

IT'S A BUM RAP!



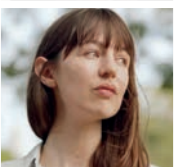
Media sets Heather Humphreys blazing

Profile: FF's John Lahart

Young Blood: Garron Noone

Mary Lou poised for Áras run

Sally Rooney's Irish target



ALSO: Michael D's record sales; Banishing John Banville; Dermot Desmond's interventions; Terry Prone's 'mass grave'; John Byrne's cockroaches; Peter Mandelson's golden touch

BCP

This is marketing communication

Time to Lock-In a Great Deposit Rate?

A 5 year deposit option through BCP

BCP/NatWest 5 Year Deposit (2.55% AER)



Term	5 Years
Interest paid	2.55% at the end of years 1 to 5
Deposit taker	NatWest Markets N.V.
Credit Rating	Fitch AA- (Stable) Moody's A1 (Stable) S&P A (Stable)
Availability	All Investor Types
Minimum Investment	Pensions €50,000 All Other Investors €100,000
Closing Date	28th August 2025

IMPORTANT NOTES: Investments will be held by NatWest Markets N.V. as deposits in an omnibus client asset account in the name of BCP. In the event of any failure by the Bank to meet its liabilities, as investors are not customers of the Bank, BCP will seek the return of funds on behalf of investors. Investors must deal directly with BCP in this instance. AER is Annual Equivalent Rate. Credit ratings correct as of August 2025.

*For further information please
contact your Financial Advisor or
BCP on 01 668 4688 and invest@bcp.ie.*



Warning: If NatWest Markets N.V. were to default, you could lose some or all of your investment and potential interest. Warning: Your investment is not covered by any Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



MEDIA SETS HEATHER BLAZING

THE PUNISHMENT meted out to presidential candidates and the relentless pursuit of any of their flaws and misdeemeanours has become a media trope, but it hardly applies to the lyrical media coverage of the born-again Mother Teresa of Irish politics, Heather Humphreys.

The *Irish Times* got into Clare Daly battle mode last Saturday with a lead, front-page story and lengthy page-two assault on left unity candidate Catherine Connolly's foreign policies.

The *Sindo* followed next day with an OTT effort that tried but failed to depict the articulate Galway woman as afraid to answer political questions.

There then followed the media veneration of Blue Blouse ex-minister Heather in the wake of moves by Simon Harris and Fine Gael to install her as Mairead McGuinness's replacement.

Next day saw the *IT's* Ellen Coyne report in excited tones that "Fine Gael is electrified at the prospect of having a border county Protestant running for the Áras". It also quoted "former editor of the *Church of Ireland Gazette*" (lest anyone forgot the religious angle) councillor Emma Blain's admiration for her "shared-island" outlook.

Heather was also congratulated for what Coyne described as her "prominent role in the 1916 commemorations".

The *Indo* reported Humphreys' explanation for not wanting to run for

Continued on page 4

APOLOGY

THE LAST edition of *The Phoenix* (8/8/2025) carried a story alleging that Russian soldiers recently captured two British Army officers and an intelligence operative in Ukraine. It has since emerged that this story is a fabrication.

We apologise to our readers for failing to recognise that this story could not be stood up. It was partly based around a photo of two British officers, a photo that turned out to be an AI creation.

This is not good enough and we apologise again for publishing this story.

The editor.

WHILE PRESIDENT Michael D Higgins may be annoyed at the *Irish Times* for its hit job last month – when the paper highlighted the degree to which the number of engagements had decreased over his second term – he does have an unmissable outing lined up for next month, where he will also be hoping to shift a few CDs.

On September 5 the *Against All Certainty* hooley will take place in the wonderful surrounds of the National Concert Hall (NCH). It is to be "a celebration of Michael D Higgins – an extraordinary evening of poetry and music".

Of course, *Against All Certainty* is the name of the outgoing president's debut spoken-word album, the release of which is also being celebrated on the night by those who shell out between €35 and €85 for tickets. A good night looks to be on the cards, with Tommy Tiernan in situ as host and performances from the likes of the National Symphony Orchestra, Imelda May and Mary Coughlan.

Given that the album – recorded at Áras an Uachtaráin no less – will be on sale at the event, Goldhawk was unsure if this was a public or private engagement. When queried, the president's office stated that the event is being organised by the NCH in collaboration with Claddagh Records (Higgins's record label) and that his office "has had no direct role in the event".

While Michael D will not receive income from tickets sales for the September 5 event, the album will be on sale for €15 on the night and, apparently, "any royalties from the album will accrue in the normal way". Alas, "it is not anticipated this will amount to a significant sum".

Poor Michael Twee.



Heather Humphreys

DUALTA MOORE'S LESSON

WHILE DUALTA Moore's exciting on-line learning platform, GoConqr, looked set to become a superstar business, judging by the hype surrounding its launch a decade ago, things haven't quite worked out that way.

Back in 2015, a *Business Post* article on Moore's cloud-based educational platform was headlined "E-learning platform plans to Conqr the US". Moore was as excited about his company's potential as the tech journos, telling the *Post*: "Users love how they can take control of their learning, and also the ability to create resources to make learning a core active and responsive process."

And he was clear that international expansion was the order of the day. Judging by his LinkedIn page, things seemed to go pretty well, with GoConqr claiming "over 8 million members and 20 million user generated learning resources". This is all in the pursuit of "encouraging the development of a blended learning experience".

There was plenty of interest in Moore's project and he established a company called Examtime Ltd which, according to the GoConqr website, is the entity that trades as GoConqr.

Alas, it appears that developing a blended learning experience is an expensive business and the latest accounts for Examtime (signed off in May last year) show that accumulated losses at the end of 2023 stood at almost €7m. Moreover, creditors were owed €6.6m, almost all of which was due to a related firm, Software Asset Management International.

The chances of the latter recouping much of this debt look pretty slim, as a creditors' meeting has been called for Examtime this week, at which Padraic Bermingham is to be proposed as liquidator.

The only listed director of Examtime is Moore, who also holds the bulk of the shares.

It looks like he is about to learn an expensive lesson.

CONTENTS

- Affairs of the Nation 3. Fowl Emissions/
Northwind 9. Last Refuge 10. Print 12.
Pillars of Society 14. Young Blood 16.
Scenes/Sport of Kings 17. High Society 18.
Funnies 20. Moneybags 24. Briefs 28.

Published by Penfield Enterprises Ltd.

44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2.

Tel: (01) 661 1062 (No caller I.D.) Fax: (01) 662 4532

Printed by Boylan Web Ltd.

Colour reproduction by Typeform Ltd. ISSN 0790-0562

e-mail: goldhawk@thephoenix.ie



Jan-Dec 2018, 11,710

www.abc.org.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Ireland €89, UK & Eur €99, INTL €125

Tel: (01) 661 1062 Email: admin@thephoenix.ie

Subscribe online: www.thephoenix.ie

All credit cards accepted

www.thephoenix.ie

CORRECTIONS: When errors occur, it is the policy of this publication to have them corrected in the immediately next edition.
Tel (01) 661 1062 or email: goldhawk@thephoenix.ie



"THEY SAY, IN THE FUTURE EVERYONE WILL HAVE THEIR 15 MINUTES OF FLAME!"

Continued from page 3

the presidency last year as due to her support for McGuinness. And Heather said her decision not to run again for the Dáil last November was because she was “burnt out” at the time. After enjoying “a good rest”, however, she now “never felt as good about taking on a challenge”.

Happily for Heather, neither the *Indo* nor the *IT* (the latter quoted her stated desire to spend more time with her grandchildren) had the bad taste to put to Humphreys precisely what she said back then. On October 19 the ex-minister told RTÉ: “I’ll be 65 next year and if I ran again I’d be nearly 70 by the end of the next Dáil term and I’m just not physically able to keep going for that long.”

“I was first elected to the Dáil on the 27th of February 2011 and, from that day to this, I’ve given this job my absolute all – and of course, that’s the only way you can do this job.”

At that time she also ruled herself out of next year’s presidential race, saying it was “not on the cards for me”.

She said she was not considering it for the same reason she decided not to run in the general election. “Unless I can give it 100%, I won’t do it.”

She added: “Politicians are human too, we give all we can for as long as we can but time catches up on us all”.

This Father John Misty-type explanation for resiling from a presidential run last autumn makes no mention of Humphreys’ respect for McGuinness’s presidential ambition. It does, however, place a big question mark over Heather’s “physical ability” to last the political or presidential pace for a five-year Dáil term or a seven-year presidential term.

Another bouquet that has been presented to Heather by a breathless media is that she played a prominent role in the commemorations around 1916.

In 2018, Goldhawk wrote how John Concannon, head of the strategic communications unit, performed well in these events (see *The Phoenix* 23/3/18), saying he received much credit “partly due to... the selection of arts minister Heather Humphreys as the minister nominally in charge.”

“Humphreys revealed an astonishing lack of awareness or interest in 1916 or other events of that period when serving on the Oireachtas committee in charge of the Decade of Centenaries. In the two years and more that she sat on the committee she had little or nothing to say about anything that it considered... Nevertheless, her status as a Protestant and a woman enabled her appointment as the minister in charge of centenary events, a PR wheeze that impressed some people.”

“Humphreys was allowed to take the political credit for events while Concannon was commissioned to do the actual work.”

DISCONTENT IN Fianna Fáil’s parliamentary party about Micheál Martin’s failure to put forward a presidential candidate has seen an alarmingly high majority of TDs, senators and MEPs – including junior minister Niamh Smyth – polling in favour of running a candidate.

This was impudent enough in a party that has until recently been unable to muster a



whimper between them as its leader pays as much attention to members as Donald Trump does to his EU allies. But even more concerning to Martin will have been that several of those polled railed against the party leadership for ignoring his TDs and others, listening only to unelected handlers around him.

It is a long time since anybody dared to cheek the leader’s dictatorial manner but this resentment appears to have grown recently, with an influx of new, young TDs part of the problem.

Now MEP Billy Kelleher has demanded a meeting of the parliamentary party to discuss the presidency. The tetchy Martin is said to be incensed at the temerity of the pygmies he must occasionally deal with when he is not busy defeating Russia in Eastern Europe.

PETER MANDELSON’S GOLDEN TOUCH

CANADIAN COMPANY Dalradian, which is behind a proposed gold mine near Omagh, Co Tyrone, has upped the ante on its planning application that was delayed by an abortive “public local inquiry” organised by the north’s Planning Appeals Commission.

The inquiry, merely a routine consultation procedure for all planning proposals of “regional significance”, collapsed ignominiously on its third day in January when it transpired that the Sinn Féin-

led Department for Infrastructure had not consulted public bodies across the border on the impact of the proposal. Dalradian’s New York-based parent organisation, Orion Resource Partners, was scathing in its criticism of both bodies for the delays, which are throwing the financial viability of the project into doubt.

Keen to protect a \$400m investment since 2009 without a fleck of gold having been produced, the mining company has enlisted

the help of a British government minister, the US consul general in Belfast, and Peter Mandelson, British ambassador to the US since February, to move the project along.

Mandelson, one of the four horsemen of Tony Blair’s New Labour, served in the British cabinet as secretary of state for the north and later as the EU’s trade commissioner.

The ‘Prince of Darkness’ intervened at Dalradian’s behest – after he hosted a convivial St Patrick’s Day breakfast with the company – by writing to the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to encourage a solution to bureaucratic delays, which the company argued were threatening the north’s image as a destination for foreign direct investment.

That Britain’s most senior diplomat should interfere in a planning application in Co Tyrone has to be seen in the context of the current Labour government’s objective of securing preferable trade deals with an increasingly protectionist US and in President Donald Trump’s rebuffed effort to secure mineral resources in a post-conflict Ukraine.

Diplomatic intrigue, however, seems unlikely to dislodge such maladministration. Liz Kimmins’s infrastructure department botched a planning process that has seen an unprecedented 50,000 objections, while party colleague Caoimhe Archibald’s economy department failed to advertise in the *Belfast Gazette* recently awarded prospecting licences for gold and silver.

Archibald, having opposed the same licences as a constituency MLA in 2022, now faces questions as to why she has issued them so urgently and cack-handedly.

In addition, the brutal economics of mining loom large, particularly when an undisclosed portion of the gold that would be mined in Curraghinalt has already been sold to a US mining speculator, Wheaton’s, for \$75 million.

It looks increasingly like the gold will be staying in the Sperrins.



Peter Mandelson

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE’S FEUD SHOCK!

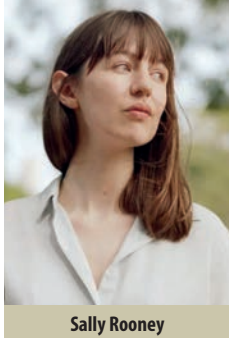


AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

SALLY ROONEY'S
IRISH TARGET

WHILE ARTISTS here and elsewhere have sensed the changing temperature around the Gaza genocide and started to speak up – even Bono and Bob Geldof felt it was okay to jump on the bandwagon – it will not surprise many that it is Sally Rooney who has really upped the ante.

Her provocative article last weekend in the *Irish Times* made it crystal clear where she stands but it will also have made uncomfortable reading for the Micheál Martin *et al.*



Sally Rooney

Rooney's *IT* article was headlined "I Support Palestine Action", which refers to a group that is proscribed as a terrorist organisation across the Irish Sea and which the Irish author has now committed to supporting with "the proceeds of my work", including income from BBC adaptations.

The reaction from the British state has been swift, with Downing Street announcing that anyone who funds the banned Palestine Action risks committing a terrorist offence.

Intriguingly, the scribbler noted: "My books, at least for now, are still published in Britain and are widely available in bookshops and even supermarkets."

This comment ("at least for now") may refer to the possibility that Rooney's next oeuvre might not be allowed to be printed in the UK but maybe Sally is toying with the idea of boycotting UK publishers herself. She has form in this arena, given action taken when her last novel was published.

Back in 2021, when *Beautiful World, Where Are You* came out, Rooney refused to sell the Hebrew translation rights to an Israeli publisher (Mordan) on foot of her "solidarity" with the Palestinian people and a desire to support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

While the attention around Sally's recent interventions have focused on Israel and now the UK, it is Ireland that features rather significantly, as it did again last weekend. The writer put the boot into the Government

SOLUTIONS TO IRISH EDUCATIONAL SHORTGAGES #1



What about making transition year students do all their work experience as teachers

here for remaining silent on Irish citizens being arrested in London for supporting Palestine Action, in contrast to the situation where Irish people are arrested "under authoritarian regimes elsewhere".

She also asked how the state can criticise the ongoing genocide but keeps schtum when "its nearest neighbour funds and supports that genocide".

Last year, when lips were generally buttoned in large sectors of the artistic community, Rooney launched a blistering attack (again in the pages of the *IT*) targeting Joe Biden's policy but also highlighting the Irish Government's two-faced approach of condemning Israel while playing footsie with the US. "This way, our Government can bask in the moral glow of condemning the bombers, while preserving a cosy relationship with those supplying the bombs."

Plus ça change...

