brendan Gleeson

New report highlights 'precarious' position of renters on Cork islands

Noel Baker

Social Affairs Correspondent

Islanders in West Cork love where they live but increasingly there are worries over housing, particularly among renters, with issues ranging from rot and damp to lack of availability and some feeling threatened by the prospect of homelessness.

A new report to be launched later this week takes an in-depth look at housing issues on the seven inhabited West Cork islands — Bere, Dursley, Heir, Long, Oileán Chléire, Sherkin, and Whiddy — and finds that a string of issues is holding back population growth, or putting the islands at risk of greater depopulation.

The report was written by Dr Siobhan O'Sullivan and Dr Elaine Desmond of University College Cork and takes in the views of 236 people, totalling almost half of permanent residents aged 18 and over.

Most owned their property, more than half were married, and the highest proportion of respondents had been living on the islands for between five and 14 years. Some worked remotely but 60% had work on the island where they lived.

Just 5% rated their island as a poor place to live and many highlighted the sense of community on the islands, including the close connection of second-home owners to the islands, with one stating: "The community is as much those who spend part of their lives here as those who are full-time." Similarly, few if any respondents felt cut off;



Lack of rental security was a concern for 58% of respondents renting their homes on West Cork islands, according to a new report written by Dr Siobhan O'Sullivan and Dr Elaine Desmond of UCC.

according to one resident: "It's remoteness, but not isolation."

Yet the housing crisis is not unique to the mainland. More than half of respondents lived in properties that had been built almost 80 years ago and while most respondents were very satisfied (39%) or satisfied (41%) with their living arrangements, those who rented their homes on the islands expressed more dissatisfaction.

Among renters, 31% did not consider their home to be worth the rent paid and 46% were experiencing difficulty in meeting monthly rental costs, with a third expressing concern over accessing rental supports.

"The lack of rental security was a concern for 58% of respondents renting their home, with 46% stating that they had no formal written lease/tenancy agreement," it said. "These findings highlight the particular precarity of renters on the West Cork islands."

A quarter of respondents expressed concerns about moving to the island in relation to the quality of broadband and access to services, in particular healthcare, as they age, and there were further concerns. More than a third expressed some dissatisfaction with the standard/condition of their homes, rising to 42% of renters. "The top problems were

difficulties with carrying out maintenance/upkeep themselves [a total of 68% of respondents stated this was a problem] and difficulties keeping the house warm [65%]. More than half of respondents [52%] stated that difficulties with the cost of upkeep were a problem, while almost half of all participants highlighted problems with damp in their homes [44%]," the report states.

Significant proportions of respondents highlighted problems with keeping their homes warm, as well as a shortage of space, and in some cases rot in windows, doors, and floors. "When renters were asked specifically about the factors

that concern or impact them regarding renting on the islands, 69% said that the condition of rental properties was a concern," it says. In addition, 82% of respondents identified challenges with finding people to undertake home maintenance. One participant said: "It's almost impossible now to get tradesmen, it's impossible to get a gardener, and it's impossible to get people who could support older people living on the island."

Other major problems were the lack of availability of houses for sale (86% of respondents), too many derelict houses (84%), and a lack of availability of houses for year-round rental (81%).

Large numbers of respondents were concerned about challenges with obtaining planning permission (77%) and limited availability of land for building new houses (71%). "Large numbers also stated that there were problems with too many second homes (71%) and too many empty habitable homes (69%), while council-owned land left undeveloped was highlighted as a problem by 43%," it states.

"Of the questions directed at renters only, 86% of renters said they were impacted by the lack of suitable housing for long-term rent [86%] and the length of time on the council housing waiting list [67%]. Several renters in the survey wrote about the precarity they are experiencing in relation to renting on the islands, with some having to leave the islands or facing the prospect of homelessness." The report will be launched later this week.

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GAA MUSEUM CROKE PARK

Irish Examiner



Prying eyes
Are you e-stalking your ex-partner?

LifeStyle Page 10

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Teen idol
Garnacho fires United to victory

Monday Sport Pages 2-3



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Locals Declan Crowe, Joe Sheehy, Roisin O'Shea, and Paul Brennan take to the water in Fenit, Co Kerry, for a winter Sunday morning swim. The friends take to the water almost every day of the year, and yesterday the water temperature was 12.7c, with the air temperature 14c. Picture: Domnick Walsh

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Consumers in Ireland have very low levels of trust that sale prices displayed by retailers are accurate, a new survey has found. **Page 15**

Up to €50k grant for vacant properties

Elaine Loughlin
Deputy Political Editor

Grants of up to €50,000 are to be extended to all vacant properties across the country in a bid to bring as many unoccupied buildings back into use as family homes.

Scheme to create more family homes expands across country

Dublin, Galway, and Limerick as well as one-off farmhouses in rural locations into the scheme. Around 365 applications have been made to the scheme since it opened in July. It is now expected that this number will increase significantly after it is opened up to all vacant and derelict properties nationwide. It means that the 700 derelict properties which campaigners have identified within a 2km radius of Cork city centre will now be eligible to receive funding.

Frank O'Connor and Jude Sherry, who have tracked unused properties in Cork, have been calling for measures to tackle the scourge of dereliction blighting towns and cities across Ireland. While the qualifying criteria for Croi Conaithe funding is to be broadened out, it is understood that there are currently no plans to increase the €50m which had been originally allocated for the scheme. However, this could be reviewed if the scheme is oversubscribed.

Under the scheme, a grant of up to €30,000 is available for the refurbishment of vacant properties for occupation as a principal private residence, including the conversion of a property which has not been used as residential heretofore. However, people can apply for a top-up grant of up to €20,000 where the property is derelict and structurally unsound. The grants, which are primarily aimed at helping first-time buyers to bridge the cost of refurbishing older and unused homes can also be combined with the SEAI Better Energy Home Scheme supports. Properties must be vacant for two years or more and

built before 1993 to qualify. Fine Gael senator John Cummins, who had called for an expansion of eligibility for Croi Conaithe, said the target to bring 2,000 derelict or vacant homes back into use by 2025 under the scheme simply is not ambitious enough and it should be aiming to bring in a multiple of that. The 2020 Census recorded more than 166,000 dwellings as vacant in the State. While some of these may have been unoccupied on a temporary basis, more than 30% (48,387) of the dwellings vacant in 2022 were also out of use when the previous census was carried out in 2016. Mr Cummins said: "We

need to ditch the red tape and simply open it up to any vacant or derelict property, no matter where it exists. He added: "The public have seen what is possible from TV programmes such as *Cheap Irish Homes*, *Room to Improve*, and *The Great House Revival* and the appetite is there to see such properties being restored to their former glory for future generations." Meanwhile, Mr O'Brien is expected to bring measures that could have a major impact on people's ability to challenge planning decisions to Cabinet in the coming weeks. It is understood that Attor-

ney General Paul Gallagher is currently studying proposals in relation to the Consolidated Planning Bill and the minister hopes to have it ready for Government approval before the end of this month. Delays in the planning process have constrained the delivery of infrastructure including renewable energy and housing projects, sparking calls for a swifter system. The new consolidated planning laws would reduce the legal risk of judicial reviews and give the power of planning decisions back to local authorities, rather than the courts. **Analysis: 9**

Alleged fraudster cannot race horses under her name

Ann Murphy

The woman wanted for questioning about allegations of fraud in the horse racing industry is disqualified from racing horses in her name by Horse Racing Ireland (HRI). Catherine O'Brien, originally from Buttevant but with an address in Dunganvan, Co Waterford, was convicted in her absence in June 2021 for breaches of animal welfare legislation and a bench warrant was issued for her arrest. The conviction arose from the seizure of more than 30 horses at an address in Ballygarrett, Co Wexford, the previous year. She is also sought for questioning by gardai investigating complaints from people alleging fraudulent activity by her. As part of its investigation into the activities of Ms O'Brien, the *Irish Examiner* has discovered that she is included in the most recent publication of the HRI's forfeit list and has been on it since November 2016. It relates to arrears of €586.71, which she has failed to pay. A source said Ms O'Brien had been a registered owner with HRI. However, because she has been on the forfeit list, she has been a "disqualified person as far as HRI and IHRB are concerned and means her HRI owner-



Catherine O'Brien's Horse Racing Ireland ownership was voided for racing purposes.

ship was voided in 2016 for racing purposes". As a result, horses cannot race under her name. A spokeswoman for the HRI said: "Individuals are only placed on the forfeit list after receiving three letters from Horse Racing Ireland over a three-month period including numerous follow-up phonecalls to offer payment plan options. "During that time, if the person has not engaged with HRI, they then receive final correspondence confirming they will be added to the forfeit list, which is published in the next issue of the *Irish Racing Calendar*." She added: "The *Irish Racing Calendar* is an industry publication which is circulated to all licensed trainers, racing officials, stewards, and other subscribers. It is also sent to the key libraries

in Ireland — so it is public record." Later this month, judicial review proceedings taken by her against the Director of Public Prosecutions following her animal cruelty conviction in Wexford will be up for mention in the High Court on November 29. She is wanted for questioning by gardai investigating allegations of fraud in the sale of horses in the past three to four years. The complaints under investigation relate to horse investment schemes via a website set up to target people interested in thoroughbred horses. Another relates to a scheme involving investment related to a property which was for sale in France, also related to horses. The website, which no longer exists, carried a list of services including racehorse purchase and management, and investment opportunities. Listen to the podcast at irishexaminer.com or wherever you find our podcasts

