

Damien.Lane@the-sun.ie

@Damienlanesun

Damien Lane



RESTORED... hut in Cork

GIVE CASH WASTAGE A REST

THE people of Cork city must be frothing at the mouth after learning their council have spent an incredible €361,446 restoring an 8ft-tall HUT.

Yep, a hut.

The city-centre landmark, known as the Fireman's Rest, had fallen into disrepair and a decision was made to restore it.

Fine. But €361,446 smackers? My jaysus.

The breakdown of costs:

- €112,000 on site works
- €143,750 on metalwork repair restoration and recasting
- €25,500 on preliminary work
- €13,200 on a limestone plinth and steps
- €15,000 on a "hanging gable for cresting"
- €18,988 for conservation consultants
- €12,000 for roof leading
- €3,000 for the roof structure
- €5,500 for the limecrete floor
- €4,500 for external doors
- €2,500 for the ceiling
- €4,600 for scaffolding (it's 8ft tall!)
- €908 for photography

Cork North Central Sinn Féin TD Thomas Gould wasn't having any of it. He said: "There are people in this city living in mouldy, damp conditions. The council is their landlord."

"If we saw a private landlord spending money like that while they left their tenants in rotting homes, people would be shocked and rightly so."

Quite. The council has yet to respond.

MARE FOR PUNTERS

GREAT to hear that there'll be plenty of Guinness on tap for racing punters heading to the Cheltenham Festival.

Diageo says it has been working around the clock to ensure sufficient supplies for the four-day event kicking off March 11. However, if you are travelling to the Cotswolds and want to quaff the black stuff, pack a pile of extra cash.

A pint in the Guinness tent will set you back a hefty £7.80. That's €9.40 a pint! Yikes.

Only the very rich can afford that. I covered Cheltenham for the paper over five years in the

early Noughties and back then a pint was £3 a pop. Which was eminently affordable.

The guts of a tanner for a pint of plain, served in a plastic cup, a third of which spills by the time you make it from the bar to the paddock, is a price that will put many, many punters off.

Cheltenham will always be racing's crown jewel. But if they're not careful with pricing, they'll kill the golden goose.



8 years to find a room for one X-ray scanner sums up the Irish State ...Three Stooges stuff



● I USED to wear a denim jacket when I was a teenager. Had a wall of metal studs over one pocket. An AC/DC patch on the back. A metallor in me heyday. Denim was en vogue in the 1980s. So, it's great to see it back in fashion after a 40-year hiatus. And Beyonce, above, wears it so well. Pity about her music, though.

YOU'D want to have the skin of an elephant, the hardened undercarriage of a seasoned jockey, the deadened head of a super heavyweight boxer to put up with the carry-on in the Department of Arts.

Three Stooges stuff. After squandering an extraordinary €7million of your tax dollars on an IT system that is not fit for purpose, it has been revealed that in 2017 they signed off on the purchase of a €124,805 X-ray machine for the National Gallery that has NEVER been used.

The costly device — needed so they could examine paintings without the need to touch them — remains boxed up on site somewhere in the bowels of the building for the last EIGHT years. Never been plugged in.

The X-ray bulb, the thing that makes it work, is still with the supplier because of safety issues. You see X-ray machines emit radiation and whoever bought it back in the day didn't consider the need to have a radiation-proof room to store the bloody thing in.

What's the problem?, you ask. All they had to do was put up four lead walls. A few builders would have done it in a couple of weeks, no?

Solutions that work in the real world in a matter of weeks with a bit of cop-on don't play out in the fairytale land of the State. It's an alien concept, clear thinking.

They worried about whether the walls of the National Gallery would be able to withstand lead lining.

But they decided to plough on, and A YEAR after buying the yoke, a tender went out looking for someone to erect the necessary lead walls.

They got one response and, according to the National Gallery, the received bid was "non-compliant", whatever that means.

And the suitable lead-proofed room was never built because for eight years they couldn't find a suitable room.

Ever since, the poor old X-ray machine, which was built to do a job, remains unused and useless.

Strike me dead, oh Lord. Take me from this Earth in the blink of an eye.

I can take no more of this theatre of the absurd, this clown's circus at the heart of our State.

When the story broke this week, the National Gallery came out to say that it "has been working with the relevant experts and stakeholders to bring the system into operation and has identified a preferred solution".