JOHN BYRNE'S
COCKROACHES

THE LATEST list of food hygiene infringers produced by the Irish Food Safety Authority (IFSA) got a fair degree of attention last week due to the naming of one of Lidl's Dublin stores (Sallynoggin) as a business where rodent droppings had been found "in multiple areas". Of more interest to Goldhawk was the cockroach problem that landed the Brandon Hotel in Tralee on the naughty list.

The well-regarded property has been operating for decades and today it is Ballsbridge-based moneybags John Byrne who is the most high-profile name associated with the owners of the Kerry operation. He is in the saddle at the property empire built up by his father, John Byrne Sr (who happened to be rather well known to Squire Hockey).

Last year, John Jr continued his ascent up the ladder when assuming the role of chairman of the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (formerly the Turf Club). His old man had also been a big personality in the sport of kings and John Jr has become a well-known breeder, having been closely associated with Ballymadun Stables. He also served on the Curragh committee and was chairman of the project board for the multimillion-euro development of the track.

The minted Byrne has also galloped ahead with the family property group, Santenay Ltd, which is the parent company of a number of entities, including Prince's Investments Ltd (PIL). This latter happens to be the firm that owns the Brandon Hotel and it is listed as the entity on which the IFSA closure order was served last month.

According to the report from the authorised officer, there was "evidence of a significant cockroach infestation at all stages of the life cycle throughout the food premises".

Dead cockroaches were found in the kitchen area, the wash-up areas and the staff canteen, as well as in the restaurant, where live specimens were also observed.

As a result, the Brandon had to close all kitchen areas and the restaurant on July 23, with the order duly lifted on July 25.

PIL is owned by Santenay, which is, in turn, owned by an entity called Claraduff Society Ltd, where John Byrne and his 80-year-old mum, Ciara, hold the positions of secretary and chair respectively.

So just how loaded are the owners of the Brandon Hotel? The 2023 accounts for Santenay reveal a profit for the year of a more than respectable €7.4m, after John and Ciara shared a combined remuneration of just on €800,000. (The profit compares with a hefty €34.5m loss in 2022 following a revaluation of the group's investment properties.)

The rather good news is that, as a result of the surplus recorded in 2023, Santenay ended the year with accumulated profits of no less than €122m. Nice.

"Hotel operations" accounted for €5m of the group's turnover, which relates to the Brandon Hotel. This was up almost €½m on 2022 and no doubt the Byrnes are keeping their fingers crossed that the recent food safety hiccup doesn't impede the Tralee business's momentum.



John Byrne



"It must've happened when I was reading that report about how disinterested we are."

MAKING LAOIS
 GREAT AGAIN

ENORMOUS HYPE surrounded the recent Make Europe Great Again (Mega) conference in Warsaw. It was claimed that attendees came from over 40 countries and three continents, while reports in conservative media asserted that the Mega gathering demonstrated the strength and cohesion of populist right-wing politics in central and eastern Europe. The fact that Irishwoman Elaine Mullally spoke at this, the fifth in a series of Mega conferences, is noteworthy.

Mullally is a native of Portarlington, Laois, where she owns the Clown Around Play Centre. Despite growing a substantial following on X and Facebook in recent years, it wasn't until she resigned in July 2024 as chairperson of Independent Ireland (II) that her significance in Ireland's new right could be gauged.

When it was announced that then newly elected II MEP Ciaran Mullooly had been accepted into the European Parliament's liberal Renew group, Mullally immediately quit II. She posted on X: "I have made the difficult decision to step away from Independent Ireland, as it no longer aligns with my values and principles."

Following Mullally's resignation, on Gript Media podcast *The Week That Really Was*, Sarah Ryan gushed: "A nicer, more competent, more like a high integrity lady you couldn't meet... I'm just such a fan."

Frustrated by the direction II had taken, Mullally decided to run as an Independent in the general election in the three-seater constituency in Laois. In a well-financed



Elaine Mullally

campaign, Mullally's first-preference vote of 2,438 was well shy of the 9,570 quota but a respectable showing nevertheless.

In her Mega speech, Mullally claimed that Ireland was under attack by a tyrannical Government and also stated: "Our own political leaders are seeking to erode democracy, our free speech, our national identity, our culture and our heritage."

She posted pictures from Warsaw of herself with American alt-right figure Jack Posobiec, with the text: "Patriots all over the world are uniting".

Posobiec has been central to spreading the QAnon-linked "Pizzagate" conspiracy theory online, which claims that "Hillary Clinton was running a child sex-trafficking ring out of the basement of Comet Ping Pong, a pizza restaurant in Washington, D.C." Not only did Posobiec make claims online like "#PizzaGate may be bigger than we suspected", he also travelled to the restaurant and only left after police arrived.

Mullally also posed for pictures at Mega with former Brexit Party candidate Jim Ferguson. He controversially chaired a recent meeting of prominent Irish right-wing figures including Independent councillor Malachy Steenson, former leader of Ireland First Derek Blighe and Irish Freedom Party member Michael Leahy, who were seeking to establish a new unified political party.

MI5'S STELLA
 RIMINGTON

MI5 DIRECTOR-GENERAL (1992-96) Dame Stella Rimington, who passed away this month, worked in all three branches of MI5 – counter-espionage, counter-subversion and counter-terrorism – and possessed an intimate knowledge of its most ghastly secrets.

As an intelligence collator in 1969, she was one of the first within MI5 to address the turmoil in the north. In retirement, she achieved success in the UK with her spy novels, which featured spirited MI5 heroine Liz Carlyle battling stereotypical Russian

villains. In 2011, she served as chair of the judges for the Man Booker Prize.

Yet neither her novels nor her sanitised 2001 memoir, *Open Secret*, alluded to MI5's darker truths of which she was familiar.

Her insistence that no one in MI5 ever actively sought to undermine PM Harold Wilson was directly contradicted by cabinet secretary (1973-1979) Lord John Hunt, who



Stella Rimington

acknowledged that rogue elements in MI5 disseminated damaging stories about Wilson's government.

Rimington's career was pock marked by the surveillance of MPs, trade unionists, civil rights groups and journalists.

It is inconceivable that she was unaware of MI5's collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in the north, including the notorious Glennane Gang, responsible for the 1974 bombings in Dublin and Monaghan. The ongoing Operation Denton, tasked with probing this scandal, is emulating Rimington's proclivity for fiction by focusing on a few rogue gang members within the RUC or UDR, while turning a blind eye to those in British intelligence who controlled them.

Consider too the MI5-RUC 'shoot-to-kill' policy investigated by John Stalker, deputy chief constable of Manchester in the mid-1980s. He uncovered MI5's involvement in the murder of individuals such as Michael Tighe and was removed from his probe in 1986 by dirty tricks. These machinations were described in forensic detail last year in Patrick Hillyard's book, *Decades of Deceit: the Stalker Affair and its Legacy*.

It would stretch credulity beyond breaking point to suggest that Rimington rose to become DG without a full briefing on the dirty tricks involved in the framing of Colin Wallace for manslaughter and the smearing of Fred Holroyd as unstable. Both of these men challenged MI5's involvement in illegal activities in the north and campaigned vigorously in the 1980s and 1990s for truth and justice.

Last June the British government appointed Sir Gary Hickinbottom as chair of the Patrick Finucane Inquiry into the 1989 assassination of the Belfast solicitor by acknowledged British agents. The British establishment's tactic of incessant delay has again yielded results: two crucial witnesses – Rimington and her MI5 predecessor, Patrick Walker – are now deceased.

Rimington became one of two deputy DGs of MI5 in 1990. That was the year of the arson attack on Sir John Stephens's office during his investigation into MI5's use of the UDA as proxy assassins.

As DG of MI5 she maintained the atrocious cover-up of the Kincora Boys' Home scandal, piling misery and frustration on the traumatised survivors of child abuse.

Rimington had an opportunity to pen a ground-breaking spy novel, one that explored the complex moral ambiguities inherent in the intelligence world. Instead, she delivered Liz Carlyle and her jolly hockey stick escapades.



The first batch of presidential posters are back from the printers.



QUANTA

CAPITAL

ACCOMMODATION FOR BUSINESS



Reach out to us to see how we can support your business from start-up to scale-up with our flexible business accommodation solutions.

- Industrial Warehouses
- Workshop Spaces
- Office Premises
- Corporate Headquarters
- Business Centres
- Retail Locations

**Flexible Short and Long Term
Leases Available**

Contact Erin Madden
erin.madden@quantaeurope.com

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

GENERAL CLANCY'S
NEAR ABROAD

WHILE DONALD Trump and Vladimir Putin sat down in Alaska and during subsequent meetings and calls with Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European and Nato leaders, the war ground on in Ukraine. There was to be no ceasefire. In the weeks prior to the peace negotiations, EU Military Committee (EUMC) chair (and former Irish Defence Forces chief of staff) General Seán Clancy travelled to Ukraine to meet defence minister Denys Shmyhal and commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces General Oleksandr Syrskiy to discuss the country's "defence capabilities" and "key battlefield needs".

Prior to taking up the top job at the EUMC, Clancy had served in the Irish Defence Forces for 37 years. In his current role, he is tasked with chairing a committee composed of the chiefs of defence of all EU states. Any military operations undertaken by the bloc as part of the Common Security and Defence Policy are guided by the EUMC. The EUMC is also tasked with providing military advice to the EU's Political and Security Committee, which is made up of the EU's ambassadors.

Clancy is supported in this role in Brussels by a team of Irish Defence Forces personnel. In addition to a close protection team assigned to protect Clancy, selected from the Army Ranger Wing, a further 10 Irish troops have been appointed to administrative roles in Brussels. These 10 range from a brigadier general and a lieutenant colonel to experienced non-commissioned soldiers.

As the war has progressed, Ukraine has become more self-reliant in weapons manufacturing. It now produces over half of the arms it requires to fight on, although this is largely financed by the countries' allies.

The EU is also providing substantial

military support to Ukraine. Up to last month, the value of this aid has amounted to €59.6bn. As part of this support, production capacity for ammunitions and missiles in the EU has increased significantly.

While then US president Joe Biden committed over \$65bn in military aid for Ukraine since Russia's invasion, the latest tranche of \$2.5bn, which he committed to supplying in December 2024, has been almost completely drawn down by Ukraine. It looks likely that the Trump administration, which has paused arms transfers a number of times, will now only sell weapons to Ukraine's

European allies, who then would be free to donate them to the war-torn country.

Clancy and Shmyhal discussed in detail the situation on the front lines in Ukraine as well as the protection of Ukraine from air attack and the supply of artillery ammunition and missiles. Ukrainian intelligence shared with Clancy and his team their assessment of Russia's military plans for the months ahead.

Clancy and Shmyhal also discussed the expansion of the EU Military Assistance Mission

(EUMAM), a military training mission set up by the EU to enhance the training and preparation of Ukrainian soldiers for combat. The pair also focussed on the production of interceptor drones, which might act as an alternative to Ukraine's dwindling stock of air defence missile systems.

Shmyhal stated: "We are grateful to the EU for its practical assistance. Together, we are defending not only Ukraine but all of Europe."

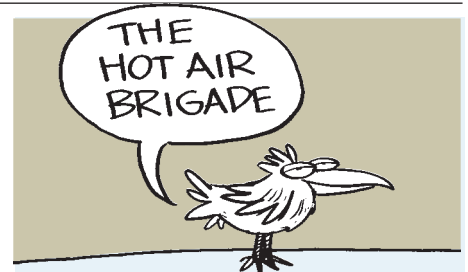
Clancy gave an insight into his assessment of the situation in Ukraine on the Irish Defence Forces podcast in November 2022. At that stage, when discussing the security situation, he explained: "I think the war on Europe, in terms of on the landmass of Europe, perpetrated by Russia on Ukraine, has shifted the model indefinitely."

He also stated: "If anything has come out of this in terms of positivity [it] is the unity within Europe in its response."

It was not a surprise then, in February 2023, with the backing of then Lieutenant General Clancy, that the Government approved the participation of up to 30 Defence Forces' personnel at any given time in EUMAM. Irish troops were then deployed by Clancy to Belgium, Germany and Cyprus to train Ukrainian armed forces.



Seán Clancy



Imagine that. 6% of all our electricity from the sun! And we are only at the beginning of this solar revolution. It is mind-blowing really, if we are honest. **RTE's environment correspondent George Lee has his mind blown, rte.ie**



George Lee

And I pray for the day when I can bring my wife back into our home; my home of 25 years, and stand by the fire and just... it's hard living in hotels for two years. **Michael Flatley on living in Monte Carlo, Sunday Independent Life Magazine**

We are very lucky in the position in Fine Gael that we have more than a number of people who are both affable, amiable, well qualified, you know, politically experienced, so we are in a very, very lucky position. **Regina Doherty on This Week, RTE Radio One**

What I do is a purposeful approach to design, it's never design for design's sake, it's me reflecting on a feeling that I want to talk about and translate into a concept, so I think our authenticity makes us different to other street brands. **Luke Rainey, head designer of fashion brand Dagger, Irish Times**

There's a tribalism to it as well. Like where do you get 32 women who can stand shoulder to shoulder, talk about their achievements, their culture, their identity, their Irishness, the craic.

Kathryn Thomas on the empowerment of the Rose of Tralee, Sunday Independent Life Magazine

Speaking to the *Advertiser*, Ó Cuív said he has been on tour recently at various functions in Belfast, Dublin, Wexford and farther afield, where he says the presidency was mentioned to him in small talk at every turn "except in Wales". **Éamon Ó Cuív on his election changes, Galway Advertiser, submitted by reader**

Hipster priests or rock stars – you wouldn't know who you might meet in Kildare. **Barry Egan, Irish Independent**

He is a multi millionaire who has never forgotten where he came from or his humble beginnings. When Gerry Hutch speaks, he is a bit like Michael O'Leary in some respects, you need to pay attention. He has his finger on the pulse and talks a lot of sense. **John Kierans, Irish Mirror**

Her island-traversing record as communities minister and her prominent role in the 1916 commemorations all now seem like kismet, for the blooming campaign behind the woman who insisted she didn't want to be president. **Ellen Coyne on Heather Humphreys' mooted presidential bid, Irish Times**



Please send suitable contributions to: The Hot Air Brigade, The Phoenix, 44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2 or email: hotair@thephoenix.ie

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



GAS AND MIRRORS

A WHOPPING 40% of global warming to date is due to methane emissions. This gas is extremely potent, with a warming impact per molecule 84 times greater than carbon dioxide

One of the largest sources of methane is ruminants such as cattle and sheep and Ireland's hugely oversized livestock herd is a major source of these greenhouse gases.

The industry has tried to downplay the inconvenient impact of methane, including various efforts at promoting accounting systems that paper over its negative effects.

But the agri-industrial lobby appears to have struck gold, with a brilliant new concept called 'no additional warming'. In simple terms, rich countries like Ireland that are already major methane polluters should be given a free pass on historical emissions and instead



Marie Donnelly

judged only on not doing even more damage.

This patently disingenuous method has been adopted by the Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC), the independent body charged with providing the state with objective, science-based guidance on climate issues. In June, CCAC chair Marie Donnelly told an Oireachtas climate committee: "Our analysis on the agricultural side is a technoeconomic one that is basically the Teagasc marginal abatement cost curve."

In other words, the CCAC depends on Teagasc, an agency dominated by dairy industry interests, for guidance on how to cut emissions from this very industry.