Garda critically injured while aiding motorist

A garda was rushed to hospital in a critical condition and with likely life-changing injuries after he was struck by a car while assisting another motorist in east Cork. The incident happened on the N25 near the Youghal bypass on the Killeagh side of the town while the officer was helping another motorist. A Garda spokesperson said the on-duty officer pulled in to the roadside shortly before 7pm yesterday to assist an elderly motorist. It is understood that his unmarked patrol car was struck by another vehicle, which in turn hit the garda. "Garda member has suffered serious injuries and has been removed from the scene to Cork University Hospital where he remains in a critical condition," the

spokesperson said. "The driver of the other vehicle was also removed to Cork University Hospital with non-life threatening injuries." Units of Youghal fire brigade and paramedics attended the scene and the garda was rushed to Cork University Hospital in a serious condition, with a garda escort accompanying the ambulance. There the garda was expected to undergo emergency surgery amid fears that his leg was severely injured in the incident. It is understood the injured person is a senior garda based in east Cork. The area around the collision remained sealed off last night and was due to undergo technical examination. Gardai said investigations were ongoing and no further information was available.

Homebirth access under threat in southwest

Niamh Griffin
Health Correspondent

Women living in large areas of West Cork and Kerry could be denied the option of a homebirth if a proposed change to the service goes ahead, a TD has warned. A HSE recommendation to limit access to homebirths to women living within 30 min-

utes "blue-light" drive by an ambulance is causing growing concern. More than 400 people attended a protest in Cork yesterday and another is planned for Dublin on Sunday, November 20. Social Democrats TD for Cork South West Holly Cairns said women in rural areas are being left out. **News: 4**



This Men's Health publication is designed to highlight the suite of services available to men in CUH and also in your community.

It is so important to look after your health so you can be there for those you love and continue to do what you love.

CUH Charity's mission is to provide life-changing and life-saving equipment, facilities and services to patients attending CUH & CUMH.

Any donations made on the back of this publication will be available to any department that has a research project specifically for men or require equipment that will progress treatment for men.

This will benefit your fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, friends and colleagues from across Munster who attend CUH.

We thank you in advance for your support

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'C'est la vie' as French fans bow to Messi magic

Eoin English
Cork



He remembers vividly running into his garden at home in Cordoba in central Argentina and weeping after his beloved national team was knocked out of the 2006 World Cup.

But it was tears of joy last night for Ramiro Bignieri, 22, as he watched Argentina win the World Cup after a final filled with drama and emotion.

Even though he was just six years old in 2006, Ramiro said he can still recall the real sense of shock when Argentina lost their first-ever World Cup penalty shootout 4-2 to Germany at the quarter-final stage.

But all that pain, all those sad memories, were replaced with sheer delight after another penalty shootout which saw Argentina win their first World Cup title since 1986, and Lionel Messi finally win the medal that had eluded him over the course of a glittering career.

Ramiro was among a small group of Cork's Argentinian community who gathered in the Old Oak pub on Oliver Plunkett St to watch the final.

"There are so many emotions," a delighted Ramiro said. "It's not just about Messi. Of course he deserves it, and of course we all wanted to see him win his first World Cup title, but this is about the whole country."

"One of our politicians said recently that the result of this World Cup was more important than the economy, and I think he may be

right. It is the only time when all Argentinians are together, and this is really a special moment for us."

Ramiro, who arrived in Ireland in October 2021, works in the Old Oak and has been following the tournament closely, many times from behind the bar while on duty. But he was given the day off yesterday to watch the final.

"Most of my friends who left home are living now in Spain or Italy but there are a few here, and we made sure that everyone had a jersey for the match," he said.

And the atmosphere was electric in a pub which attracts a multicultural clientele, with many French fans too, as well as Spanish, Italian, and Brazilian punters also in the crowd, wondering what might have been.

Argentina started brightly, threatening the French goal several times in the first 15 minutes, with Messi busier and more involved in the play than he has been in previous games.

Then, in the 21st minute, Argentina won a soft penalty after Angel Di Maria went down in the box following slight contact with Ousmane Dembélé.

The pub erupted, then fell silent as Messi stepped up and calmly stroked the ball into the bottom right corner, sparking scenes of hysteria amongst the Argentine fans. In doing so, Messi became the first player to score in the round of 16, the quarter final, the semi final, and the final.

And, 15 minutes later, Messi was involved again as Alexis MacAllister — the only, and distant, Irish link to this World Cup final — scored at the end of a quick free-flowing move.

The cheer in the Old Oak



It was a dream come true for Argentina fans enjoying the World Cup final in the Old Oak pub in Cork City.

Pictures: Howard Crowdy



'C'est la vie,' said French honorary consul in Cork, Josselin de Gall, left, who watched last night's breathtaking World Cup final against Argentina with other French supporters in the Woolshed Baa and Grill in Cork.

may have been heard in Córdoba as Ramiro and his pals celebrated as Argentina took real control of the final.

Over in the Woolshed Baa and Grill on Cork's Marldyke, a large contingent of French fans had little to cheer about until the 78th minute when their team was awarded a penalty, converted by Mbappé, who continued the French revival by equalising less than two minutes later.

Argentina fans were crestfallen, and French voices were in full flight, with their comeback leading to extra time.

The drama continued with another moment of Messi magic putting Argentina 3-2 up, sending their fans into ecstasy before Mbappé scored another penalty, less than five minutes from the end, breaking Argentinian hearts again.

A hat-trick in a World Cup final to make it Argentina 3 Mbappé 3, and penalties to

decide a final that couldn't have been scripted better. The tension mounted as Argentina slotted their penalties away, and the French misfired. And finally the tension, the agony, and the long wait was over, and Argentina were champions.

Ramiro and his friends were delighted. Juliana Parozza, 29, from Messi's hometown of Rosario, said it was an amazing game.

"I was so nervous during the whole march," she said.

"But I am really happy about the result. It is the last World Cup for Messi and di Maria, and they deserved to win."

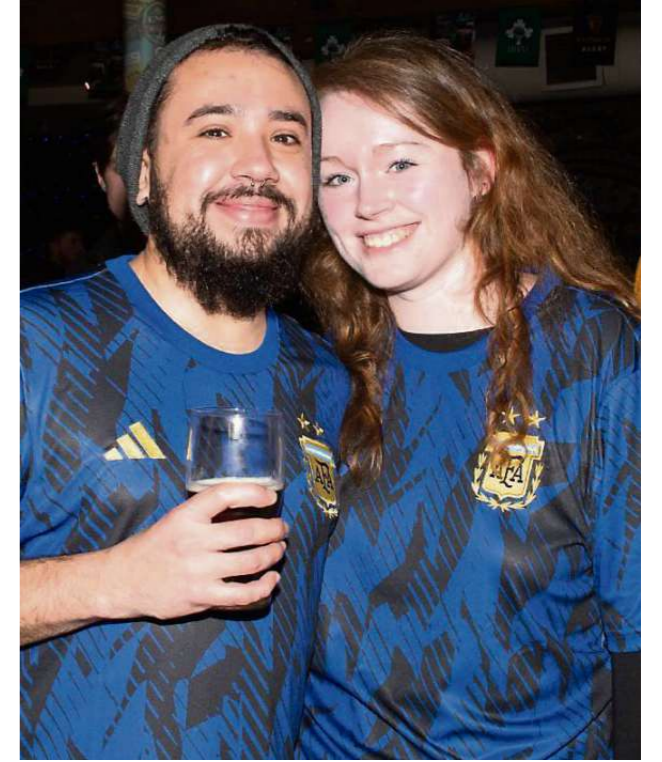
Luisina Lanza, 28, who lived for eight years in Rosario, was delighted too.

"It's my first time seeing them win," she said. "It's very emotional because it's my first time being abroad, and away from home, and it's so different being away, missing your people and your places, but

today I feel more attached to my home country. "It has been a really wonderful experience."



Brothers Killian and Aidan Bukulin from College Rd in Cork were supporting France during last night's World Cup final.



Argentina supporters Martin Barberan and Jan Brazil enjoyed the nail-biting Fifa World Cup final in the Woolshed Bar in Cork.

World Cup final and that's a huge achievement. Fellow countryman Bastien Peyraud was disappointed, but magnanimous.

"I feel a bit sad that France hasn't won but I'm delighted for the Argentinian fans," he said. "It was a Messi/Mbappé match. It was a superb match, both teams put on a wonderful show but the best team has won."