And that solution? Well, they're going to use the X-ray machine as a "mobile unit on-site", and it could come into use later this

year. Eight jaysusing years to come up with that? And, when the solution is arrived at, it will take many more months to PLUG in the machine.

Before that fateful day in the future, presumably every member of staff at the National Gallery will have to undergo rigorous health and safety training.

The machine itself will undoubtedly have to be put through exhaustive checks, especially as it has lain idle for so long.

After many years of ineptitude, maybe the first painting will get the X-ray's eyes late in the year of our Lord 2025.

I wouldn't bet on it, though. You know how this place works, by now.

At sloth's pace. Simon Harris is furious, of course. Micheal Martin, incredulous.

Explanations have been demanded, as they always are when taxpayers' money is flushed down the toilet in spectacular fashion.

The Office of Public Waste — while not involved in the X-ray machine scandal itself — has been front and centre in the most egregious waste of recent times.

Remember the €335,000 spent on the Leinster House bike shed that can accommodate 18 bicycles?

Simon and Micheal were furious then, too.

Did anything happen? Was anyone sanctioned? Were they f***.

Then there was the extraordinary €1.4million splurge on a security hut at the Dail.

The two boys were spitting feathers then, too.

Did anyone get hauled over the coals? Was a P45 dangled in the face of whoever signed the contract for so much?

Were they f***.

Of course, the coup de grace, the cherry on the cake, the crème de la crème of OPW frittering of your dough: the €490,000 spent building a 70-metre wall around the offices of the Workplace Relations Commission.

Again, shag all consequences for anybody. On they toddle, unmolested because they work for the State.

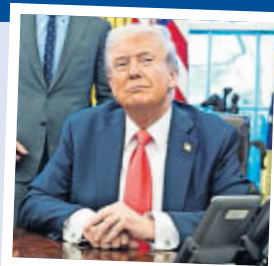
When incidents of public money being recklessly spent are brought to light, the politicians fall over themselves to express their outrage.

They've done it so many times now, no one takes them seriously any more. There is no doubt many more similar stories of grotesque State spending waiting to emerge.

When they do, politicians will queue up to jump on the moral high horse and condemn the latest waste of taxpayers' money.

Joe Soap will just shrug his shoulders, knowing that is the way it has always been, and will continue to be until the end of time.

The sad reality is that many institutions of the Irish state are so inefficient and broken as to be beyond repair.



UNPREDICTABLE... Donald

TRUMP'S PUTIN US AT RISK

THE values upon which America was founded — truth, democracy and the defence of freedom — are being destroyed by Donald Trump.

Since assuming power on January 6, Trump and his bootlicking MAGA acolytes have torn out the country's soul and abandoned its traditional allies to get into bed with Russia and its blood-covered dictator, Vladimir Putin.

Trump promised to bring the three-year war in Ukraine to an end, but nobody foresaw how he would try to achieve that.

Nobody predicted how Trump would demonise Ukraine, wrongly brand its leader, Volodymyr Zelensky, a dictator and its people unworthy of an ounce of respect for fighting back the Russian army.

Nobody could have known Trump would then try to extort Ukraine, like a mafia boss, demanding access to \$500billion of its mineral wealth to compensate for €115billion in US military aid.

Nobody could have dreamt how Trump would lionise Putin, side with Russia, North Korea and Iran at the UN, and push for Russia's rehabilitation from pariah state to international player once again.

What Trump has done to damage the world order is astonishing. That he is getting away with it is even more astonishing.

The only winner in all of this: Russia.

● WHAT is it with immature man-babies and their toys?

Elon Musk is the world's most renowned spoiled brat, so it was no surprise to see the buffoon brandish a chainsaw at a gathering of "conservative" Trump lovers earlier this week.

Musk, elected by no one, was appointed by his master, Donald Trump, to oversee massive cuts across the federal government.

He's taken to the task with gusto, firing thousands of poor innocents left, right and centre. Not because they did anything wrong, no, they were fired by Musk because, well, he can. It would be hard to unearth a more odious character on Earth than Musk.

Despite all that money he is nothing more than a Trump toady with the intellect of an eight-year-old boy. And classless to boot.

He is doing untold damage to American institutions. Meanwhile, he continues to promote far right lies on his vile X/Twitter platform.

As I watched him wave his chainsaw, I prayed for a malfunction. That he's still here tells you what happened next.