As Goldhawk has previously reported, Teagasc has been repeatedly denounced for its pro-industry stance, including its ill-advised endorsement of the so-called Dublin Declaration, a meat industry PR stunt slammed by international researchers.

The recent publication of bombshell research led by UCG found the new "temperature neutrality" model peddled by the CCAC and Teagasc undermines Ireland's climate ambitions and risks "locking in global hunger".

Lead scientist Dr Colm Duffy said: "It protects the status quo for wealthy countries while placing an unfair burden on poorer, food-insecure countries, limiting their ability to grow their own food systems."

Why would the CCAC undermine its independent status by promoting a

manifestly unjust and flawed methane accounting system? The answer is that it gets its guidance on agri issues from Teagasc, which is an *ex officio* member of the council.

An independent evaluation in 2020 of the CCAC (see *The Phoenix* 6/3/2025) warned that Teagasc's involvement on the CCAC was "blurring the lines between independent expert and stakeholder", and recommended it be removed as a council member. This advice was ignored.

This sleight of hand around how we account for methane will, according to the CCAC, allow Ireland to pump out an extra 9 million tonnes of carbon in the early 2030s. RTÉs George Lee bizarrely presented it as a "big academic row among climate scientists...who are at loggerheads."

This is hardly the case. The CCAC's position is in fact political and has no real backing from actual climate scientists.

THE BUSINESS Post had a front-page hatchet job by former government press secretary and oil exploration industry lobbyist Mandy Johnston on the 'sandal-clad' Greens. Hardly a cliché gets left behind, from the "Land Rover-driving green vote" to green bins and snails. Johnston omitted to mention her own angle as an industry lobbyist, in a piece wittily headed "Time to weed out Green policy". Ironically, her huffy umbrage at progressive environmental policies only serves to underline the enduring success of the last Green-tinted government.



MINORITY RULES OK!

LIKE MANY aspects of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), policing hasn't worked out as intended. Admittedly, policing wasn't part of the GFA text because it would have been a deal breaker so it was left to a Policing Commission chaired by former Conservative politician Chris Patten.

Unionists owned the RUC. It was their police force designed to uphold their unionist sub-polity. At the time of the GFA, it was 90% Protestant. Patten resolved to make the new Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) reflect the population divide. His main way of achieving it was to establish 50:50 recruitment of Catholics and Protestants.

Everyone knew it would take a long time to reach an acceptable balance, which stupidly the Irish government accepted was a unionist majority of about 70:30, a ratio unionists had proposed in 1922. Yet by 1998 the community divide was 60:40 and heading rapidly towards a Catholic majority, which arrived in the 2021 census.

Unionists hated the 50:50 recruitment stipulation. When Labour was defeated

in 2010, the DUP insisted on the new Conservative northern secretary ditching the provision, which he did in 2011. Catholic/nationalist recruitment stalled and then went backwards. In the latest recruitment round, just over 17% were Catholics. Soon there will be a minority policing the majority.

In April, SDLP MP Claire Hanna wrote in the nationalist *Irish News*: "The optimism and possibility of the Patten reform has ebbed away, through neglect by inadequate resourcing, failure to deal with the past, weak authority of the Policing Board and the persistence of operational and cultural relics within the PSNI." That's a pretty damning critique of the PSNI.

She also blamed the failure to deal with legacy as a major reason for the drop off in Catholic recruits. She said legacy was "constantly pulling resources and headlines back to the past... Truth and disclosure are blocked and the hostile environment compounded by PPS [Public Prosecution Service] decisions in relation to Operation Kenova."

The PPS failed to accept any of Kenova's recommendations to prosecute in the notorious British Army spy Stakeknife case.

The culprit is the British government, which has blocked proper examination of the past largely due to the nefarious

role of MI5 and British Army undercover units and their murderous conspiracies with loyalist terrorists, usually sanitised as 'collusion'. Despite promising to repeal the infamous 2023 Legacy and Reconciliation Act, Starmar has done nothing because of opposition in his

party to prosecutions of former soldiers. Labour veterans minister Al Cairns, a former Royal Marines commando, has threatened to resign if veterans are prosecuted for murder.

Hanna said: "The acid test is getting legacy right, based on the needs of victims and survivors, not the protection of perpetrators. The temptation to 'draw a veil' is a mirage."

She called for a review of policing. Some chance.

There has been total silence from Dublin on all of this for years, despite Iveagh House and the Taoiseach's Office knowing well what's been happening.

Figures now suggest Catholics make up 32% of the PSNI and this is falling, but this 32% includes Catholics from England, the Republic and even eastern Europe. PSNI civilian staff are 79% Protestant, while just under 90% of serving officers live in unionist districts and 80% of applicants to the PSNI live in unionist districts.

Not what the GFA intended.



Claire Hanna



MARY LOU POISED TO RUN FOR PARK

A STRONG indication of the decision that the Sinn Féin leadership will likely take in the presidential election came with the circulation of a strong editorial in Belfast Media, the umbrella group composed of *Andersonstown News* and its equivalents in north and south Belfast. This was headlined: “WE SAY: Mary Lou should throw her hat in the ring in race for Áras”.

The editorial argued that SF should not fear the potential setback it might suffer if her election campaign proves a flop as no politician in Ireland is more popular than McDonald.

The real argument, however, is that “President McDonald would give Irish reunification the rocket fuel needed to propel it over the line... the greatest obstacle to a United Ireland is the deep-seated and resolute – some would say visceral – opposition of Taoiseach Micheál Martin to a United Ireland. When the ‘leader’ of ‘Ireland’ refuses to support the reunification of his own country (putting him at odds with his ‘sister party’, the SDLP), there is zero chance that the British, the EU, the Americans or indeed any other nation will back that goal. Yet, what an amazing counterweight to the partitionist Fianna Fáil leader a pro-United Ireland President McDonald would make.”

References are also made to various electoral initiatives that helped to improve the position of Irish nationalists such as Bobby Sands’s victory in Fermanagh-South



Mary Lou McDonald

Tyrone or Gerry Adams’s move south to the Dáil in 2011. But the real argument is that the presidential election offers a golden opportunity to argue for a united Ireland with a captive, state-wide audience.

Even more forceful, in the eyes of SF members north and south, is that while the message is published and posted in Belfastmedia.com, which is not an organ of SF, it does reflect what Belfast republicans and SF have concluded after months of debate about the presidential election.

A clear northern view may not be as conclusive in party decision making as it once was but it still goes a long way, especially when it comes to strategy on a united Ireland. And while Mary Lou’s campaigning prowess is a strong card in this case, some also argue that, if not the party



Catherine Connolly

leader, another party personality should run simply to put the united Ireland argument in the mainstream.

The arguments against running Mary Lou are several. One is that she may not trigger quite the same response as the northern membership

believes and the party could suffer a bad electoral and demoralising defeat. Two is that it will be hard for Mary Lou to simply walk back into the leadership of SF should she have a bad outing. Certainly, coming third behind the left unity candidate, Catherine Connolly – not entirely out of the question – would have a negative effect on more than one level.

Finally, there is the two-fingered signal that it would be seen as by many in and outside of SF if the party was to go it alone when three other parties, relatively small as they are, have organised a broad left platform for Connolly that could have a real chance of winning the presidency. Even more important is that the unity between the Social Democrats, People Before Profit and Labour was a sign that collective action by the opposition, or the left part of it, could look forward to a similar exercise that could defeat the Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael coalition in a general election.

If these groups can’t even coalesce on a presidential campaign, what hope is there for unity at a more crucial general election? This is the question that many on the left of SF

have put in the party consultations in recent months. In fact, this argument was making a lot of ground in the south but the ‘letter from Belfast’ has pushed back hard against this line.

So too has a post on Facebook by southern-based Seán Brady, an ex-SF director of publicity and former editor of *An Phoblacht*. His post last week, which like the Belfast message was read avidly by SF members, argued: “This is a moment that should not be wasted. This is the time to talk, plan and act for Irish reunification. The pace of change means the next seven years could be the most important in generations. We need a President who will speak proudly for unity, inspire people north and south, and lead the conversation. Electing someone who hasn’t thought deeply about Irish unity – or won’t champion it – would be a step backwards we can’t afford.”

This last sentence reflects the fact that SF members are familiar with the taunt that Connolly has not devoted much time or effort in her long political career to supporting a united Ireland. Her defenders say that she has signed up to a united Ireland position on her united presidential platform.

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD ITEM

THE GRAND old gentleman of the Irish left, the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI), has undergone much in its 100-plus years of existence, with attacks from within and without, and in recent years it has been eclipsed by republicans and Trotskyist groups. Recently, internal wranglings have involved splits over the national question and ultra-leftist revisions but the latest row is perhaps the deadliest as it is founded on a charge of rampant misogyny.

According to a group of members, mainly but not exclusively female, a non-member

of the party complained that she was the subject of “inappropriate behaviour” by a young, Dublin-based member, resulting in his suspension from the party while the matter was investigated. The suspended member appealed his

suspension and a majority of the national executive committee agreed with his appeal. This enraged those who supported the complainant and they demanded that the person charged with misbehaviour be expelled.

The women claim that the old-guard members that control the leadership then closed ranks and began to cast doubt on the validity of the complaint and also on the character of the complainant. The women also allege that the young accused member was being coached and that a plot was under way whereby members were collaborating with the defence to ensure an acquittal.

As the split deepened and sharpened, as



Mick O'Riordan



AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

these things do, three women and a male party member resigned over the issue. They were followed by another female member of the officer board of the party. All the resignations were of long-standing senior party members and there is now not a single woman left in the party leadership.

The CPI lost its youth wing, the Connolly Youth Movement, four years ago in another faction fight and there have been multiple disputes with the northern membership amid name calling such as 'red unionists' and 'King Billy communists'. There has even been a Cork faction uniting with Belfast members against those f**kers in Dublin, while one of the latter gloried for a while in the nickname 'the Georgian', which was bestowed on him by revisionist elements.

What would James Connolly or CPI legend Mick O'Riordan make of all this?

UNIONS SIPTU and the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) have for several years now exhorted successive transport ministers to create a dedicated transport police to halt the rising tide of assaults on their members. NBRU assistant general secretary Tom O'Connor stated recently that no less than five ministers – Leo Varadkar, Paschal Donohoe, Shane Ross, Eamon Ryan and current incumbent Darragh O'Brien – have talked of transport police in the last decade but no such force has materialised. But it is Micheál Martin as Taoiseach who is the real culprit.



"It may be the case that the Presidential election campaign hasn't caught fire just yet."

Just a fortnight before last November's general election, Martin gave a five-page interview to the Irish Mail on Sunday in which law and order was the main thrust and a transport police was the single most important proposal.

Martin's electoral assault was fierce – with then justice minister Helen McEntee the main target – and he declared that opposition to such a force from Garda commissioner Drew Harris would not stop him from creating such an entity.

That was last October, when Martin and Fianna Fáil were exploiting law-and-order concerns to outflank their coalition 'partners', Fine Gael.

Only those with short memories would

have forgotten what happened in the Seanad nearly two years before that. At that time, a motion to create a dedicated transport police service was moved by FF senator Mary Fitzpatrick with the support of FG, the Greens and Independents, thereby ensuring its passage. Or so it appeared.

But as the debate concluded and senators prepared to vote, the then junior justice minister, James Browne, hastily entered the chamber to inform members that, unfortunately, the "independent" Garda commissioner, Harris, did not intend to create such a service at this time.

Browne did this on behalf of the government, and his leader and then tánaiste, Martin.

IS FF LEADERSHIP BACKING JACK CHAMBERS?

IS MICHEÁL MARTIN really intent on retiring as Taoiseach and Fianna Fáil leader in September and then going for the presidency? That's the forecast of *Irish Mail on Sunday* political editor John Lee, whose paper seems to have also decided who is going to replace him as leader of the country and the party. And it's definitely not the man that almost everyone else believes is on course to be the next leader, justice minister Jim O'Callaghan. Instead, the *Mail* is backing public expenditure minister Jack Chambers and in recent weeks has claimed that Jack is a virtual shoe-in as next leader of the party.

On July 20 Lee gave his end-of-term marks to the 15 Cabinet members, awarding eight out of 10 to Jack (joint highest with Jennifer Carroll MacNeill) and predicting that he would be the next leader if Martin left in September. Bizarrely, Lee said that "Chambers's temperament is positively Zenlike", a quality that would be needed in the face of squalls to come in the public finances. Really?

During an RTÉ *Claire Byrne Live* debate on climate change in the 2020 election Jack lost his cool, provoking much hostile reaction from listeners. Shortly afterwards, on appointment as government chief whip, he managed to alienate practically every other party whip at their first meeting of that Dáil – a meeting normally regarded as the most collegial of any Dáil committee meeting.

At last year's election Chambers, as director of election, engaged in an unedifying verbal debate with Fine Gael's discreet

minister, Hildegard Naughton, while Sinn Féin's Pearse Doherty looked on with a wide grin on his face. Little was seen of FF's director of elections for much of the election campaign after this performance.

Lee finished his school report on young Chambers by saying that, if "the party has not lost its political sense, Chambers is the next leader".



Jack Chambers



Jim O'Callaghan

Lee also argued that "Martin has never rated O'Callaghan" – a more accurate read would be that Martin has never trusted O'Callaghan as he has been the main leadership challenger for five years or more. Lee gave the justice minister three marks out of 10, the second lowest of the 15 ministers and just one mark more than his predecessor as justice minister, Helen McEntee.

A week later Lee interviewed the man he predicted is on course to become taoiseach and, in a most benign interview, showed proper respect by not cross-examining him about Government economic policies, public

spending or the next budget.

Two weeks later, the *Mail's* political columnist, John Drennan, followed with an article dissecting O'Callaghan "as he comes under pressure to address deepening crises in his department". Worse was the citing by Drennan of a remark by an anonymous FF cabinet 'colleague' that O'Callaghan was like Darragh O'Brien, with lots of

announcements, photos and the like, but that "no-one is quite sure as to whether he is actually achieving anything".

As Goldhawk noted (see *The Phoenix* 30/5/25), the perception in the FF parliamentary party post election is that Jim is to be the next party leader but that Martin was anxious not to rubber stamp this succession result in advance or at the time of his retirement. O'Callaghan as the newly anointed successor was a scenario created largely by Martin's heavy reliance on the senior counsel as his second-in-command during a general election campaign that threw most of his mediocre frontbench into sharp relief. O'Callaghan came out of this smelling roses; Chambers, previously seen by some as the dauphin and, despite his titles as finance minister and director of elections, emerged with less fragrance.

The real question now is whether the veritable campaign against O'Callaghan and pro Chambers is being stimulated by Martin's people or those of Chambers – or both. And is it really credible that Martin is planning to go early, be it to the Áras or some EU sinecure under his close colleague, EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen?



IRISH MEDIA AND GAZA

A MOST civilised discourse may have been anticipated by *Sindo* readers recently who looked at the headline “Letter from Jerusalem” over an article written by Tsela Rubel, described by the newspaper as “a historian”.

An Israeli liberal, Rubel explained that

“Israeli reaction to the international response ranges from frustration to anger and bafflement” and concluded with a depiction of the brutal behaviour of Hamas on October 7 and since.