Editorial: 8
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Efforts to force alleged fraudster Catherine O'Brien to pay back €290,000 debt fail

Ann Murphy

Efforts to enforce an instalment order on alleged fraudster Catherine O'Brien requiring her to clear a debt judgement of almost €290,000 through weekly instalments of €10,000 have failed.

The debt arose from loans given to her over a period of 17 months by her former friend, Waterford woman Marie O'Shea.

Ms O'Shea died in 2016 and efforts to have the loans of €215,093 and interest of €10,754.65 repaid to her before her death failed.

Efforts by the estate of Ms O'Shea to have the money repaid have also failed.

The loans were given to Ms O'Brien by cheque, bank transfer, and cash lodgments between June 2007 and November 2008 by Ms O'Shea, from Straubbally, Co Waterford.

Ms O'Brien, who has an address in Dungarvan, Co Waterford, is wanted for questioning by gardai investigating allegations of fraud in the sale of horses in the past three to four years.

She has not lived at her Dungarvan address for several months.

The *Irish Examiner* is continuing its investigation into Ms O'Brien, who has issued judicial review proceedings against the Director of Public Prosecutions following her conviction, in her absence, in June 2021 for 34 counts of animal welfare legislation breaches relating to horses seized in Co Wexford.

A bench warrant was issued for her arrest following her conviction. In relation to the funds owed to the estate of Ms O'Shea, a High Court judgement was made in June 2009 after legal proceedings were taken by Ms O'Shea when efforts to have the loans repaid to her failed.

In that case, the court ordered that a total of €289,194.47 be paid to Ms O'Shea by Ms O'Brien to include the balance due to her from the loans, as well as costs, expenses, and interest. An affidavit in that case stated that Ms O'Shea had become attached to both Ms O'Brien and Ms O'Brien's children.

The affidavit also stated that Ms O'Shea had been influenced by the attention, affection, and time given to her by Ms O'Brien.

A judgement was made in her absence on December 4, 2019, at Dungarvan District Court, that she pay the amount from the June 2009 judgement, along with €990 in legal costs relating to the 2019 case to the estate of the late Ms O'Shea.

The judgement ordered: "By weekly payments of €10,000 per week the first payment to be paid, 14 days after service of the instalment order on the debtor." The order declared that

failure to make a payment may lead to a further summons being issued against her to attend the district court, "which may lead to your being arrested and imprisoned for a period of up to three months".

However, the money has not been repaid to date as the summons server was unable to serve the instalment order on Ms O'Brien.

The case was due back before the district court in mid-2021 but Ms O'Brien failed to appear. The court was told that her whereabouts were unknown.



The court heard Catherine O'Brien's whereabouts are unknown. Picture: Irish Mail on Sunday

Spielberg 'truly regrets' decimation of shark population after 'Jaws'

Mike Bedigan

Steven Spielberg said he "truly regrets" the "decimation of the shark population" following the success of his 1975 film *Jaws*.

Joining Lauren Laverne on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*, he discussed his successful directing career, including his latest project, the semi-autobiographical film *The Fabelmans*.

Spielberg, 75, is known for Hollywood blockbusters, including *ET*, *Indiana Jones*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Jaws*. The 1975 Oscar-winning thriller tells the story of a man-eating great white shark that attacks a US seaside town, which prompted a rise in sports fishing across America.

He was asked by Laverne how he felt about having real sharks circling his desert island. "That's one of the things I still fear," he said.

"Not to get eaten by a shark, but that sharks are somehow mad at me for the feeding frenzy of crazy sports fishermen that happened after 1975."

"I truly and to this day regret the decimation of the shark population because of the book and the film. I really, truly regret that." Spielberg's latest film *The*

Fabelmans tells the mostly true story of his own childhood and introduction to filmmaking in post-war America.

The film, starring Paul Dano and Michelle Williams, has already received wide critical acclaim, picking up top nods at both the 2023 Golden Globes and Critics Choice Awards.

Discussing the making of the film, Spielberg said he had initially thought the project would be the "most self-indulgent thing I've ever asked people to accompany me through".

Describing it as "\$40m of therapy", he said: "I didn't know really what I was doing, except I was answering a need I had."

"Being an orphan, or recently orphaned by the loss of both parents, to recapture some of those memories in some way that wouldn't seem too indulgent to actors I really respected."

"So it was a tight rope for a while." Asked by Laverne if he had become emotional while filming, he replied: "Yes, I did. I did. Oh, my God, I did."

"Probably the biggest struggle I had making the film was not to get emotional."

"But there were times where it just, it was out of my



Steven Spielberg: Latest project is the semi-autobiographical film *The Fabelmans*. Picture: BBC/PA



Robert Shaw, Roy Scheider, and Richard Dreyfuss in Steven Spielberg's 1975 film *Jaws*. Picture: Universal Pictures

control." He said that the project had sent his fear levels "through the roof". "I'm a private person

that's going public about and I can't hide behind somebody else's authorship or a book or a genre or American history."

Varadkar admits it's 'traumatic' for Ukrainians to move at short notice

Michelle Devane

The Taoiseach has acknowledged it is "very traumatic" for Ukrainian refugees being moved to alternative accommodation at short notice.

Leo Varadkar said people should be given as much notice as possible if they need to be moved.

His comments come after it emerged that Ukrainian families living in a hotel in Dundalk were given 48 hours' notice that they were to be moved to alternative accommodation in Limerick and Kerry.

On his first day back in the role of Taoiseach, Mr Varadkar attended a Christmas lunch for about 100 Ukrainian men, women, and children organised by the Irish Red Cross and promoter Harry Crosbie at Dublin's Vicar Street.

A group of children sang songs in Ukrainian, helped along by Santa Claus. Mr Varadkar said that, for the majority of people, Christmas is a wonderful time but it can be a very difficult time for some people.

"I'm very much thinking of the Ukrainians who have arrived in Ireland this year, particularly Ukrainian children, for whom this will be their first Christmas away from home," said the



Taoiseach Leo Varadkar checks his Christmas cracker with five-year-old Alina Chorna from Ukraine. Picture: Brian Lawless

Taoiseach. "I just want to take the opportunity to remind them that they are very welcome in Ireland, and that we will do everything to make sure that they feel welcome and continue to support Ukraine in its efforts to secure its independence and secure its democracy."

The Fine Gael leader said he believes many of the Ukrainians who have fled their country since the outbreak

of war will stay in Ireland long term.

"It's becoming increasingly obvious to people that this war could go on for some time. And very many of the Ukrainians who have come here are probably here to stay," Mr Varadkar said, adding that the Government will start making plans for longer-term accommodation.

He said the Government will be "accelerating" the

modular housing programme in the new year to increase the supply of accommodation.

"We'll see the first of those in the new year, and I think that can help us into the future," he added.

Asked what he will do to help refugees who are being asked to move at short notice, Mr Varadkar said he would look into the matter.

"My feeling is that if people have to be moved — and sometimes they do — it's important to give them as much notice as possible because, particularly if families and children have to move schools, that can be very traumatic, so I will make inquiries about it," the Taoiseach said.

"There might not be a way around it. But as a basic principle, I think we should try to give people as much notice as possible if they need to move."

Asked about reports of a Ukrainian family being split up due to accommodation issues, Mr Varadkar said it was "not desirable at all" and he would make contact with the Children's Minister about the matter.

"It's not good that families are ever separated, or that people are asked to move from one place to another with short notice. And that's true all year round."

Catholic connection used to influence acquaintance

THE expense of St Peter's Square in the Vatican is synonymous with elections of popes, Easter ceremonies, and the weekly audiences with the Pontiff. It is one of the most recognisable sites in the world and is top of many dedicated Catholics' wish lists of places to visit.

Catherine O'Brien used her link to the Vatican to befriend an older woman before borrowing a significant sum of money from her, writes Ann Murphy



A tumour which her medical team had been fighting had shrunk and she was in remission after being diagnosed in 2005 with cancer. After a long battle to get into remission, Marie was on a high and the trip to the Vatican was a welcome one after all she had been through. Accompanying Catherine on the visit was a sign of how close the two women had become in the four years since Marie first met her socially during a visit to Catherine's home with mutual friend Nicola Minihan. That first meeting with Catherine was a fleeting one and she wasn't to know that day in late 2004 that the two children she met during that visit would become almost like grandchildren to her.

Few though can expect to have a private audience with the pope of the day — but alleged fraudster Catherine O'Brien is among those few. And it is a moment which she has used a number of times since to show new acquaintances how strong her connections were, including all the way to the Vatican. Her visit to the Vatican in 2008 was an occasion during which she wasn't shy of photographs, something which acquaintances say is one of her key characteristics. But a photo of herself with Pope Benedict XVI taken during her visit to the Vatican is one which she has shown to new acquaintances in the years since. One person who met her years later and to whom she showed the photo was not lucky enough to see it because she wanted to persuade him that she was a woman of worthy connections, leading all the way to the world's smallest but influential state.

showed immense pride in her brother's prominent role in the upper echelons of the Catholic Church. One acquaintance recalls her 2008 visit to the Vatican which followed an O'Brien family celebration which was attended by Catherine with a photo she first asked to help Marie as being similar to that of a mother and daughter similar to the relationship Catherine also had with Marie's friend Nicola Minihan. The relative says: "Marie felt protective towards Catherine, and developed a

The acquaintance described the visit as "an incredible uplifting experience for Marie" as it came after a very tough time for her. She when contacted by the *Irish Examiner*. Acquaintances and former friends of Catherine say she

strong attachment to her almost as a surrogate mother and had a grandmother-like role with the children. Catherine would stay for up to two hours at a time, told Marie how she enjoyed her company, and often sought her advice and guidance. Indeed, there were times when Marie addressed Catherine in similar ways to how she addressed her own children and relatives but more money was needed as a sale of land in Mallow was not finalised and Catherine did not have the funds without it. Another loan of €52,000 was secured from Marie for a deposit on the property, on condition that 5% interest would also be paid.

But just a week later, in May 2008, a further loan of €69,000 was provided by Marie to pay a financial judgment made against her friend — as well as €3,500 for legal fees which were also required. In that instance, a relative of Marie's ensured that loan agreement was drawn up — and it was drafted by Catherine, who Marie knew had an interest in law and legal matters anyway. Vast volumes of law books had greeted any visitors to Catherine's home in An Ghríanna in Ballinacorney during the years. They were a reminder of Catherine's few years studying law. The knowledge she secured during those years and from her vast legal book collection helped her gain a strong

enough understanding of legalities to help persuade many acquaintances over the past 20 years that she could help them in any matters involving legalities or dealing with establishment organisations such as Gardaí or government departments. After Marie's financial

rescue of Catherine, the relationship between the women continued to strengthen, despite the concerns of people close to Marie. As the acquaintance who spoke to the *Irish Examiner* related, Catherine regularly visited Marie's home, "continually expressing her gratitude and updating her

Catherine O'Brien became very friendly with Marie O'Shea and went on to borrow more than €200,000 from her which was never repaid. Picture: The Irish Mail on Sunday

what was happening with the shop, outitters, and stock arriving". In the months after came a visit to Catherine in the summer of 2008 to join Catherine's family for a celebration. Two months later, the duo were on their way to the Vatican at a time when Marie's health woes had lifted. But, for Catherine, financial matters appeared to be once again a problem after they returned from Rome. The sale of the shop in Dunganarvan had not gone through and she moved to reassure Marie that she would not let her lose her €52,000 deposit.

Marie's health woes had lifted. But, for Catherine, financial matters appeared to be once again a problem after they returned from Rome. The sale of the shop in Dunganarvan had not gone through and she moved to reassure Marie that she would not let her lose her €52,000 deposit.



Catherine O'Brien had a €785,000 loan advanced to her from Bank of Ireland using as collateral a land bank in Mallow for which she gave a value of €3.6m. However, Bank of Ireland's legal team claimed the lands were only worth €100,000. Picture: Dan Linnhan

It was a niggler at the back of Marie's mind as she prepared for her second holiday that year — a two-month visit to Hong Kong and New Zealand with her son and daughter in November. As she was preparing to head away, Catherine told her of new financial worries, this time relating to stock from a

cash and carry for which Marie agreed to write another cheque. This one was for €50,000. Catherine was apparently financially dependent on her. From what Marie could see. On this occasion again, Catherine's legal expertise assisted her in handling of the situation after Marie

insisted that a loan agreement would be drawn up, before Marie was due to head on holiday with her family. The handwritten agreement seen by the *Irish Examiner*, was signed by Catherine on November 5, 2008, and was also signed by Marie O'Shea. In the agreement, Catherine acknowledged and promised by Catherine to repay her never materialised.

Despite the growing concerns about the failure to repay, Marie returned home to Stradbally with presents for not just her own family but also for Catherine and her two daughters. As a relative of Marie says now, Catherine's daughters were as significant in Marie's life as if they were own grandchildren. But Marie had to organise a bank transfer to Catherine while she was away? The stricken Dunganarvan woman contacted Marie in the middle of a Hong Kong night on November 13 to tell her that her vehicle had been seized and pledged that it was a mistake but she needed funds in order to get the vehicle back before it would be sold. She was to repay the sum to Marie's account shortly afterwards but never did. Ten days later, members of Marie's family at home became aware that Catherine was a serial debtor when a newspaper printed details of judgments made against her over the previous decade and Marie made regular requests to Catherine repay her the money she owed her — even though Catherine had managed to convince her the newspaper article detailing

the list of judgments was not correct. On Christmas Eve 2008, Marie received a Christmas present of sorts when Catherine lodged a cheque to Marie's account for the amount of €38,400, while Marie remained on holiday. However, in the early days of 2009, the cheque bounced and promises by Catherine to repay her never materialised. "The total of the sum would be discharged together with the interest of 6%". A copy of the undertaking was to be held in a solicitor's office in Waterford until the "discharge is made".

An affidavit in that case stated that Marie had been ordered to both Catherine and Catherine's children, as Marie's own

“The whereabouts of the infamous Corkwoman are still unknown to the vast majority of people who thought they knew her

after her return, things were never the same again. After one meeting following her arrival home, Marie never met Catherine again and attempts to meet her children were rebuffed too. With support from relatives, Marie began legal steps in an effort to get her money back. But she was not alone. So too were Bank of Ireland and a local plumber in Waterford. The High Court heard in 2009 that Bank of Ireland had advanced a loan to Catherine O'Brien for €785,000 — using as collateral a land bank in Mallow for which she gave a value of €3.6m. However, Bank of Ireland's legal team claimed the lands were only worth €100,000. The claim was

another successful application was brought by a Waterford plumber, Roger Mee, who sought an interim injunction preventing Catherine from lowering her assets below €100,000. He had given her a loan of €90,000 on the condition she would repay it with €10,000 interest — which she failed to do. On June 17, 2009, a court order against Catherine ordered that she pay a total of €289,194.47 to Marie — a sum which Marie had already borrowed from Marie, as well as interest, costs, and expenses. However, by the time of Marie's death in January 2016, the money still had not been paid. The issue was up in court in Dunganarvan again just three years ago when an instalment order was granted in favour of Marie's estate.

Her once great friend Catherine failed to turn up for the hearing. In her absence, the court ruled on December 4, 2019, that €290,184.72 was to be paid by Catherine to Marie's estate — at the weekly rate of €10,000. The order declared that failure to make a payment may lead to a further summons being issued against her to attend the district court, "which may lead to your being arrested and imprisoned for a period of up to three months".

In the weeks before the hearing, she emailed the legal team representing Marie's estate, saying she was awaiting forms to fill in for a statement of means. She said she had engaged with a personal insolvency practitioner, she said, would be applying for a protection certificate "in respect to me". She added: "Due to recent events at my home, I have not been very well". She had requested an adjournment of the case in her correspondence to Marie's estate's legal team. However, the hearing went ahead as planned on December 4, before Judge Terence Finn. Following the case, the summons served was not able to serve the instalment order on Catherine and the case came back before the court in September 2020, where a summons was issued by the presiding judge for Catherine's failure to respond to summonses or the court order. On that occasion, she provided a medical reason why she could not attend in court. Eleven months later, the case was again listed but at that hearing, it was heard that Catherine's whereabouts were unknown. At that point, the legal team representing Marie's estate outlined to her administration that there was little prospect of progressing the case until the whereabouts of Catherine O'Brien could be established.

To this day, the whereabouts of the infamous Corkwoman are still unknown to the vast majority of people who thought they knew her but who now realise that they really didn't.

Calls for system to monitor refugee centres

Staff worked seven days a week and never left centre, said resident

Ann Murphy Staff at an accommodation centre for Ukrainian refugees appeared to be working seven days a week, had little English, and never left the premises, according to a complaint made by one of the centre's residents.

The Government is being urged to introduce a monitoring system, independent incident reporting, and an appeals mechanism in place for such centres, to prevent operators from taking advantage of the accommodation, or the need for Ukrainian refugees. The call is being made Emma Lane-Spellen, the national co-ordinator of the Ukraine Civil Society Emergency Response group. The complaint was one of a number of reports received by the Department of Integration from Ukrainians regarding conditions in accommodation across the country. The nature of the complaints was released to the *Irish Examiner* under the Freedom of Information Act. The venues, the exact type of accommodation, or the country of location were not identified in the materials released by the department.