Rubel’s description as “a historian” is the truth but not quite the whole truth. Her full title is ‘general secretary of the Historical Society of Israel’.

Alison O’Connor, a columnist for the Irish edition of the *Sunday Times*, has been less liberal than Rubel. When the Government seemed set to abandon the Occupied Territories Bill (OTB) last February, Ali recognised the realpolitik here, saying that Ireland had to think of the Irish economy as it depends hugely on US investment. Showing remarkable insight into the Middle East conflict on every level, she told readers that instead: “Our government is better placed to prioritise the release of remaining hostages, the maintaining of the ceasefire, increasing humanitarian aid and, crucially, the rebuilding of Gaza.” Really?

Unfortunately, Ireland has not asserted



Alison O'Connor

itself since this visionary text was penned. Thus, the hostages have not been released, the ceasefire has not been maintained, aid has been denied to the point of famine and Gaza is still a pile of rubble.

However, O’Connor saved her best line till last, asking how Irish people felt about the fact that 44% of the “almost 960” Palestinians seeking international protection in Ireland last year were, wait for it... “young men”.

In May, as Israeli brutality ratcheted up, O’Connor did a U-turn but wrote as if she had always been on the side of Palestinians. Talking of Government statements, she referred to how “we” had called out Israel’s behaviour (“we”?) and referred to “our early stance” (“our” stance?).

Alison also wondered aloud if powerful people internationally are now concerned how their inaction will be viewed in the future? Again, such insight, despite the irony gap.

This month Ali again pivoted and she worried that the OTB could cause “serious damage to the Irish-US relationship”. She added: “What’s in our hearts clearly matters but we also need to engage our heads to do what is most effective and not self-harming.”

The *Irish Times* rarely resorts to such blunt instruments when trying to get with the flow of an outraged citizenry and its recent hand-wringing rhetoric, under the heading “This war must be brought to an end”, was a classic of the genre. A list of Israeli depravities in the editorial referred also to Germany’s suspension of arms supplies and the need for the international community to take stronger action to end the war. But Ireland’s paper of reference forgot to even mention, much less promote the single, concrete action at home that has been stalled by government for years, the OTB.

RTÉ’s sense of irony was also evident the day after five Al Jazeera journalists were murdered by Israeli forces with an unflattering critique of the station, which was depicted as a creature of Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood (to whom it allegedly gave “unprecedented airtime”) and Hamas, while conceding that it became a rival to a biased western media in the region. The lengthy article was published the same day as RTÉ journalists joined with other protesters at the murder of journalists in Dublin and Derry.

TERRY PRONE’S ‘MASS GRAVE’

THE IRISH edition of the *Sunday Times* recently focused on the discovery in the past few years of another “mass grave”, which is adjacent to the site where nearly 800 infants were buried in a septic tank at the former Bons Secours mother and baby home in Tuam.

The grave – containing 48 circa bodies, including 17 children and two infants – was unearthed in 2012. Further research by the Eachtra Archeological Projects, however, has since provided much detailed information about the lives and deaths of those buried there who, it turns out, are famine victims.

This would appear to confirm, in part at least, PR guru Terry Prone’s response to documentary maker Saskia Weber when she asked if she

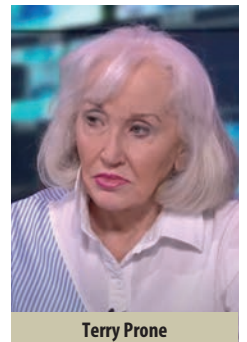
could interview Sr Marie Ryan of the Bons Secours nuns for a programme she was planning to make in 2014 for *France 2*, a flagship programme of France Televisions.

Prone (in) famously advised Weber: “If you come here, you’ll find no mass grave, no evidence that children were ever so buried and a local police force casting their eyes to heaven and saying ‘Yeah, a few bones were found – but this was an area where Famine victims were buried. So?’”

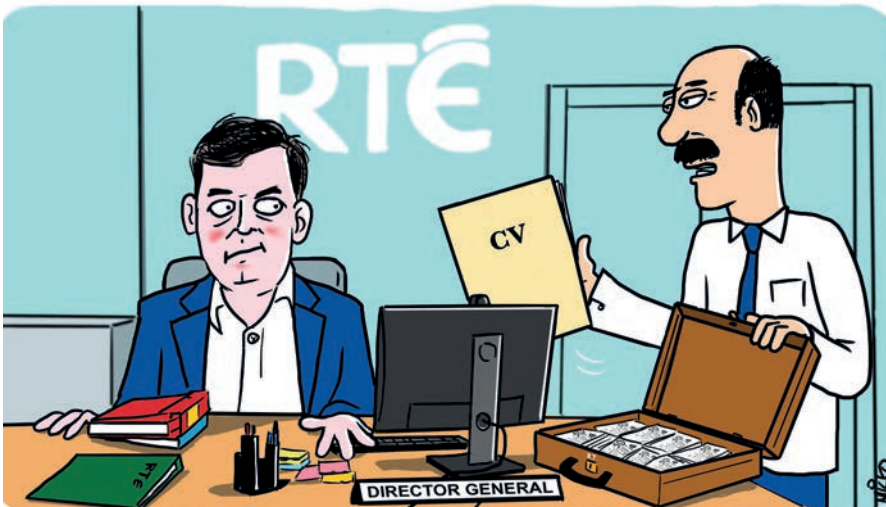
“Several international TV stations have aborted their plans to make documentaries because, essentially, all that can be said is ‘Ireland in the first half of the 20th century was a moralistic, inward-looking, anti-feminist country of exaggerated religiosity’ – which most of us knew already.”

This somewhat flippant and misleading retort provoked an angry response from various quarters but Prone can claim that she had referred to something that existed – even if she had given the wrong impression, ie that it was the Great Hunger, not the mother and baby home regime, that was the root of the problem.

In any case, the following year saw the government institute The Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation. Six years later the commission concluded that 9,000 children – one in seven of those born in the institutions covered by the commission’s terms of reference – had died in the mother and baby homes between 1922 and 1998, double the rate of infant mortality in the general population.



Terry Prone



“Tubridy left this in with the money!”

GOLDHAWK 

goldhawk@thephoenix.ie
tel: 01 661 1062
NO CALLER I.D.

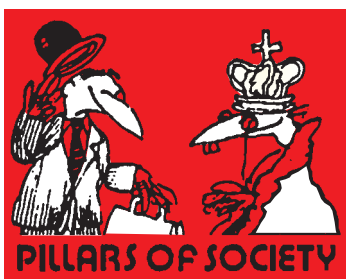
Keep Him Informed

A woman with long blonde hair is lying back in a wicker chair, smiling and stretching her arms above her head. She is wearing a white top and blue jeans. The chair has thick beige cushions. The background is a bright, sunlit room with large windows.

tune in...
relax

sunshine106.8

dublin's easy place to relax



John Lahart

HARDLY THE most publicly contentious or outspoken of backbench TDs, Fianna Fáil's John Lahart was chosen to chair the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs, which involved him overseeing its recently published report on the Occupied Territories Bill (OTB). He must have been highly thought of by party leader Micheál Martin, who has been seen by Palestinian activists as safely tucked into the pocket of the stridently pro-Israeli EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen. But Lahart, while now seen as a loyal, even compliant servant of the party leader and Taoiseach, was not always at one with Martin and he has made some rather untimely political choices about the party leadership in recent years. Lahart would, naturally, be keen to produce a report on the OTB that would upset as few people as possible on this highly challenging issue. Has he succeeded?

The rise of psychotherapist Lahart from backroom adviser for former junior minister Tom Kitt in the 1990s and noughties to South Dublin county councillor for 17 years to 2016, eventually saw him win a Dáil seat in Dublin South-West in 2016. It was shortly after this that his political troubles began.

With FF trying hard to recover from the electoral catastrophe of 2011, Dublin became even more important than usual at the 2016 general election with its high number of seats and with the party possessing not one in the capital city.

Lahart was one of the six newly elected FF TDs as a recovery of sorts began that year and Martin put him on the front bench as spokesperson for Dublin. But despite this grandiose title Lahart failed, like many other party TDs, to make much of an impact as FF adopted the then controversial confidence and supply (C&S) agreement, with Fine Gael in benign opposition to the government.

Come the 2020 general election and Jim O'Callaghan, formerly Martin's right hand man – already excluded from Martin's leadership circles by 2018 because he disagreed with continuation of the C&S policy – had emerged as the unofficial opposition within FF to Martin's

leadership. With Martin under serious pressure after a poor general election, O'Callaghan and others denounced his refusal to hold talks with Sinn Féin, if only because it removed any vestige of a coalition fall-back position in talks with FG.

Surprising many, Lahart was very vocal in expressing the same argument against Martin at a stormy parliamentary party meeting during this period.

From then until 2023 Lahart was part of a group around O'Callaghan that wanted to unseat Martin. By then, however, the 'payroll' vote (ministers, junior ministers and chairs of Oireachtas committees) composed a sizeable chunk of a depleted parliamentary party as against a group of similar size around O'Callaghan and a group of frightened backbenchers holding the balance of power. These latter TDs blamed

O'Callaghan for not going bald headed for the leadership, while the rebels responded that only the paralysed backbench TDs were keeping Martin in power.

Meanwhile, Lahart crept silently away from the bad company around O'Callaghan and became a loyal member of Martin's team. Lahart may have thought he was going to be rewarded for defecting a second time – this time in a return to Martin's camp – in the new, enlarged parliamentary party following the 2024 election and others also believed the Dublin

spokesperson would become a junior minister. But Lahart had clearly not learned the rules of engagement in the most successful political party (until recently) in the history of the state – that loyalty to the leader is a cardinal principle.

Martin gave Lahart a bronze medal in the form of the foreign affairs committee chair in an indication that the former now had the measure of his rebel TD.

Lahart had made the classic, political mistake of alienating both sides in the ongoing leadership contest between Martin and O'Callaghan. Even worse, with the two big beasts striking a Blair-Brown accord just before last year's general election (O'Callaghan will be hoping this 'deal' does not adhere precisely to the original script), Lahart does not now enjoy the patronage of either the present or likely future leader of the party. This is not an enviable position for an ambitious 65-year-old politician.

ISRAEL FRIENDSHIP GROUP

It may be that Lahart's 'gift' as chair of the foreign affairs committee reflects the new balance of power in the FF parliamentary party which, incidentally, now has 10 extra TDs, but Lahart would have recommended himself to Martin on another level.

The Dublin South-West TD joined the Ireland-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group in the last Dáil – the only FF TD, along with five party senators, to do so.

Lahart told *The Phoenix* that he had resigned from the Israeli friendship group last year, saying in his resignation statement: "My reason for doing so is that the term 'Friendship Group' is misleading, and I am conscious that my membership of this group has been taken – by some – to suggest support for the Netanyahu government and the appalling atrocities it has conducted daily in Gaza and the West Bank. Nothing could be further from the truth."

"I utterly and unequivocally condemn the continuing and relentless onslaught on Palestinian civilians at the hands of the Israeli Defence Forces. I have also been steadfast in my condemnation of the senseless slaughter and provocation of innocent Israelis and the taking of hostages on the 7th of October. This is clear from my own contribution in the Dáil on the matter."

Lahart is a trained teacher and would surely agree that, when it comes to the political bent of the Ireland-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group, the clue is in the name. Goldhawk thought it would be interesting to establish precisely at what point in Israel's escalating slaughter and genocide of Palestinians Lahart



AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

left the 'Israel friendship' group but he declined to say when asked.

The other piece in this political jigsaw is that, in the latest and bloodiest round of Israel's decades-long war against the Palestinians, Martin has been regarded as less sympathetic to the latter than FG leaders Leo Varadkar and Simon Harris. At the same time, the diligent Lahart, whatever his political views, is a good choice to handle the divisive players in this political war game being played out in front of an outraged Irish electorate.

By most accounts, Lahart was an accomplished chair of a most difficult project and while there were several arguments on the margins of the committee's work, these were not about fundamentals, focusing instead on issues such as the number and outlook of witnesses/speakers addressing the committee. Certainly, when it came to representative groups the line-up of two speakers from the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland, two from the Ireland Israel alliance, one from business group IBEC and two each from the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Sadaka – Ireland Palestine Alliance is unrepresentative of public opinion.

OTB REPORT

However, the tone of the dialogue and the precise recommendations of the committee's report reflects Irish political opinion to a large extent. More to the point, it ensures that the report does not emerge bereft of any meaning as it insists that prohibition of imports from the occupied territories should include services. Even the foreign affairs department's legal adviser felt compelled to warn the committee that compliance with the 2024 International Court of Justice opinion would be only "partial" if services were excluded.

The report recommends that the bill proceed and that it include the banning of services; and to give businesses clarity, the legislation should be modelled on measures introduced against Russia in 2014.

So far, so good. But a number of other apparently innocuous recommendations and statements are contained in the report that could, if the Government so decided, be used to obstruct the passage of the bill or render it ineffective. In his introduction to the report, Lahart, as chairman, noted the recommendation "that the Government undertake efforts to establish and publish a range of scenarios on the potential repercussions of the measure in terms of both international relations and economic effects and to comprehensively engage with business".

This stipulation can be read in two different ways. First, as a means of combatting some of the more lurid descriptions from Israel, the US and other

supporters of Ireland's alleged antisemitic intent to damage the Israeli economy, not to mention the Irish economy.

The other interpretation is that outlining the 'repercussions' and 'economic effects' is simply to underline the real argument against the bill. That argument is not a moral argument and is presented as simply an unfortunate fact of economic, global life – namely, that the US has the clout to punish

the Irish economy if we step out of line. It is also the most powerful argument as Messrs Martin and, to a lesser extent, foreign minister and Tánaiste Simon Harris are well aware.

AG ADVICE

The other recommendation is that the advice of the Attorney General be expedited so that the OTB can be advanced as a matter of urgency. This demand for swiftly delivered advice from AG Rossa Fanning is repeated several times and, early on in his introduction to the report, Lahart bemoans the fact that "the Committee had to proceed without the advice of the Attorney General with regard to the inclusion of services in the Bill proper".

Hopefully, this anxiety in the report as a whole about the urgent need for the AG's advice does not indicate a hope that Fanning will, like his predecessor, Séamus Woulfe, rule that the OTB would conflict with EU law.

There was a lengthy section in the report on the committee's debate about this potential conflict, with considered opinion from international lawyers

effectively demolishing this view. Will Fanning be expected to perform as the Government's Sixth Cavalry here if and when General Martin makes his last stand against the bill?

An interesting remark in Lahart's introduction went as follows: "As Chair, I am also conscious of the different roles and responsibilities of parliamentary committees and government. Government has access to more information and carries heavier burdens in areas of governance, than a parliamentary committee."

Indeed, government has much greater access to information and resources than a Dáil committee. How strange then that a small Oireachtas committee, with no legal employees or advice of its own, should be able to press ahead with its own legal analysis and recommend that the bill, including measures on services, be progressed – and all this in a matter of weeks. Meanwhile the AG's well-staffed office is still grappling with this issue nearly a year after Government asked the AG to consider – again – whether the OTB was compliant with EU law.

It is now over five years since vague arguments about EU law disbarring the bill were used to delay its passage.