More than 60,000 people have arrived in Ireland since Russia invaded Ukraine in February. Large numbers have been living in up to 500 hotels across the country which are being used as accommodation centres. The note relating to the complaint mentioning the staffing at an accommodation centre stated: "Low staff on the premises with the majority of them not able to speak English. Appears the same staff work 7 days a week and do not leave the premises". The same complaint also said that windows in a common area were smashed and residents were told it would

take months to replace it. Ms Lane-Spellen said: "While it is difficult to comment without further investigation, with over 500 contracts it's unsurprising that there are a few rogue operators taking advantage of the situation. It is extremely important that the Department of Integration put in place a monitoring system, independent incident reporting and an appeals mechanism in place for such centres, to prevent operators from taking advantage of the accommodation, or the need for Ukrainian refugees. "Proper worker conditions, heating and healthy food should be standard. It is concerning that some operators may put profit over due care, as has been seen repeatedly over the years with the direct provision system. This needs proper and immediate investigation. According to the Department of Integration, there have been over 70 inspections carried out in the country since the direct provision system was introduced. The number of reports received by the Department of Integration from Ukrainians regarding conditions in accommodation provided for Ukrainian refugees, with follow up inspections in some instances where issues were identified. A spokeswoman added: "Employers have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of their employees under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Where the department contracts for the provision of short-term emergency accommodation, the employer remains responsible for the health and safety of the people it employs to work in the accommodation. "If the department is alerted to concerns about the health and safety standards for staff in a contracted accommodation, the report would be shared with the Health and Safety Authority, which is responsible for enforcing health and safety at work."

The same complaint also said that windows in a common area were smashed and residents were told it would

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Property & Home

Ingredients of a perfect home

Elegant Georgian property in Kinsale
Pages: 14-16

Dermot Bannon

'You'd be a fool not to listen to what people think'
Page: 28



EUROVISION
has finger on the pulse
News: 10

The big show

Cork and Tipp ready to light up the Páirc

Weekend Sport Pages 2-6

PLUS Beirne and Snyman return for Munster's Glasgow trip **Page 12**

Saturday, May 6, 2023

www.irishexaminer.com

No. 62,779

€3.80 (£2.20 in N. Ireland)



Bruce Springsteen enthralled fans last night at the first of three sold-out concerts at the RDS in Dublin.
SEE: Page 2

Picture: Andres Poveda



Couples turn to log cabins as housing crisis bites
See: Forum Big Read



'Rooting out corruption in Qatar should be no bother to Paddy'

See: Mick Clifford in Forum

Martin urges crackdown on vapes

Ciaran Phelan
Political Correspondent

Tánaiste Micheál Martin has said he wants Ireland to follow Australia's lead in banning recreational vaping. In a tobacco industry crackdown, the Australian government has tightened its e-cigarette laws to stop an alarming rise in teenage vaping and to ensure vapes are solely used as tools to help smokers quit. The measures include a ban on the importation of non-prescription vaping products and restrictions on flavours, colours, and other ingredients. Vape products will only be sold in pharmacies and must have pharmaceutical-like packaging, while nicotine

Tánaiste '100% with Australian view it's Big Tobacco coming back'

concentrations will also be reduced. All single-use, disposable vapes will be banned. Mr Martin, who introduced the landmark workplace smoking ban in Ireland in 2004, said he would like to see Ireland follow suit and he is fully supportive of the view taken by the Australian government. He said he is "amazed" that vaping products have been launched easily without proper assessment and can be placed next to sweets in shops. "Personally, I'd be 100% with the Australian view

that this is 'Big Tobacco' coming back, marketing these products in an attractive way to lure younger people, and placing them next to sweets in shops," he told the *Irish Examiner*. "This is nicotine. I've said in the past, vaping is the revenge of tobacco after the successful efforts to curb smoking." Vaping involves heating a liquid that contains nicotine in what is called an e-cigarette and turning it into vapour that people inhale. Sinn Féin health spokesman David Cullinane said he would be slow to put a ban on

recreational vaping for all citizens, as it may have unintended consequences. He said a lot of people who give up cigarettes turn to vaping. Mr Cullinane said the Government should put more resources into raising awareness of vaping to ensure people are aware of the consequences. Before Christmas, Health Minister Stephen Donnelly brought a memo to Cabinet to legislate for a ban on the sale of vaping products to under-18s in Ireland and this law is expected to come into force in the summer. The legislation is almost finished and will be sent to President Michael D Higgins to be signed into law. It is expected that this will

happen before the Dáil breaks for summer recess on July 13. Under Mr Donnelly's legislation, vaping advertising will not be allowed near schools, and the ban will also extend to public transport, to limit children's exposure to commercial messages normalising or glamorising the purchase and use of e-cigarettes. According to the World Health Organisation, there are 16,000 different flavours of vapes, including bubblegum and gummy bears, and there are concerns that it is a gateway to smoking, as children who have vaped have been found to be five times more likely to start smoking. A 2021 study carried out by



New relationship sees Ireland more in tune with coronation
See: News, Page 3

Nurses nap in sleeping bags in cars after shifts

Niamh Griffin
Health Correspondent
Killarney

Nurses and midwives are so tired after working in short-staffed units that some are bringing sleeping bags in their cars so they can stop for a nap on the way home. The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation's (INMO) conference in Killarney heard fatal crashes are happening because staff are battling extreme tiredness after working long shifts. The union's president told Health Minister Stephen Donnelly, who attended the conference yesterday: "Minister, we work long shifts, compounded by hours of

commuting and the risks to exhausted nurses/midwives driving long distances home after their shifts, which has tragically been proven catastrophic for some of our members over the years." Delegates pointed out that the danger of tiredness is being compounded by the long drives nurses face after their shifts because they cannot afford to live close to the hospitals. Those who do, the conference heard, are having to spend up to 80% of their earnings on rent. Under questioning, Mr Donnelly said hospitals have confirmed that they are examining the possibility of building staff accommodation. He said that, in particular,



Lynda Moore: Many accidents after a long hospital shift.

those hospitals which are struggling with recruitment are evaluating properties where accommodation could be located. INMO midwives section chairwoman Lynda Moore told the conference: "Each of us knows people going home

from night-duty who have crashed their cars, who've had quite a serious accident." She added that most were single-car crashes. Ms Moore, a midwife on the Domino Scheme at Cork University Maternity Hospital, said in her experience this does not only affect midwives driving long distances between work and home. "They all have a sleeping bag in their cars," she said. "They set their alarm on their phone for half an hour's sleep. So they pull into the side of the road and they make it look casual, they don't want to make it look obvious they are having a sleep at the side of the road."

All units are facing a staffing crisis, she said. "Our labour ward would be two to four midwives short practically every shift," said Ms Moore. Midwives can then find it difficult to take a break and make time to eat. "Midwives are going off [shift] stressed, hungry, headachy, starving in some cases, feeling sick in some cases. "Sometimes midwives go home and you stuff your face with food because you are so hungry, and others just go straight to sleep because they are so tired — and they are the ones who are losing weight or lacking nutrition." News: 4

Catherine O'Brien trail leads to horse-racing scene in Slovakia

Ann Murphy

New leads have opened up in Eastern Europe in the search for a Buttevant woman wanted for questioning by gardai on fraud allegations. A horse linked to Catherine O'Brien placed last in a race in Bratislava on April 22, while three other horses connected to her are currently based in a Slovakian training yard. It is understood she has been using the alias Katie O'Brien in her dealings with trainers in Slovakia. Ms O'Brien, who has been

convicted of animal welfare breaches, is the subject of a bench warrant in connection with that conviction and is also being sought in relation to frauds amounting to millions of euro. While she herself is not thought to be living in Slovakia, the horses in question have been relocated there since 2021. One of the horses, Shakespurr, placed last in a race in Bratislava on April 22. While the *Irish Examiner* cannot establish the ownership of the horses, an ongoing investigation by this

newspaper has confirmed her involvement with the animals. Gardai believe that Ms O'Brien, who has an address in Dungarvan, Co Waterford, has gone abroad after spending a number of months in Northern Ireland. However, sources in Eastern Europe do not believe she is in Slovakia. A woman calling herself Katie O'Brien has enlisted the services of trainers and agents by phone — including from a phone number known to have been used by Ms O'Brien in Ireland. The first horses arrived in Slovakia in late 2021 after contact was made with a trainer she later hired, Josef Chodur. Shakespurr arrived a year ago and first raced last October, coming third in

field of nine and winning €250. The four-year-old came in last in a race on April 22, also in a field of nine. She has engaged a new trainer, Jaroslav Brecka, in recent months. The name of the breeder on the racing card for the April 22 event was that of an operation set up in Ireland with which Ms O'Brien was known to be involved. Slovakia hosts 20 horse racing meetings per year, and prize funds are usually small, although one feature race in Bratislava next Sunday has a €19,000 winner's prize. Costs such as trainer fees, meanwhile, can be as little as €400 per month. Ms O'Brien has taken judicial review proceedings against the DPP arising out

of her conviction in absentia of more than 30 counts of animal welfare breaches. The warrant was issued for her arrest at Gorey District Court in June 2021, following her conviction on 34 counts of animal cruelty under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. This related to the seizure of thoroughbred horses in a malnourished state in Ballygarrett in Wexford in 2019. The judge opted not to sentence her in her absence when the case was in court in June 2021, and the bench warrant remains live. She was convicted under Section 12(1) of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. Under the act, there are penalties of up to €250,000 and/or imprisonment of up to five years.

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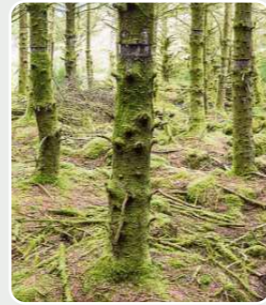
Irish Examiner

Islands of Ireland Spruce up
Cow Island is 'Innisfallen on steroids'



Outdoors Pages 12-13

Common good must prevail over pure profit



Head scratcher
Donegal frustrate Kerry, Royals stunt Rebels' revival

Sport Allianz League Pages 2-11



Monday, January 30, 2023

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No. 62,696

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Funerals delayed as death rate rises

Ann Murphy

A spike in the number of deaths in recent weeks has disrupted funeral arrangements and put mortuaries under unprecedented stress.

An *Irish Examiner* analysis of death notices on the website RIP.ie shows there were 9,718 published in the eight-week period from December 1, 2022, to January 25, 2023 — up 20% from 8,075 in the same period a year earlier. The figure is also considerably higher than the 8,135 death notices published in the same period to January 25, 2021, when the country was in the grip of the worst period of the Covid pandemic.

Pre-pandemic, 6,802 death notices were published in the eight weeks to January 25,

Record number of Cork deaths surpasses peak of Covid pandemic

2019, almost 3,000 fewer than in recent weeks.

The death rate in Cork has been so high in the last two months that bodies had to be stored in the city's hospitals until space became available at the Cork City Morgue.

"Between the 19th of December and the 3rd of January, over 100 deaths were reported to my office," Philip Comyn, coroner for Cork city, told the *Irish Examiner*.

"This is the most ever reported for this length of time, surpassing even the busiest period during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The mortuary [at Cork

University Hospital] had so many bodies it couldn't take any more and the other Cork hospitals held onto their bodies overnight."

Ivan Perry, of UCC School of Epidemiology and Public Health, said flu and other respiratory illnesses may be the reason for the alarming spike in deaths.

"It could also be that people are slightly more vulnerable post-Covid because there is a post-Covid elevated risk of heart disease for example, so that could be contributing to it as well."

An analysis of rip.ie shows there were 1,092 deaths in Cork alone from December 1,

2022, to January 25, 2023 — an increase of 16.4% from a year earlier.

Death notices were at 1,007 in the December 2020 to January 2021 period, with numbers as low as 786 for the same period up to January 2019.

Mr Comyn said high death rates are being recorded across the country. He said Dr Margot Bolster, the assistant State pathologist, and mortuary staff "started work at 6am, including Saturdays, to clear the backlog".

Mayo coroner Patrick O'Connor also noted "an extraordinary number of deaths" in the period from December 15 to January 15.

"In one five-day period, there were 17 postmortems carried out in Mayo University Hospital, which would

be very unusual," he said.

"Usually, there would be around one a day perhaps. And these are only post-mortems where there is a sudden death or exceptional circumstances. The reality is that the numbers [of deaths] are much higher."

"It is putting greater strain on frontline services — the doctors, the morticians, the pathologists, and indeed the coroners."

Limerick Fianna Fáil TD Willie O'Dea said he noticed a "huge upsurge in funerals" before Christmas and submitted a parliamentary question to Health Minister Stephen Donnelly in relation to excess death rates.

He said wakes and removals were disrupted, often taking place during the day because of the high number of

deaths meant there was not enough time in the evenings to accommodate everyone.

Aontú's Peadar Toibin is calling for an investigation into the unexplained rise in death rates.

He highlighted the closure of some critical health and screening services during Covid-19 and said any link with current death rates should be explored.

Last week, calls were made in the British House of Commons for an investigation into why death rates in the UK are increasing.

Some 17,381 deaths were registered in England and Wales in the seven days to January 13 — above the average for this time of year by 2,837, according to the UK Office for National Statistics.

Analysis: 9



STRIK A ROAR NERVE: Maria Larkin, 6, and Linna Basso, 5, react as they meet members of the Flower City Dragon and Lion Dance Association following a Cantonese lion-dancing performance yesterday as part of Dublin Lunar New Year's flagship event for Chinese new year. Picture: Brian Lawless/PA



Why can't women rock out in their 60s?

Suzanne Harrington: Life/Style Page 10



Time to ditch the briefcase for a pension plan
Terry Prone: Opinion, Page 8



Adoptees' fight for records goes on
News: Page 6

Individual hotels owed up to €400k for housing refugees

Ciara Phelan

Political Correspondent

Hotels providing accommodation to Ukrainian refugees are threatening not to renew their contracts because of late payments from the State, with some owed up to €400,000.

It is also understood the Government may consider putting time limits on the financial support and accommodation offered to Ukrainians, following a report that looked at how other EU countries were dealing with refugees.

Government and opposition TDs are being inundated with complaints by private accommodation providers, who are furious with the State over a backlog of payments.

Fewer than 20 staff in the Department of Integration are processing invoices to 700 providers, with a source confirming that before Christmas just four staff were dealing with payments to hotels, B&Bs, and nursing homes.

A spokesperson for the department would not specify the total sum of money owed to private providers and how many were due payments.

They said there is an "extraordinary volume" of



Marian Harkin: Hotel has been owed €400,000 since October.

payments to be made and the department "sincerely regrets" the backlog.

There are no outstanding payments to providers offering accommodation to international protection applicants.

Marian Harkin, Independent TD for Sligo-Leitrim, said that one hotel has been awaiting payment of €400,000 since last October, despite sending in multiple invoices.

Michael Ring, Fine Gael TD for Mayo, said he is aware of one hotel owed €250,000 and a second provider owed €180,000.

"It's disgraceful," Mr Ring

said. "Substantial amounts of money are owed to a number of providers and they are complaining to local TDs that they are not getting paid and they're demanding to know where their money is."

"What sort of message does that send out to hotels, and other providers, who the Government is trying to get to accommodate Ukrainians and asylum seekers?"

The Cabinet sub-committee on Ukraine will meet tomorrow, when Roderic O'Gorman, the integration minister, will again plead for additional staff to deal with the payments backlog.

A report requested by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, into how Ireland compares across Europe in supporting Ukrainians, has found that the State is an outlier in the use of hotel accommodation for those fleeing from war.

Meanwhile, 200 people attended a protest in Lismore, Co Waterford, yesterday against the opening of a direct provision centre, in Lismore House Hotel, for up to 117 asylum seekers.

Groups of families and single females are to be accommodated in the hotel, but local residents have said they are unhappy about the lack of consultation between the Government and the community.

The State had no accommodation for 81 asylum seekers that arrived in the country last week.

Drop in apprenticeships may hit housing targets

Ciara Phelan

Political Correspondent

The Government has been dealt a further blow to its housing targets as new figures reveal a "very serious" fall in the number of people registering for apprenticeships.

There was a drop of almost 3,000 apprenticeship registrations last year compared to 2021 — down from 8,607 to 5,628.

The Government's target is 10,000 sign-ups every year by 2025 as part of its strategy to tackle housing shortages.

Pressure is mounting on Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien to increase the State's housing targets of 33,000 homes per year after the Housing Commission indicated that Ireland requires between 42,000 and 62,000 new homes every year to meet demand.

Mr O'Brien and Taoiseach Leo Varadkar cited soaring costs and construction skills shortages as factors that will hinder the Government from reaching its targets.

Social Democrats housing spokesperson Cian O'Callaghan said a drop in apprenticeship registrations is "very serious" given that the Government has over 60 apprenticeship programmes.

Mr O'Callaghan said State construction contracts should have stipulated that a certain number of workers hired must be apprentices.

"They haven't taken any real initiative to increase the numbers and the incentives in place aren't attractive enough," he said.

The *Irish Examiner* understands the Government is considering introducing two-year traineeships in a bid to accelerate getting workers on construction sites to help meet housing targets.

A Government source said the initiative is in its infancy, but discussions are taking place within the Department of Further and Higher Education on how the State could reform the apprenticeship model.

The traineeship model would run in parallel with apprenticeships but workers could be out on sites after two years for certain trades.

"The upside is a traineeship is a shorter commitment but the department would have to ensure the quality control of the training and skills because you can't take an apprenticeship that is a four-year programme and make it into a two-year course — that would make a mockery of the system," the source said.

Construction Industry Federation director of safety and training Dermot Carey said inflation and the war in Ukraine had damaged the industry. He called on the Government to bring back a €3,000 grant given to employers if they registered an apprentice between March and December in 2021.

"I think it's demonstrated that it was a significant attraction for employers to take people on and it should be reinstated in a targeted manner at what we deem to be wet trades such as brick-laying, stone-laying, plastering, and painting," he said.