Micheál Martin



Ursula von der Leyen



LOOKING FOR A FIGHT

ATHY DISTRICT Court heard the case of a man charged with public intoxication and engaging in threatening and abusive behaviour following an incident at his address on December 30. Garda Matthew McGrath said officers were called to a disturbance at the Crescent, Ballylinan, Laois. When they arrived they found 25-year-old William Donoghue in a heavily intoxicated state. According to McGrath, the defendant fled the scene before promptly returning and becoming extremely aggressive. McGrath told the court that Donoghue "wanted to have a fight with me and my colleague", telling them: "I could take the pair of ye." Judge Desmond Zaidan imposed a four-month sentence for public intoxication, saying: "I've been good to him." This was amended to three months after Donoghue's solicitor reminded Judge Zaidan that the maximum sentence for public intoxication was 90 days. *Laois Nationalist*

COMMISERATIONS

A TIKTOKER with 22,000 followers appeared before Portlaoise District Court, on foot of a bench warrant, charged with public intoxication and engaging in threatening and abusive behaviour. In the early hours of December 27, gardaí responded to a disturbance outside the defendant's address at Lansdowne Court, Portarlinton. The officers encountered Laura Dunne in an agitated state. According to Sgt JJ Kirby, Dunne was "kicking and screaming" calling gardaí "bastards". She declared: "You can't arrest me." Defence solicitor Philip Meagher said that, on the date in question, friends of his client had arrived at her house with alcohol to commiserate following the death of a family pet. Sgt Kirby added that once Dunne sobered up following the incident, she was "okay". Dunne pleaded guilty to the charges and received two-month sentences for each, suspended for two years. *Carlow Nationalist*

'SHOWER OF LATCHICOS'

A WOMAN in her 70s accused of making a false report to gardaí and engaging in threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour has had the charges dismissed at a sitting of Belmullet District Court. Alice Keane, of Shranamonnragh, Ballycroy, called gardaí on June 17, 2024, to complain that a farmer's cattle had damaged turf on her bog. Keane alleged that the officers who came to her home failed to take her seriously and called her "thick and stupid", a claim denied by Garda Ian Kelly. Garda Kelly, meanwhile, alleged that Keane was abusive to him and his colleague, saying: "Fuck off you shower of latchicos. Kiss my arse." He also alleges she told them: "Ye will get what's coming to you." The officers said they failed to spot any damage to the bog, while Keane maintained they looked in the wrong place. Judge Alan Mitchell said the incident was a "clear case of communication breakdown" and dismissed the case. *Western People, submitted by reader*

• Suitable contributions to: *The Phoenix*, 44 Lower Baggot St, D2, or email bogcuttings@thephoenix.ie



Garron Noone

MUSICIAN, COMEDIAN and social media content creator Garron Noone caused a stir recently when he announced his decision to cancel his nationwide tour and several dates in the US, following a few challenging months. Scrapping the tour is likely to disappoint followers of Noone, who is known for his whimsical commentary and customary video sign-off catchphrase: "Follow me, I'm delicious."

Sadly for the 31-year-old Mayo man, who is generally considered likeable and a tad eccentric, things went wrong a few months ago when remarks he made on social media about immigration were considered to be not quite as appetising.

With 2.2m followers on Instagram and 2.1m on TikTok, Noone has a massive following and generally posts about pressing issues such as the rising cost of Freddo chocolate bars and whether chocolate digestives should be eaten upside down. Back in March, however, he strayed into the area of social commentary and had to temporarily deactivate his social media accounts after a video he posted blew up in his face. Noone should have known things had taken quite the wrong turn when right-wing outlet *Gript* issued an op-ed in his defence, entitled: "The vile attempt to cancel Garron Noone".

The issue occurred following the controversy generated by Conor McGregor's White House meeting with Donald Trump, during which the fighter declared that the "illegal immigration racket is running ravage [sic] on the country".

Telling his followers that he had been asked to comment on the issue, Noone weighed into the debate by declaring that "there absolutely is an immigration issue in Ireland".

He went on to say: "The systems that we have in place are being taken advantage of, and that is plain to see, and the Government continually does not allow people to express their concerns about that."

Noone argued that Irish towns and cities were becoming much less safe "not just because of immigration, there's a lot of factors to that" and he also said that, if you increase people's distrust in the Government, you "push people towards racism and extremism".

While some people thought his comments were measured and reasonable, others were appalled that someone with his huge following was adding fuel to the already incendiary debate on immigration.

Suggesting that "the systems we have in place are being taken advantage of" was not considered to be helpful by various factions, given the recent upsurge in racism and violence.

The drama around Noone's comments caused him to be 'cancelled' by those on the left and he deactivated his social media accounts due to the criticism that came his way. A few days later, Noone returned to social media to say he stood by his first video and he was "not anti-immigration" and it was "absolutely crazy to think that".

Saying that he was clarifying any points that were taken up differently to how he meant them, Noone admitted that he could have communicated his points better as they were "too open" to misinterpretation.

However, his protests weren't helped by finding himself in the unenviable position of being championed by a number of high-profile anti-immigration figures associated with the far-right, including the less-than-delicious mouthpiece Katie Hopkins and Tristan Tate, brother of misogynist influencer Andrew Tate.



Garron Noone

Hopkins's contribution to the debacle came via a post on X: "Don't apologise. Don't look back. The crowds are in advance of you, cheering you on. You ARE delicious. Katie."

While being bracketed in the same wheelhouse as McGregor, Hopkins and Tate would sound the death knell for many people's careers, a swathe of celebrities and politicians rushed to defend Noone, including singer Imelda May, Sinn Féin TD David Cullinane and Aontú TD Peadar Kirby.

As he made them, Noone predicted that his comments might be misconstrued, which caused Maria Maynes from *Gript* to declare that "the mob was warming up" for the comedian's impending cancellation.

Speaking on Newstalk, Noone said he deactivated his accounts as he received "hundreds of messages" quoting things he had never actually said and linking him to people he didn't want to be "associated with".

He told the *Indo* that he "lost a lot of spon-

sors" and didn't leave his house for a week.

Noone was relatively unknown prior to the pandemic. The eldest of four, he grew up in Ballina and spent a lot of time on the sheep farm owned by his mother's family. He dropped out of school at 15 – which he later said was due to anxiety and agoraphobia – and attended Youthreach, which provides personal development and training guidance for 16-20 year olds who left school early.

"I'm quite passionate about helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have dropped out of school. That's the background I came from," he told the *Irish Farmers Journal*.

His mum could play guitar and his dad was in an Elvis tribute band and Noone began playing music in pubs, combining it with working in a fuel card company, a phone shop and as a salesman for a software company. He uploaded music tutorials on social media at the start of the pandemic, which led to people asking him for lessons and a UK university inviting him to teach modules on a master's course.

When he started posting more light-hearted videos, his star ascended and he was named one of Ireland's "break-through stars" for 2023 on TikTok. He appeared on BBC show *Big Comic Energy*, which went well but, so far, this doesn't appear to have led to more work from Auntie.

He launched his own podcast, *Listen, I'm Delicious*, in October last year, which is structured around the theme of guests' favourite foods and snacks.

Some say there is no such thing as bad publicity and Noone's following on TikTok went from 1.7m to 2.2m in the wake of the 'trouble'.

The comedian has spoken about experiencing anxiety, panic attacks and agoraphobia, and the rescheduling of his tour dates to 2026 centres relates to issues he dealt with in the past. This meant that he had to cancel his appearances at various Irish venues as well as Paddy Reilly's in New York City, the Milwaukee Irish Fest, Chicago's Gaelic Park Irish Fest and McGonagle's Pub in Boston.

"It has gotten to a point where I really need to put all of my energy into getting back on track," he told followers.

Noone has learned the hard way that he is better off confining his material to light-hearted topics to avoid causing a social media storm. While the cancellation of his tour is obviously disappointing, the good news is that he is getting to do some sponsored content for brands such as Apache Pizza, IKEA, Uber Eats and Fit Foods.

As a consolation prize, this must be rather delicious.



BANISHING BANVILLE

POOR OLD **Jawn Banville** must be wondering what he did wrong when he found himself out in the cold earlier this month after the *Sunday Times* chose its “pick of the top British and Irish fiction of the past 25 years”.

Banville has, of course, been one of the truly dominant Irish novelists of recent decades, managing to attract critical acclaim and a high profile, eg courtesy of his 2005 Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Sea*. John Boy has also regularly cropped up on lists of the bookies’ favourite to pick up the all important Nobel Prize in Literature, which, indeed, he thought he had done in 2019, only to find it was a dreadfully cruel hoax – much to the amusement of his various detractors.

In more recent years, however, Banville’s name has failed to concern the bookmakers, while **Sebastian Barry**, for example, has been increasingly prominent. (He is currently ranking around 25/1 for the 2025 gong, with **Anne Carson**, **Haruki Murakami** and **Can Xue** among the runners and riders with the shortest odds.)

In the case of the ST, the “top British and Irish fiction” of the last quarter of a century was selected by the paper’s literary editor, **Robbie Millen**, along with chief literary critic **Johanna Thomas-Corr**, and **Ceci Brown-ing** and **Laura Hackett**, assistant literary editor and deputy books editor respectively.

Could it be that the eminent Banville’s decision to sup at the trough of commercial detective/crime fiction has not gone down particularly well among the worthies who decide who is in and who is out when it comes to proper literary accolades?

It was in 2006, the year after his Booker scoop, that Banville started churning out crime fic-

tion – beginning with *Christine Falls*, under the pen name of Benjamin Black. In his familiar self-deprecating way, the novelist has described these bukes (many of which are set in the dreary 1950s and feature the ‘hero’ detective Quirke) as being “cheap fiction” and the trouble is that many others agree.

Clearly, JB cleaned up with this rather lucrative side gig (although in recent years it has increasingly become his bread and butter) with the moolah boosted by assorted TV adaptations. The last few page-turners have even boasted Banville’s real name, but a so-called alternative history/crime novel, *The Secret*

Guests, was attributed to one BW Black. That risible effort was based around the wartime evacuation of young British princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, to Co Tipperary to escape the threats of WWII’s London Blitz.

Not surprisingly, the novel failed to make the ST’s list of top-notch fiction but what might interest Banville is that, of the 25 authors whose work did feature, almost 30% were Irish scribblers.



John Banville

Colm Tóibín (Brooklyn) of course made the cut, as did **Sebastian Barry** (*Day Without End*). Then there was **Anne Enright** (*The Green Road*), **Sally Rooney** (*Conversations With Friends*), **Anna Burns** (*Milkman*), **Eimear McBride** (*A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*) and **Paul Murray** (*The Bee Sting*).

At least Banville can check his bank balance for solace.

THE EDINBURGH Fringe is over for this year and a notable result was Dan Colley’s Lost Lear picking up one of the Scotsman Fringe First awards.

The show (a “remix” of Shakespeare’s play) debuted in Ireland in 2022 when it was produced by the Riverbank Arts Centre and the Mermaid Arts Centre, before popping up at the Dublin Theatre Festival.

Culture minister Patrick O’Donovan was quick to claim some credit last week, as the department’s Culture Ireland (CI) funding body provided €48,000 to help with Lost Lear’s 23 performances in Edinburgh.

Of the eight productions CI funded for the 2025 Fringe, this was the biggest grant, which is good news for Colley as the Scotsman’s prestigious award carries no monetary element.



TALLY HO TO YORK

THE OWNERS of *Lady Iman* – the Tally Ho branch of the **O’Callaghan**

family – have overruled trainer **Ger Lyons** by supplementing their speedy filly for York’s Coolmore Wootton Bassett Nunthorpe Stakes on Friday. **Roger O’Callaghan**

– who part-owns the home-bred filly with his mother **Anne**, father **Tony** and brother **Henry** – clearly has huge confidence in the horse, which is a daughter of Tally Ho’s leading first season stallion, *Star Man*.

Lady Iman’s regular rider,



Lady Iman

Colin Keane, who missed the Group 3 win at Goodwood at the end of July through whip suspension, will be once again out of luck for the ride at York, with the filly set to carry just 8 st 2 lbs, well below Keane’s minimum riding weight. He will be replaced by veteran lightweight rider **Joe Fanning**, who originally hails from Co Wicklow.

It is expected that the speedster filly will head to Del Mar later in the year for the \$1m Breeder’s Cup Juvenile Turf Sprint – which is Lyons’s original target for her and a race that he won last year with *Magnum Force*.

THE FAMOUS red and black silks of Dawn Run returned to the winners’ enclosure on August 6 when they were donned by Gabriella Hill aboard the Henry de Bromhead-trained Trubshaw, who made all the running to land Sligo’s Guinness Handicap.

Trubshaw is part-owned by the father of the winning rider – Benjamin Hill, son of Dawn

Run’s late owner, Charmian Hill. While Gabriella was still attached to Jim Bolger’s yard when riding the third winner of her fledgling career, she now heads over to the UK to fill her new position as apprentice to the Stuart Williams stable, a move orchestrated by former jockey, Gordon ‘Flash’ Power.

Hill’s grandmother, Charmian, rode into her 60s, earning her the nickname ‘Galloping Granny’ and her final ride was a winning one aboard wonder mare Dawn Run in a bumper at Tralee back in 1982, after which the then Turf Club refused to renew her jockey’s licence.

LADY KAI’S COLLAPSE

THE IRISH leg of the Fegentri World Championship for amateur riders was run at Leopardstown earlier this month but the race lost much of its appeal for punters when the **Ross O’Sullivan**-trained favourite, *Lady Kai*, genuflected leaving the stalls and unseated rider **Josh Williamson**.

Lady Kai, a Sea The Stars filly, is owned by Catherine Kinane,

wife of former champion jockey, **Mick Kinane**, and was bred through the couple’s Eadling Farm company. Although a half-sister to the high-class **Aidan O’Brien** pair, *Chicago* and *Mikhail Glinka*, *Lady Kai* has failed to match her siblings’ racecourse performances. She has only managed to win two low-grade handicaps.

Oblivious to the unseating drama at the stalls in Leopardstown, the **David Harry Kelly**-trained *Louiescall* made all the running under **Teagan Padgett** to score a comfortable success.

Prior to the race, the IHRB stewards panel, chaired by **Laurence McFerran**, received a report from **Pat Malone** (IHRB clerk of the scales) that the rider of the **Sabrina Harty**-trained *Supreme Law*, **Maria Kelly**, had weighed out at 6 lbs overweight, of which only a possible two pounds extra had been declared.

Evidence was heard from Kelly, who claimed there was a discrepancy between her weighing scales at home and the scales at the course but, having considered the evidence, the stewards cautioned the jockey regarding her responsibility to carry the correct allotted weight in the future.



DERMOT DESMOND'S INTERVENTIONS

NOT SURPRISINGLY, billionaire Swiss tax resident **Dermot Desmond** got plenty of blowback for his recent AI-based intervention in the MetroLink debate. There was rather less coverage of his new role relating to the 2031 Ryder Cup, where DD has joined up with his fellow billionaire old pal and Malta tax resident **Denis O'Brien**. Coincidentally, the latter was previously involved with Dermo when the moustachioed one made another high-profile intervention into the state's strategic direction.

Dinny has managed to snag the Ryder Cup for his swish Camiral complex near Girona in Catalonia and he is leaving nothing to chance. O'Brien has put in place a committee of heavy-hitters to help oversee preparations, with no less a sporting giant than **Pep Guardiola** appointed as a

member. Also on the high-powered committee is one Dermot Desmond.

In the not-too-distant past, Dermo and Dinny teamed up as would-be 'visionaries' at Ireland First – an assortment of fat cats who drew up a document grandly entitled, Ireland First: Political Reform – Effective and Efficient Government.

Published by a fawning *Irish Times* back in 2011, with a link even provided to the full 11,000-word report for wide-eyed readers, Dermo and his acolytes outlined a number of initiatives that could be taken to make Ireland a far better country, including wheezes such as the appointment of non-elected ministers and junior ministers.

Among the worthies who came on board with Desmond and O'Brien to kickstart the revolution were former Goldman Sachs and BP chairman **Peter Sutherland**, then Rehab boss **Angela Kerins**, former Bank of Ireland chief executive **Mike Soden**, former taoiseach **John Bruton** and Fianna Fáil grandee

Ray MacSharry.

A more recent high-profile intervention by DD was his 4,400-word address to the nation in 2020 (again given significant exposure by the *IT*) to solve the housing crisis.

While the disarmingly modest Desmond conceded that "I am not an expert in housing" (any more than he is in high-speed rail links presumably), he still demanded that "the state needs to proactively intervene", courtesy of assorted strategies such as "the master planning of communities together with their financing and construction".

Coincidentally, some of the arguments raised then also featured in the high-profile legal case lodged the same year against An Bord Pleanála's fast-track powers in light of the planning body's greenlighting of a huge housing development on Donnybrook lands sold to Cairn Homes by RTÉ.

The High Court action, which resulted in the permission being quashed, was taken by three Ailesbury Road residents, **Chris**



Dermot Desmond

Comerford, John Gleeson and one **Pat Desmond**, wife of Dermo.

THE SPORT of kings is a rich man's game, where even the high-profile runners and riders need to dig deep to keep the show on the road. One name familiar to Irish punters and trainers who has found how heavy the going can get is Qatar's Sheik Fahad bin Abdulla Al Thani, whose Newmarket-based Qatar Racing (QR) operation is fronted by David Redvers.

Al Thani has been scaling down his operations in Ireland and recently sold off his Limerick stud, Spring Lodge. The accounts just filed for QR show that, despite an increase in prize money and sponsorship in 2024, turnover was down a chunky 26%, mainly due to a £4.5m drop in bloodstock sales. This led to a £7.3m loss last year, leaving the accumulated deficit at a thoroughbred £93m.

Bloodstock agent Redvers has a one-third stake in online auction company Matchem Ltd, where the Qataris have 10%. QRL also does business with David Redvers Bloodstock, which boasted profits of over £2.5m at the end of March 2024.

EDEN
O N E



EXPERIENCE DUBLIN'S FINEST HEALTH CLUB & SPA



MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES: membership@edenone.ie | 01 215 0640

www.edenone.ie

CIARA DONLON'S THIRD TIME LUCKY?

HAVING HAD a couple of pops at establishing an environmentally friendly underwear business called Theya, Dalkey-based **Ciara Donlon** is now entering the nappy market and will be hoping there is rather less brown stuff hitting the fan this time around.

Theya Lingerie Ltd (TLL), which produced post-surgery underwear from bamboo no less, was forced into liquidation at the start of 2023 but the name lived on (briefly) in the form of Theya Healthcare Ltd (THL), where Donlon was a director at one stage. Alas, this latter company has now also collapsed into liquidation following a nasty spat.

Fans of Goldhawk will be familiar with La Donlon (see *The Phoenix* 1/12/22). Having won her fair share of plaudits, she then found herself looking to stave off the winding up of TLL in December 2022 through the Scarp process.

Ciara, who "identifies as a social entrepreneur", made her mark winning the Entrepreneur of the Year gong at the Irish Women's Awards in 2020.

Donlon's admirable ability to tap funders had kept Theya above water and, impressively, the company claimed to have

raised almost €3m.

That must have encouraged a board that included France-based number-cruncher **Nick O'Connor** of France Trade Connect. (Donlon was previously based mostly in France, having been married at one stage to wine importer **Laurent Caubet**.)

At the start of 2023, Grant Thornton's **Nicholas O'Dwyer** and **Colm Donlon** were installed as joint liquidators, with unsecured creditors (mostly investors) owed a chunky €830,000.

Their annual inspection report revealed the trademarks and website were sold in October 2023 to Dungarvan-based **Joe Gallagher's** Viecura Medical Ltd, described as part of the International Chinese Medical Group.

Viecura provided funding to THL, which had been incorporated in June 2023, with Joe's wife, **Anne Gallagher**, listed as a 60% shareholder, while Donlon held a 40% stake.

But relations deteriorated pretty quickly and Donlon (who exited as a director in late 2024) ended up in the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in June this year, claiming her situation had been made "impossible" and also referring to what she described as "an aggressive takeover" in 2023.

The WRC recently awarded Donlon just on €85,000, but the day before the hearing THL itself was placed in liquidation, so there has to be a question mark over the recoverability of any award.

In any case, Ciara has already moved on and has incorporated a company called Bare Needs Ltd. Her fellow 50% shareholder here is **Mimi Wu**, an American eco-entrepreneur based in Virginia, who is *in situ* as COO, while a third director is "eco-entrepreneur" **Killian Stokes**, CEO of "trade justice and global citizen education organisation", Proudly Made in Africa.

Bare Needs is behind a strategy to produce a

"revolutionary" new green (100% free of plastic and chemicals) nappy, designed in Ireland and New York under the brand name Moss Diapers.

Not surprisingly, the main ingredient here is biodegradable bamboo, while another product will be 100% biodegradable wet wipes. According to a post by Wu on LinkedIn: "This isn't just product innovation. It's an industry reset." Wow!

Wu is also founder and CEO of something called Global Green Solutions, which is involved in plastic waste management, and is a mentor at a climate tech accelerator programme, Cycle Momentum. The good news for Donlon is that her dynamic new partner is "impact-driven", which definitely sounds like a good thing.

Presumably the two gals met through the Cartier Women's Initiative, which "aims to drive change by empowering women impact entrepreneurs". The annual programme is open to women-run and women-owned businesses aiming to have a "strong and sustainable social and/or environmental impact".

Fingers crossed that Moss turns out to be third time lucky for poor Ciara.



Ciara Donlon



Viva Verdi Viva Wagner

SINÉAD CAMPBELL WALLACE SOPRANO
RYAN CAPOZZO TENOR YNGVE SØBERG BARITONE

CONDUCTED BY KERI-LYNN WILSON
IRISH NATIONAL OPERA ORCHESTRA

SATURDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2025
NATIONAL CONCERT HALL DUBLIN

ARIAS, DUETS & SCENES FROM OPERAS
BY GIUSEPPE VERDI AND RICHARD WAGNER

TICKETS €19, €39, €49 BOOKING FEES MAY APPLY
booking 01 417 0000 www.nch.ie



Dire-ish Independent

WHO IS GARETH SHERIDAN?

By all hacks

A FEW short weeks ago, Gareth Sheridan was just another businessman desperately seeking publicity for his memoir. But in a short timeframe, the 35-year-old Dubliner has been rocketed into the media spotlight, as journalists report on his business ventures, Wall Street ambitions – and various other details I have painstakingly sourced from his Wikipedia page.

The atmosphere around the presidential



hopeful's campaign has only intensified recently as reporters compete to fill up the most space about the latest sensational developments. These include that Moldovan airline controversy, the tension with Seánie Gallagher and several other stories I've picked up from Google News.

It's left the general public asking: Can all these Sheridan fillers somehow save the most deathly dull presidential race in history? (Brilliant stuff, let's have another 5,000 words tomorrow – Ed.)

IRELAND COULD BECOME 'AI ISLAND'

IRELAND HAS the potential to become a world capital of AI, according to FFTD Malcolm Byrne, with many members of the Oireachtas already appearing completely robotic and devoid of personality. With many predicting AI will wipe out boring and repetitive tasks, it is also believed ministers' Six One News appearances will soon come under threat.



"The Government is totally isolated and out of touch, so the AI island concept is achievable," insisted Byrne. "Government TDs are world-renowned for being able to instantly regurgitate past statements, so our credentials in this area are second to none. Some ministers can even occasionally pass as human, which shows we're entering unprecedented terrain."

MAJOR POINTS OF THAT TRUMP-PUTIN SUMMIT



LESSONS:	Trump impressed with Russia's key takeaways – especially Crimea.
CEASEFIRE:	Putin concerned about President Trump's incessant attacks on Zelenskyy.
PEACE TALKS:	Little prospect of a breakthrough except for Russian offensive lines.
DEMILITARISATION:	Donald determined to keep gunning for Rosie O'Donnell.
SANCTIONS:	Trump has managed to avoid virtually everyone of them.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE:	Europeans unimpressed with Alaska's version of <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> .

GAZA BONO SPEAKS OUT!

IN A dramatic move welcomed widely by himself, Irish rock legend Bono has called for Israel to be freed from Benjamin Netanyahu while urging Hamas to release the hostages. Speaking at the Ivor No Shame Awards, U2's frontman emphasised the dense complexity of the problem.

"The whole genocide thing is so complex that it's taken almost two years for the world's most important voices – particularly mine – to take a muted stand on the treatment of Palestinians.

"I have been shocked by the latest revelations, ie Geldof's overdue intervention on Gaza,



which leaves me with no choice but to ask: Why did it take Sir Bob so long?

"Speaking forcibly and extremely cautiously, I believe something must be done – and I'm sure our American friends will come up with some kind of solution very soon."

GARETH SHERIDAN

NOBODY 2

"What about a female lead?"
HEATHER HUMPHREYS

"A box office bomb"
SEAN GALLAGHER

THIS COMPLETE UNKNOWN HAS DECIDED TO TAKE A SHOT AT THE BIG TIME. WITH MANY SAYING HE HAS DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR AND DOESN'T KNOW HIS ÁRAS FROM HIS ELBOW, CAN HE PROVE THE DOUBTERS WRONG?

MERCHANDISE BUSINESS HOSTS CONCERT SHOCK!





THE DEPARTURE OF WEATHER WOMAN JOANNA DONNELLY

... As I was saying on pages 2, 5, 6 and 10, the pressure on me reached unbearable heights when I was told what weather patterns to report! I was actually given a chart based on information from satellites that I had never seen and instructed to repeat that information without question!

This was despite any data emanating from cows gathering in a corner of a field, seagulls gathering over my house or even

my own knee playing up when it was about to be foggy.

I found this corrosion of my personal judgment highly unfair and intrusive. I stayed silent for a few years hoping my discomfort would blow over. But then, one night when caught in a sudden downpour that I had been forbidden to warn about, my anger burst like an ominous dark cloud and...

(Continued on pgs 15-17 and in all other major print outlets).

ALL-PURPOSE SPEECH FOR NEW FG CANDIDATE

THE TIME has come to shake up a presidential campaign dominated by dour figures in grey suits. Only I personally have the charisma to set the campaign trail alight as I prioritise vital issues such as traffic-light management, the country's inadequate supply of paperclips and making motor tax more efficient.

One thing is certain; the other candidates in this race are calculating careerists only in it for power and status. It's hard to not

feel sick when confronted with such naked ambition. In contrast, I will be a president for all – especially those high up in FG who feel we could do with a distraction from the complete disaster the Government is making of everything.

Now is the time to imagine a new version of Irishness, one not bound to tired old clichés. So let me sign off by saying: Is maith liom uachtar reoite.

(That's enough FG – Ed)

KEY PLAYERS TO WATCH IN THIS YEAR'S RUGBY WORLD CUP

JOANNA DONNELLY

Was hoping to cause a media scrum when she claimed to have left Met Éireann under a cloud but the public seem to have passed on her sob story. Will be hoping to remain centre of attention once her upcoming books are published.



MARY LOU MCDONALD

Was mauled by reporters when she suggested she might line out for Sinn Féin in the upcoming election but seems to have kicked for touch on that issue ever since. May instead play a supporting role if she decides to offload a hospital pass to another party colleague.



CATHERINE CONNOLLY

Her campaign has got off to a very slow start and she will have to up the pace if she wants to emerge victorious. Was a bit defensive about an unofficial tour of Syria she attended a number of years ago but nothing major has kicked off from it yet.



MO CHARA'S COURT GIG

Micheál Martin

The Kneecap trial highlights the importance of being bold when setting out your radical vision of the future. And experienced politicians like myself understand that getting high on raucous rap and drugs is far from the shared-island solution required to be on the right side of history.



Nigel Farage

They swarm here in dinghies waving terrorist flags, with no English and chanting lies about Gaza. They get the best court benefits and deprive decent British criminals of language interpreters. These thugs are constantly stirring up social unrest. Who do they think they are – Reform UK?



Michael Twee

Mo is essentially effervescent – a multi-talented charismatic figure, Irish-language enthusiast, community activist, all-round cultural icon, passionate, controversial and endowed with unlimited vibrancy. Indeed, he reminds me so much of myself when I was in my early 70s – just a kid with a crazy dream.



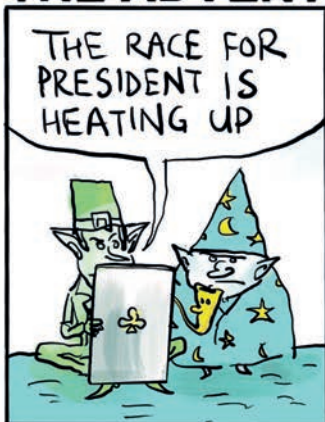
Garda Traffic Corp Report Latest

- Significant number of officers want to hit the road
- Levels of alleged laziness is breathtaking
- A lot hoping to speed up their retirements
- Commissioner definitely being taken for a ride
- Management denying they need to hit the brakes
- No signs of malaise slowing down
- Public witnessing a complete car crash

US FRANCHISE OPENS FIRST IRISH STORE



THE ADVENTURES OF FESTY O'SEMTEX





Win a Shannon Rollerball in Bog Oak,
(RRP €110), www.irishpens.ie



Irish Pens
the writer's choice



Crossword by Procrustes

ACROSS

- 1 Though seen in dementia, rarely seen on outside of head of a grand woman. (5)
- 4 Get a letter from Athens, not in favour of Italian wine! (7)
- 8 Star of Sister Act gave away valuable material to play vital role in Titanic. (4)
- 9 In this series of matches and contests, success might turn on team changes. (10)
- 10 Whenever I eat crab salad, there's always the danger of picking up disease agents. (8)
- 11 Mediterranean trees in which snake-charmers' snakes are dispersed. (6)
- 13 Turning red before sickness hits is a serious matter for those whose lives are on the line. (10)
- 16 Short article appearing after lightweight person in some boats at Henley has a joint. (4)
- 17 How editor would tell his young lad to ignore suggested change and leave his cowboy hat. (4)
- 18 What one was doing before returning to yacht club and going on right old bender. (10)
- 20 High-flyer died in a crash in the Mediterranean, during America-Russia flight? (6)
- 22 Use your eyes! You can see these as going to compete before post-Beatles band. (8)
- 24 Being unsteady, omits abuse of indulgence while getting vowels in order. (10)
- 26 Despite going crazy, assure everyone that one is alright. (4)
- 27 Being corrupt, can rule with a degree of power never experienced in this country. (7)
- 28 Despite being a medical person, one does nothing for workers' hives. (5)

DOWN

- 1 By restoring the picture a beneficial effect will be felt by those who aren't well. (11)
- 2 Worry that Ger might be about to become a hoodlum? (5)
- 3 Torn or wet flag can be discerned in light of the fact that the sun has already set. (9)
- 4 Mission having unrefined character as backup inside? (7)
- 5 In conclusion, Icarus is the embodiment of one those classic Greek styles. (5)
- 6 The cruel man I have wounded in order to classify him on a scale of 1 to 100. (9)
- 7 Doing wrong, sing away but leave the pub. (4)
- 12 Man in ring had it on hand, to block all possible escape routes for child's horse, love. (6,5)
- 14 Fooling around with rich tart, I get stiff. (9)
- 15 Went all over the country playing old-style jazz with a bit of poetry thrown in. (9)
- 19 There are various different ways of spelling another name for Jesus. (7)
- 21 Not all get about a thousand red flowers to remember this engagement, and others. (5)
- 23 Get into an altered state in Florida hot tub. (5)
- 25 Produced by Baker in abundance when there's a conga taking off. (3))

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY * required

Name

Address

.....