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Editorial: 8



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In some countries, deaths must be recorded within 24 hours. Some representatives have been calling for an investigation into the death figures in Ireland, writes **Ann Murphy**



The State needs a more accurate death register

We have to rely on a scan of Rip.ie to know that close to 10,000 people died here in the eight weeks from December 1, 2022, to January 25, 2023 because, as it stands, the State can't offer a more concrete figure for the period.

Still, coroners, medics, academics, politicians, and even Joe and Jane Soaps across the country can sense there have been more deaths in the run-up to and aftermath of the festive period than normal.

In England and Wales, deaths must be registered within five days. In Scotland, it is eight days. This allows for weekly returns of death rates, published by the Office for National Statistics. In France, Greece, Luxembourg, Italy, and Spain, deaths must be registered within 24 hours.

However, in Ireland, there is a three-month time window to register under the Civil Registration Act 2004, leaving statisticians with a void in securing accurate death rates in real time.

Two years ago, the Department of Social Protection launched a public consultation on the process of death registration. It wanted to cut the time window to two working weeks admitting the time lag is contrary to "a range of international comparator countries".

The department's consultation document highlighted that only four out of five deaths are registered within the required timeframe.

"Without legal consequence, deaths can be registered at any time following death. Such time lags have implications for the compilation of population statistics and data to support public health actions and public health and medical research."

Today the Department of Social Protection is still considering the options in relation to revising the process of death registration.

Therefore, while the department can tell us death rates for the past six years — an increase from 31,199 deaths in 2017 to 34,470 in 2021, the 31,075 for 2022 is an incomplete figure.

"These figures do not represent the total number of deaths which have actually occurred, in particular those for the months of October, November, and December 2022, as this falls within the three-month period where a person can register a death, and are liable to change as more deaths continue to be registered throughout 2023."

Nonetheless, figures this newspaper has garnered from trawling Rip.ie for the past five years make startling reading. There were 9,718 deaths published from December 1, 2022 to January 25, 2023 — up from 8,075 for the same period to January 25, 2022. The figure was also considerably higher than the 8,135 death notices published in the same period to January 25, 2021, despite that period being at the height of the pandemic. For the eight-week period to January 25, 2019, 6,802 death notices were published.

In calling for an investigation into the apparent increase in death rates, Aontú leader Peadar Kirby highlights that more concrete figures from Eurostat are available for last summer, showing that excess deaths in Ireland in July increased by 16%. He says the numbers dying in August 2022 were 17% higher than the average before Covid-19.

Limerick Fianna Fáil TD Willie



Limerick TD Willie O'Dea says he noticed an increase in funerals before Christmas, with some wakes and removals taking place during the day because of the high occurrence of deaths.

O'Dea says he noticed an apparent "huge upsurge in funerals" before Christmas and submitted a parliamentary question to the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, in relation to excess death rates. He noticed wakes and removals taking place during the day because of the high occurrence of deaths.

In response, Mr Donnelly said that while the Department of Health does not produce estimates of excess mortality, it closely monitors estimates of excess mortality which are published by a range of different sources.

He added that a study published in *The Lancet* last April showed that Ireland was among several European countries with some of the lowest rates in the world, with less than 50 excess deaths per 100,000 population.

However, Mr O'Dea is concerned that deaths appear to be increasing in Ireland and believes that the process of death registration in Ireland

needs to be more efficient.

"It is something that is centrally important to health policy. It is a significant worry. When officials and ministers are deciding a policy, they need to have the proper and up-to-date information."

He added: "In the age of technology, it does seem very amateurish to be relying on Rip.ie."

Sinn Féin's health spokesman, David Cullinane, says it is a mistake not to have real time figures available on death rates.

"We need to fully understand what is happening behind the numbers — obviously behind each number is someone that has passed away and a bereaved family, but there is also data that can inform learnings in terms of what is happening, in what areas are we seeing increased deaths, and what measures need to be put in place. If the analysis is not being done, then you can't respond

in a way that you could if you had that data. It is something that needs to be done in terms of anticipating what could happen."

Professor Ivan Perry of University College Cork says Ireland did relatively well compared to other countries in respect of deaths related to Covid-19. He says it is unlikely that Covid deaths "contributed greatly" to death rates recently. He believes the recent increase could possibly be linked to influenza and other respiratory illnesses.

He added: "We have taken for granted over decades that life expectancy will continue to improve year on year. In Ireland, it has. But in countries including the US, life expectancy has stopped improving — it has fallen by about two years over the past four to five years. Some of that is due to the pandemic, some is due to the opiate epidemic and some is due to rising rates of heart disease linked to obesity and poor diet."

According to former president of the Irish Medical Organisation, Dr Peadar Gilligan, an increased death rate is to be expected in winter months. But he says there was a significant increase in attendances at emergency departments during the Christmas period.

He says flu and other respiratory illnesses had an influence on hospitalisations and there was a fear among the population at large about spending long hours in emergency departments awaiting admission to a ward.

"Undoubtedly as well, the public concern about attending hospitals has led people to leave things longer than they might have in some cases and that has definitely been to the detriment of some people."

"I know from GPs across the country that they can't convince their patients to go to hospital because of the concern about having a protracted stay in the emergency department — that they

might be there hours or even days in some centres."

Coroner for Mayo, Patrick O'Connor, is the public information officer for the Coroners Society of Ireland and has recently compiled his statistics for his district for 2022.

He said: "I had in total 1,008 deaths reported to me in that period. And in that, there were 720 which were ordinary reports, then there were 184 post-mortems in that period and I held 104 inquests — the biggest number ever. Some 10.3% of deaths I dealt with went to inquest and 18.25% went for post-mortems. That was an increase overall on the previous year of at least 20%."

"It doesn't look like it is going to go down this year either given the start of the year."

Mr O'Connor also pointed out there is an increasing number of people residing in Ireland now, which will lead to a natural increase in deaths.

The storyteller who won't let Beirut forget its troubled past

For a city with a long and storied history, Beirut doesn't make it easy to remember it.

Ronnie Chatah has been on an almost two-decade-long mission to remedy this historical amnesia by telling stories of Lebanon's complicated and frequently dark past.

Soft-spoken and pony-tailed, the Lebanese podcaster and columnist speaks to *The Irish Examiner* at the rooftop of Kalei, a popular cafe in Mar Mikael in east Beirut.

Starting in 2005, Ronnie ran a popular walking tour where he used the neighbourhoods and landmarks of Beirut to explain the city's past and how the modern, dysfunctional state of Lebanon came into existence.

On the tours, Ronnie would describe the country's 18 sects and how the mishmash of crumbling Ottoman villas, French-era buildings, and glass skyscrapers, were constructed and frequently damaged to create the modern Beirut skyline.

Lebanon has never had a public reckoning with its past and the history of the civil war is mostly avoided in schools.

An amnesty granted to militias in 1990 after the conflict ended meant that almost no one was prosecuted for the countless atrocities committed during the bloody period.

Ronnie stopped delivering the walking tour for several years after his own father, Mohamad Chatah, a Lebanese politician and former ambassador to the US, was killed.

He died along with seven other people in a car bomb in downtown Beirut in 2013. No one has ever been held responsible for the attack.

"Expectations for a functioning, systematic investigation that yields tan-

Hannah McCarthy speaks to Ronnie Chatah, who delivers walking tours and an English-language podcast on politics and history in Lebanon



gible results is off the table completely, whether that's in my own case or any other political crime of that nature over the last 17 years," says Ronnie.

"This country does not function the way most countries function with a judicial authority that is independent or autonomous enough to do its job."

"There is a sub-state group in this country that determines most security concerns and that includes things like political assassinations," he says, referring to Hezbollah, an expansive Shia Muslim organisation backed by Iran which operates paramilitary and parliamentary wings in Lebanon.

"When that group deems it problematic, those investigations don't happen."

Ronnie's father was viewed as a moderate figure who could cross sectarian lines and get opponents to talk in a country where political stalemates strangle progress.

He was a close adviser to Saad Hariri, the son of the former Lebanese prime



Ronnie Chatah delivering a tour in Beirut.

Picture: Hannah McCarthy

minister Rafik Hariri who was also killed by a car bomb eight years earlier.

The elder Hariri and Chatah are buried in the same mausoleum in Beirut.

Both men had opposed the Syrian regime's three-decade-long occupation of Lebanon and the paramilitary strength of Hezbollah, a Syrian ally.

Lebanese politicians who have opposed either have frequently paid with

their lives. "There were threats in the way many people face threats, but nothing that was hinting at that kind of attack," says Ronnie of the car bomb that killed his father.

Hezbollah has certain redlines but over time they might "re-adjust them" he says and what is "not always a redline could be a redline when they deem it so."

Ronnie recounts how Hezbollah began as a Shia militia backed by Iran in the 1980s during the civil war.

The group focused on kidnappings and truck bombings, with an emphasis on violence rather than political strategy.