.....

Eircode*

Tel No*

Closing date: Fri 29 Aug

LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTION:

Post only to: CROSSWORD COMPETITION,
Phoenix Magazine,
44 Lr Baggot St,
Dublin 2, Ireland

Across: 1. Putty. 4. Ricotta. 8. Bean. 9. Maiden Name. 10. Villains. 11. Teethe. 13. Atmosphere. 16. Limb. 17. Mimi. 18. Respondent. 20. Assail. 22. Souvenir. 24. Sarcophagi. 26. Soho. 27. Eastern. 28. Nexus. Down: 1. Paediatrics. 2. Tonal. 3. Yom Kippur. 4. Reissue. 5. Cleft. 6. Tunnelled. 7. Aim. 12. Human Rights. 14. Oligarchs. 15. Elucution. 19. Sustain. 21. Lapse. 23. Essex. 25. Ape.

LAST ISSUE'S WINNER: Michael Creagan, Ballymote, Co Sligo

Craic & Codology ... Craic & Codology ...



TAYLOR SWIFT LATEST!

by Our Taylor Swift staff

THE POP megastar is back and while details are scarce, that doesn't mean a thing.

There is certainly no shortage of gossip about superstar Taylor Swift and her loved-up NFL player boyfriend, Travis Beefy.

Said one editor: "How could anyone have predicted that, after running out of Oasis front-page hype yesterday, whispers around Taylor's latest album could solve the tabloid summer problem of desperately filling up.

"We have even run out of traditional 'Phew what a scorcher!'

headlines and that dodgy foreign hornet hasn't attacked anyone at all.

"Of course, I'm a little uneasy about one or two of these dire filler pieces – such as recent rumours about Taylor's weight loss – which are painfully thin, even for the silly season.

"Maybe it's time journalists started putting some meat on the bones of their non-stories."



Inside

■ Who is Taylor Swift and what's with the Easter eggs? p2-32

■ Shock piece that's not about Taylor Swift p31

METRO SAYS AI WILL MAKE DERMOT DESMOND OBSOLETE

The proposed Dublin Metro has said that developments in AI will soon make Dermot Desmond unnecessary, as the rapidly evolving technology more perfectly mimics self-obsessed billionaires who love the sound of their own voices.

"We're working on an AI driven by rampant egotism," said the Metro. "It's completely shrill and insufferable, so it's likely to take over from the super-rich. It will also get you to the airport quicker, as more and more



people look to escape Desmond and Mick O'Leary's latest pronouncements."

Scribble Box

A PAIR OF MAD YOLKS
MORNING GLORY WITH PJ & JIM
WEEKDAYS 6-10AM



RADIO
Nova
100FM
SERIOUSLY ADDICTIVE MUSIC



Good riddance to Rita-Rose Gagné

IT WAS only 10 weeks ago that Rita-Rose Gagné, CEO of giant retail property play Hammerson (owner of Dundrum Town Centre), announced her intention to stand down by next summer in order to give Bob Noel's board time to find a replacement. The timing looks odd as, within two months of the announcement, Hammerson pulled off a big £138m placing at 287p a share – a 25% discount on the June 2025 net asset value (NAV) of £3.81. Whatever about the timing, it is clear that the battered shareholders will not miss Gagné one little bit.

The cash raised last month was to fund the purchase of the outstanding 50% interest not owned by Hammerson in the big Bullring shopping centre in Birmingham city centre, which last year boasted a customer footfall of a phenomenal 33 million, compared with Dundrum's 25 million.

That deal comes alongside the acquisition of the outstanding 50% of the adjoining Grand Central shopping centre, which cost a total of £319m. It also comes on top of the £186m buy-in of the outstanding 50% of the big Brent Cross centre outside London, as well as the similar £135m acquisition of Westquay in Southampton last November.

These deals represent quite a change in Gagné's recent trajectory as, prior to the buy-ins, the CEO had been busy selling assets left and not busy wisely. It therefore seems an odd time to announce her exit when she is right in the middle of this more aggressive strategy.

To get a sense of the scale of the three recent transactions, it is worth noting that Dundrum Town Centre is the largest of all the Hammerson centres, with a 128,800 sq m net lettable area. Birmingham's Bullring centre is quite close with 122,400 sq m, while the Cabot Circus centre in Bristol comes in third at 106,000 sq m.

Next up is Brent Cross (105,500 sq m) and Westquay (94,400 sq m), while Hammerson's two French centres at Cergy (northwest Paris) and Marseilles come in at 70,800 sq m and 62,800 sq m respectively.

While Dundrum is the largest

of the centres, with a 2024 rent roll of £27.4m (€31.5m), it is not the highest yielding operation. This turns out to be Brent Cross which, presumably thanks to its proximity to London, delivers a higher yield at £30.8m. The much smaller Marseille centre brings in a seriously impressive £30.6m,



over 20% ahead of the much bigger Bullring (£25.4m).

In judging Gagné's five-year reign in Hammerson it should be noted that, when she was appointed in November 2020, the pandemic was in full swing and this had a huge impact on the retail sector. Essentially, only supermarkets and pharmacies were allowed to stay open and, with both going gangbusters, the good news was that Hammerson had significant tenants in these categories (such as the big Tesco outlet in Dundrum).

Gagné trained as a lawyer, which is probably not the best route to managing property development and understanding retailing. While she can boast property group experience overseeing strategy in Asia and Latin America, this has little to do with Hammerson's bread and butter of managing Irish and UK shopping centres.



Rita-Rose Gagné

Given the substantial collection of shopping centres accumulated in the decade prior to the pandemic by Gagné's predecessor as CEO, David Atkin, and chairman David Taylor, the boys recognised that the group was in some peril, carrying £3bn of borrowings prior to the new CEO's arrival in November 2020.

They had already done some of the really heavy lifting to stabilise Hammerson by selling off assorted assets such as the one million sq m Silverburn Shopping Centre in Glasgow in January 2020

for £114m and the VIA Outlets European-focused business in August 2020 for £274m. There was also a huge £552m rights issue at £0.15p a share (representing a 95% discount).

The result was that Hammerson was left with manageable borrowings of €2.2bn at the end of 2020 when Gagné arrived. Her strategy appeared to be to simply continue to drive down debt by selling key assets.

Hammerson benefited from the excellent job carried out in Dundrum, where manager Don Nugent successfully re-let two of the four floors vacated by House of Fraser to Brown Thomas and the other two floors to Penneys (Primark). Dunnes Stores was then brought in to occupy the old Penneys stores in the centre. (There were similar transformations in Hammerson centres in Britain caused by the liquidation of Debenhams and the shuttering of House of Fraser.)

Gagné described Hammerson's strategy as recognising "the unique position" that the group has "in urban locations and the opportunities to leverage our experience and capabilities to create appealing destinations, serving occupiers, customers and communities".

This appears to intimate that the group's plan was to grow its dominant retail centres in big cities in the UK, Ireland and France but, instead, the CEO flogged off the likes of the Silverburn centre in Glasgow (£70m), Victoria Leeds (£120m) and Union Square in Aberdeen (£111m).

BAFFLING STRATEGY

This shopping centre disposal strategy was simply baffling but even harder to understand was the decision a year ago to sell out the group's 50% interest in Value Retail, which holds stakes in 12 European retail outlet centres (including Kildare Village). Hammerson had a non-controlling 50% stake in this business and, in her review a year before the disposal, Gagné noted that the outlets had "delivered another solid operational performance".

Bizarrely, in December 2023 the Value Retail stake was given an updated net asset value on Hammerson's balance sheet of €1.1bn – which was a full €2bn more than

Continued on page 26

Reference the Market Abuse Regulations 2005, nothing published by Moneybags in this section is to be taken as a recommendation, either implicit or explicit, to buy or sell any of the shares mentioned.

Stocks & Shares

PTSB shares flying dangerously high

ALTHOUGH FORMER CEO Jeremy Masding spent a decade trying to turn PTSB into a viable bank, it was still in a dreadful state when he handed the keys to his deputy, Eamonn Crowley, in June 2020. The latter caught an early break courtesy of NatWest but failed to maximise the potential advantages on offer to PTSB. As a result, the bank's profitability has been significantly less than it could have been. Nevertheless, the market has pushed the shares to €2.30, at which they stand on an eye-watering price-earnings multiple approaching 30, three times that of the pillar banks.

Timing can often be fortuitous in business and no sooner was Crowley installed as CEO of PTSB than Alison Rose in NatWest, the parent of Ulster Bank, decided to pull out of Ireland. As the Irish government would not have allowed either of the pillar banks, AIB and Bank of Ireland (BoI), to gobble up all of NatWest's loan book, this left Crowley in prime position.

He was handed the opportunity to buy Ulster Bank's key €7bn non-tracker performing mortgage book for €362m below value, with the transaction smoothed by a €155m equity injection from the British bank.

This boosted PTSB's loan book by 58%, pushing it up from €12bn to €19bn, a sufficient boost to give the bank a very credible chance of survival. This was particularly lucky given that NatWest had previously had to inject €15bn into Ulster Bank to keep it afloat through the crash – representing a full one-third of the €45bn the UK government, in turn, had to pump into NatWest to keep it going.

Crowley's lack of ambition, however, manifested itself by his failure to take on Ulster Bank's huge €7bn performing tracker loan book, letting it fall instead into the hands of AIB. Gobbling up that book would have gone a long way to making PTSB a credible third force in Irish banking, with a performing loan book of €26bn.

As it turns out, despite taking on 25 Ulster Bank branches from NatWest as part of the deal with Rose in order to make PTSB more of a national bank, boasting 98 outlets nationwide, the latter is simply not big enough to make an impact – and this at a time when the competing pillar banks are making billions.

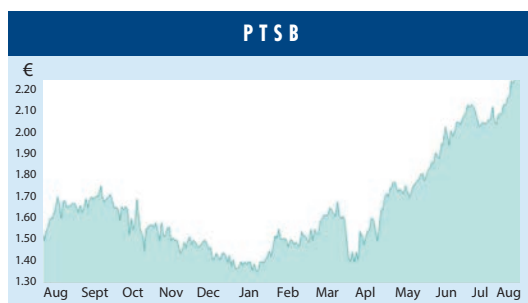
PTSB's most recent returns for the six months to June 2025 show underlying operating profits collapsing 38% to €51m and its return on capital equity dropping back to just 2.9%. This is miserable in its own right but remarkably underwhelming when compared to AIB's

admittedly remarkable 27.5%.

With the total loan book at the end of June 2025 standing at €21.8bn, PTSB's critical net interest margin fell 10% in the last six months to 2%, driven down by reducing ECB interest rates and PTSB's efforts to remain competitive in the mortgage market where it has to compete against the big pillar banks.

Simply put, PTSB cannot really afford to get into this battle given its incredibly high cost-income ratio of 76%, which should really be down at 50%.

Crowley's strategy is squeezing the bank on both sides, with net interest income falling to €288m in the first half of 2025, while operating expenses rose to €271m.



In these circumstances, it is easy to see why operating profits collapsed 38% to €51m for the six months.

PTSB does have the benefit of very low-cost retail deposit funding of €23.5bn, with €9.3bn of this held in current accounts that pay no interest and €13.3bn in retail deposit accounts that pay an average of 0.8%. This means that the average cost of this retail funding is 0.5%, which looks like a funding base that Crowley should be able to really take advantage of.

Unfortunately, there is also €2.2bn in very expensive wholesale funding that is costing 5.7%, something PTSB has been forced into by Gabriel Makhoul in the Central Bank of Ireland on foot of the latter's restrictive capital ratio requirements.

These require PTSB to borrow expensively in the wholesale market, while at the same time carrying surplus cash of €7.2bn.



Eamonn Crowley

This latter sum, however, returns very little, given that the ECB base interest rate is now down to 2%, with a rather significant slice of the income then gobbled up by the cost of the enforced wholesale funding.

With 98% of PTSB's €21.8bn loan book mainly invested in mortgage loans all paying monthly by direct debit, managing this loan book should not be a great challenge, with only €400m of it needing attention. In these circumstances, it is hard to

see why PTSB boasts such high staff numbers, topping 3,000.

This is clearly the most significant impact on PTSB in terms of the bank's lack of profitability, which in turn compromises significant fundraising. Crowley says that

he is intent on cutting staff down by a further 150 in the second half of this year but, even at 2,850, it still looks like a very chunky payroll for a bank struggling to compete with the deep-pocketed AIB and BoI.

The current state of play highlights the impact of failing to add on Ulster Bank's €7bn performing tracker mortgage book. As interest rates increased, the book would have not just boosted PTSB's gross returns but the net income revenue generated here would have fallen down to the bottom line, as costs would not have increased. In other words, PTSB would have been dramatically more profitable.

Crowley's plan is to achieve 2.2% net interest margins by 2027, while the pillar banks are earning over 3%, and he plans to bring down his cost-income ratio only to 60% in 2027 when he should

Continued on page 26



"God I dread going back to it... the constant sense of entitlement ... the endless pouting...the incessant ME ME ME... and then on top of that there's the bloody students to contend with."

Stocks & Shares

Hammerson continued from page 24

the €600m cash recouped in the sale. The absence of a convincing explanation for this eyebrow-raising sale will have sucked out any confidence investors had that Gagné is the woman to take Hammerson forward.

Moreover, in his chairman's review for the 2024 annual report, the £300,000-a-year Bob Noel characterised this alarming sale as "a transformative event", while Gagné opted for "transformational" in her review. This means that, for the hapless shareholders, there is no one at the top to have confidence in.

The transformation effect of the deal was to knock Hammerson's net assets back from just on £2.5bn to £1.8bn, with the net asset per share dropping by 27% to £3.70 per share.

Despite this dreadful outcome, Gagné describes 2024 as "a successful year".

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Now there has been a change of pace, with Hammerson buying the outstanding 50% stakes in the Bullring and Grand Central retail centres but this looks like too little, too late.