Hezbollah kept its arms after the civil war on the basis that Israeli forces still occupied South Lebanon but were con-

strained by the presence of the Syrian army in Lebanon.

Israeli forces withdrew beyond the Blue Line which separates Lebanese and Israeli territory in 2000.

Hezbollah should have disarmed then, says Ronnie, but it didn't. In 2006, after the withdrawal of the Syrian forces, the group waged a five-week war with Israel that displaced one million people.

Today, Hezbollah is one of Lebanon's main political parties — "which is not that important" says Ronnie, as "Hezbollah's leverage has less to do with politics and more to do with security". Ronnie resumed his walking tours of Beirut in 2018; the first tour had over 90 sign-ups. But anti-government protests in October 2019 and Covid-19 led him to pause the tours once again.

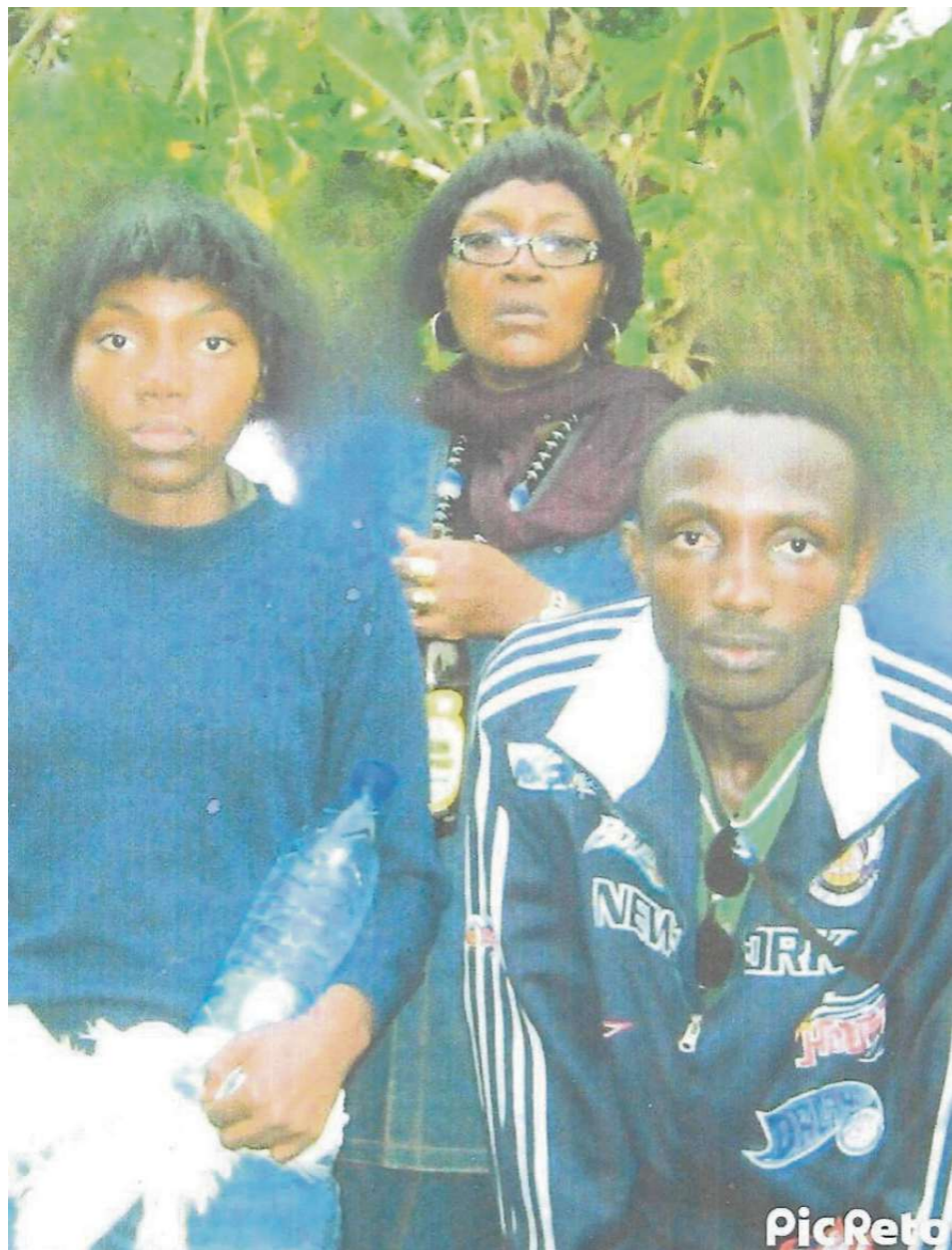
While the tours have been on hold, Ronnie has channelled his energy into a new venture, *The Beirut Banyan*, which is now one of the most popular English language podcasts in Lebanon.

Along with conversations about Lebanese politics and history, the podcast gives a platform to many of those who, like Ronnie, lost loved ones to political assassination.

From Beirut, Ronnie watched the funeral in December of Private Seán Rooney, who died in an attack on Irish peacekeepers in an area controlled by Hezbollah in south Lebanon.

To maintain relations and avoid a sudden withdrawal of UN peacekeepers, Ronnie believes Hezbollah will "surrender one or two people at most" who were involved in the lethal attack.

"What is lacking is a functioning state that doesn't care what Hezbollah wants or doesn't want," says Ronnie. "It would arrest those individuals regardless."



Left: A photo of Géraldine Yankeu with her mother Claudette and brother Romuald. Right: Géraldine Yankeu in a coma at CUMH. Pictures courtesy of the family



National defence

In a world of turmoil, it's time to halt the continuing slide in our Defence Forces

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New Year, new beginnings as the Shandon Bells ring in 2023

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Big role for Ireland as the European Union reins in tech titans

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'Nobody should die trying to give life'

WHEN Romuald Chainey hung up the phone in August 2021 after speaking to his younger sister, he had no idea it would be the last time he would hear her voice.

Romuald Chainey is still at a loss as to how his sister Géraldine died in CUMH, writes Ann Murphy



for her life. There was also the shocking news that his long-awaited niece Mary was still-born. He says: "Nobody would have imagined that such a tragedy could have happened and my mother was the person who called me very early in the morning [around 6am] to inform me that Géraldine was in the hospital but in the coma. Prior to this information, when I saw my mum's call, I thought it was to tell that Géraldine has given birth but no, it was the opposite."

him, Géraldine had been a vibrant part of their family, and was protective of him despite him being nine years her senior. Their mother, who is now 68 years old, clung to hope until the life support machine was turned off and, after Géraldine's death, Romuald remembers the effect on his mother.



Romuald Chainey, Géraldine's older brother.

Mary died. They were not aware until August this year that an inquest into Géraldine's death was mandatory. Since the introduction of the 2019 Coroners Act, inquests into maternal deaths — during and after giving birth — are mandatory. However, Géraldine's family didn't know this. In August, the Irish Examiner was told by the Cork City Coroner's office that the deaths of both Ms Yankeu and her daughter Mary "were treated as natural and no inquest was required".

tended by Géraldine's sister, Ornella, and Géraldine's partner, Patrick Mbeng, during which coroner Philip Comyn said a decision to hold a post-mortem into her death was made after he reviewed her case file. He apologised to the family if they were upset by a delay or lack of communication with them.

A submission hearing will take place in January. The preliminary hearing was told that Géraldine had hypertension. An application was made at the hearing by her family's legal team that an independent expert in hypertension in pregnancy be included in the list of witnesses to appear before the inquest when it takes place next year. An order was made to make all medical reports available to the legal representatives of the bereaved family, including the post-mortem reports and both the internal and external review into the circumstances of the young mother's death.

light on my sister's death and probably will help others by creating more awareness for similar situations. I believe nobody should die when trying to give life."

SINCE Géraldine's death, there have been two other maternal deaths in Munster. Tatenda Mukwata died at University Hospital Kerry on April 21 this year. Originally from Zimbabwe, she was a resident at the Atlantic Lodge direct provision centre in Kenmare and had been granted permission to stay in Ireland shortly before she died.

Ms Mukwata is survived by her newborn baby girl, and three older daughters, as well as her parents and brother. Less than two months after Ms Mukwata's death, Laura Liston died in Limerick after giving birth at home, prompting the suspension of the homebirth service across the Mid-West region. She died after giving birth to her first child, a son, at home in Croom, on June 5. The Sligo native was rushed to hospital after development serious complications following the birth. Inquests have not yet taken place in respect of either death. Of the 13 maternal death inquests held in Ireland between 2007 and 2022, six related to women from different ethnic backgrounds other than Irish.

sudoku

Sudoku puzzle grid with 'basic', 'intermediate', and 'advanced' sections. Includes 'HOW TO PLAY' instructions: 'Fill in the grid, ensuring that each column and row, and every 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1-9'.

Sudoku puzzle grid labeled 'BASIC'.

Sudoku puzzle grid labeled 'INTERMEDIATE'.

Sudoku puzzle grid labeled 'ADVANCED'.

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