On top of this, shareholders were landed with an accompanying £138m share placing at 278p, representing a 25% discount to the NAV per share.

Gagné has had the option of raising funds another way, rather than selling off prize retail centre assets. There is the valuable five-acre site which contains the old Dundrum Shopping Centre and is the subject of an ambitious plan to build 880 apartments. This site should have been sold off in 2021 when big developers were hungry for large apartment block sites and good sites such as this were going

for €200,000 a plot. This site could have realised a possible €200m at the time.

Likewise, there are 16 undeveloped acres beside Swords Pavilions shopping centre that could very likely secure planning permission for 2,000 apartments, which makes it worth another €200m. And outside the Bullring in Birmingham, Hammerson has a big site that could accommodate 2,000 houses, worth another €400m.

In other words, without interfering with the group's core assets and without diluting shareholders, Gagné could have raised €800m from these sites.

Then there is the planning permission obtained to redevelop the five-acre plot between O'Connell Street and the Ilac Centre, incorporating the old Carlton cinema and Dublin City Council offices, which is both a business opportunity and cause for concern.

Given that it would cost the best part of €10,000 per sq m to develop this site, the total development cost would come to around €1bn, the sort of cash that Hammerson does not have. It would also take about 10 years to complete the D1 development, without any income being generated by it over this period.

Clearly, the O'Connell Street site should have been sold and could have realised at least €200m, which would have brought the amount that Gagné could have raised from site sales to around €1bn without any impact on Hammerson's profitability or valuable shopping centres portfolio.

It was clearly a poor decision by the CEO to offload three retail centres that formed a core element of the group's previously stated business strategy.

Indeed, in the scenario where the non-income generating land assets were disposed of, Hammerson, for example, could have

when Moneybags examined PTSB's performance and noted: "This is certainly not too demanding a rating given that, in the right hands, the bank has more potential for growth than the two large pillar banks" (see *The Phoenix* 1/11/24). The share price has risen over 40% since then.

Given that the two pillar banks are now standing on single-digit p/e multiples, PTSB's share price of €2.30 represents an extraordinary vote of confidence by the market in Eamonn Crowley and the Julie O'Neill-chaired board.

As the ECB base rate only gradually came down to 2% over the last 18 months, PTSB will suffer the full impact of this change in the second half of this year, which is going to make life rather more challenging for the CEO.

The one real hope Crowley



Robert Noel

bought in the Tallaght shopping centre when it was going for buttons last year (£150m). This is also true of the Blanchardstown centre, which saw its value knocked back from the €1bn it was sold at a decade ago to €550m. The opportunity costs associated with missing out on these centres are clearly significant.

The unfortunate long-term investors in Hammerson have taken quite the battering from the £5.50 the shares reached back in 2007 to even the €1.30 these stood at in 2019.

UNDERGEARED

When you consider too that the NAV per share in December 2021 was £6.20 – after £2bn in write-offs – it is shocking that the NAV per share as of June 2025 had fallen all the way £3.81, a 39% drop over the four-and-a-half years

of Gagné's reign. Nevertheless, the CEO was paid a hefty £3.1m last year.

With net debt now down to £1bn and Hammerson boasting property assets valued at £3bn, if anything the group is undergeared. Surprisingly perhaps, for a property company having undergone significant changes, in the half-year to June 2025, it turned in an operating profit of £63m and an annualised earning per share running at 20p.

This puts the shares at the current share price of almost £3 (post 10-for-one consolidation) on a price-earnings multiple of 15 – not bad for a property company characterised by a NAV per share discount of 21%.

At this price, Hammerson shares look like good value but this is little comfort to those who bought in at a pre-consolidation equivalent of £11.30 in 2019.

PTSB continued from page 25

clearly be targeting a figure of well under 50%.

This partly explains why PTSB is looking to achieve a 9% return on capital equity in 2027 when AIB is already returning 27.5%.

It is not surprising that NatWest flogged off the final 12% of its original 17% stake in PTSB last month at €2 a share. But on the basis of the Irish bank's annualised 8c earnings-per-share base on the first-half figures for 2025, its shares now at €2.30 are standing on an annualised price-earnings multiple of 29.

VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

This is chunky looking enough and certainly well up from the multiple of just 11 late last year

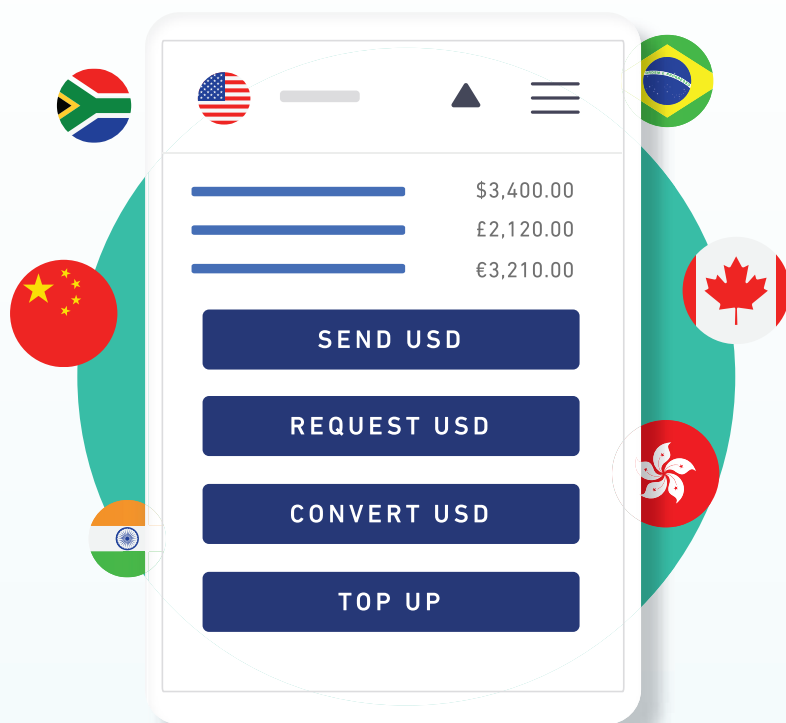


Julie O'Neill

now has is that the pillar banks opt to take whatever action is required to keep their net interest margins up by hiking mortgage rates. This would enable PTSB to also charge

a little more and, therefore, still earn a net interest margin of over 2% despite the prevailing lower interest rate environment being pushed in Frankfurt.

GLOBAL ACCOUNTS



MULTI-CURRENCY COVERAGE WITH ONE SOLUTION

Global Accounts from TransferMate allows you to hold, pay and receive in multiple currencies at one time while reducing the time it takes to transfer money internationally.



Global control
with accounts in
your name



Hold, pay and
receive in multiple
currencies



Faster, cost-effective
international
transfers

CONTACT US

Phone: +353(0) 1 635 3700
www.transfermate.com

follow us



TransferMate is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.
TransferMate provides payments services and is regulated globally.



Jack Cantillon's heavy going

LAWYER-TURNED-bloodstock entrepreneur **Jack Cantillon** of Syndicates.Racing has had an eventful few weeks, with bad news for both the syndicate business – courtesy of the dreaded taxman – and his London-headquartered sports prediction app, which has just heard the full-time whistle.

Syndicates Racing Ltd (SRL), based at the Smurfit family's Forenaghts Stud in Kildare, is 100%-owned by Cantillon and boasted stallion and bloodstock assets of €800,000 at the end of March 2022, the last



Jack Cantillon

time the firm filed its accounts, which are now 18 months overdue.

Cantillon was assisted by racing analyst **Kevin Blake** in a supporting role when establishing SRL and the firm set about raising money from the public under the brand Syndicates.Racing, offering would-be racehorse owners a “rare opportunity” to grab a slice of what could turn out to be a star stallion one day.

As Blake advised at the time: “You don’t usually get an opportunity to do this sort of thing without spending an awful lot of money.”

It is not clear what level of business Cantillon and SRL have been doing in recent times given the failure to file accounts but the website describes the operation as “one of the largest syndicates in Europe” (with horses in Ireland, the UK, France, the US and Australia). It also boasts that the company “finished the 2024 season as the number



“That’s your problem...right there...”

one syndicate in Ireland on prize money”.

Whatever the scale of the operation’s membership and investment, the taxman is now seeking to recoup some prize money for the public by registering a judgment for €13,000 against SRL. Maybe Cantillon has just been too busy to ensure the odds remain good for his syndicate.

He has recently taken on the role of ‘entrepreneur in residence’ at the Founders Talent Accelerator run by Dogpatch Labs – an investment hub that helps to boost new start-ups, offering ac-

cess to a community of investors, as well as up to €100,000 in seed funding.

Coincidentally, last year Dogpatch Labs Investment popped up as one of the backers of a sports prediction app called Herd, which was set up in London in 2021 by Cantillon, who was installed as CEO. His co-founder and chief technical officer, **Robert Minford**, had been head of engineering at an outfit called Cybersmart.

Herd has since targeted the live sports and gaming industry, offering “an alternative to the

Paul Dooley's closing time

IT’S A case of last orders at the Urban 8 restaurant/bar in Kilmainham, D8, operated by well-known hospitality entrepreneur **Paul Dooley**, who had originally helped to found the business back in 2015, along with backing from well-known pub investors **Frank Byrne** and **James and Edward Dunne** of the Brú Hospitality group. This month too, some of those early investors found themselves in a bit of a pickle as a result of a potentially costly ruling relating to Airbnb apartments near Dublin Castle.

Urban 8 was originally established a decade ago, when it was called Union 8, and eventually ended up under the control of the **Jason O’Connell**-founded Galway Bay Beer Co, after the merger of that firm with Brú Hospitality.

That deal resulted in a combined group that is majority-controlled by O’Connell, backed by Byrne and James and Edward Dunne, with the group’s assorted bars and restaurants spread between Dublin and Galway. Meanwhile, the Brú brewery in Trim, Co Meath was closed, with the craft beers subsequently all brewed in Oranmore, Co Galway.

In 2023, the Galway Beer Co boys exited Urban 8, with

Dooley taking 100% control of the business, which was operated by a company called SCR 740 Restaurant Ltd.

(O’Connell, Byrne and the Dunes, meanwhile, maintained interests in a number of bar businesses, although one of their high-profile groups, Pizza Eile Ltd, ended up in liquidation last year after a failed examinership. That company was behind six pubs, including Against The Grain on Dublin’s Wexford Street).

Back at Urban 8, Dooley found the going pretty tough and SCR 740 built up significant losses by the end of June 2024, before entering the Scarp company rescue process in March this year, with the rescue plan approved on April 29.

Recently filed figures covering the year to the end of June 2024 show the amount owed to creditors dropping by almost €700,000. According to a note in those accounts: “Subsequent to the year end, the company exited the Scarp process with a scheme of arrangement having

been approved by its creditors. This had the effect of returning the company to solvency.”

The note adds: “The directors are confident that the company can continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future.”

Although these financial statements were signed off by

Paul Dooley and his fellow director, **Dermot Dooley**,

as recently as May 19 this year, a creditors’ meeting has been called for August 25, at which it is proposed that **Flavien Kelly** of Irish Liquidations will be installed as liquidator of SCR 740. (The Scarp process had been

handled by **Joseph Walsh** of Joe Walsh Accountants.)

Meanwhile, although the Dunes and Byrne exited that business almost two years ago, they encountered problems of their own last week when Dublin City Council refused a retention planning application to continue the use of 10 apartments facing onto Parliament Street and Dame Street, D2, for short-term lets, as advertised on Airbnb at

up to €350 per night.

Obviously, if the properties are instead rented to long-term tenants only, the company, Olympia Real Estate Ltd (ORE), will earn substantially less from the properties. Nevertheless, the planners claimed the company had not provided sufficient justification for the short-term lettings to continue.

The listed directors of ORE are James Dunne and Frank Byrne, while the ultimate owner of the company, through parent entity Olympia Property Investments Ltd (OPI), is Edward Dunne.

The last accounts filed for ORE show accumulated losses of €340,000 at the end of 2023 on foot of a loss for that year of €404,000. Investment properties were valued at €10m, while bank loans topped €7m.

OPI, meanwhile, was into the red to the tune of a hefty €9.3m at the end of 2023, following a loss of over €1/4m for the 12 months.

The good news is that the “shareholders and investors have indicated their willingness to support the company until profitability and sustainability are achieved”.

Hopefully, the spoilsports in Dublin City Council haven’t thrown a spanner in the works.



Paul Dooley

Brief Cases continued from page 29

where bloodstock agent **David Redvers** calls the shots, was down from €15.1m to €11.2m, although there was also a near €4m cut in the cost of sales for the year.

Despite the hefty €7m-plus loss, it appears that QIPCO is “expecting the company to be self-funding”, although, not surprisingly, the parent company has committed to “provide additional support if required”.

A note in the QRL accounts attributes a value of £6.2m under the heading of “investments”, which represents the US adventure.

There is no sign, however, of QRL’s 50% stake in something called Equiclub Ltd (which “supplies affordable racehorse membership”). This was disposed of during the year, although “no material consideration was received”, while a 25% share held in the name of Sheikh Fahad was also transferred.

Moreover, £1m that was owed by Equiclub to QRL was provided for in full at the end of 2024.

The main shareholder in Equiclub is now the splendidly-named Maxwell Pimlot, while a smaller 24% stake is held by Leora Judah.

At one point earlier this year, the company was listed to be struck off but that was staved off by the directors.

THE COURTROOM spat between the big German radio outfit, Bauer Media Audio Ireland, and Kevin Branigan’s Classic Hits station is set to cost someone a fair few bob in legal costs. It is unlikely that Branigan was overly happy with Judge Brian Cregan’s decision to highlight an aspect of the radio group’s balance sheet.

In June, the company behind Classic – Choice Broadcasting Ltd (CBL) – succeeded in getting a temporary order in the High Court preventing Bauer from using the name *Greatest Hits Radio* on digital radio in Ireland.

Not surprisingly, the case was taken on the basis that the Classic Hits name is well established here. Brannigan was then informed Bauer would opt for the name GHR instead while awaiting a full hearing of the legal action. This too did not meet with Branigan’s approval but CBL’s attempt to extend the injunction to cover ‘GHR’ failed, with Cregan noting that a Google search of ‘GHR’ brings

up everything from Griffiths Halls of Residence to the General Hypnotherapy Register.

Of more concern to Branigan was Cregan’s agreement with Bauer that CBL could be “balance sheet insolvent” – a claim strongly contested by Branigan. It will be recalled (see *The Phoenix* 13/6/25) that CBL recorded a chunky €1.4m surplus in 2023, while sister company Classic Rock Broadcasting Ltd (which is behind Radio Nova) reported a profit that year of €380,000.

Nevertheless, this left CBL with a net deficit of total assets less current liabilities of €6.6m. Classic Rock Broadcasting, meanwhile, reported a net deficit of total assets less current liabilities of just on €3m.

Although Branigan made it clear that these deficits are based on the group’s parent company, Bay Broadcasting Ltd, calling in its debts from the individual stations – which it has no intention of doing – Cregan placed a question mark over the plaintiff’s ability to pay any eventual damages.

In the absence of Bay Broadcasting itself providing a guarantee to pay any damages that might eventually be awarded, the judge greenlighted

Bauer’s ongoing use of GHR until the full hearing.

Glanbia’s healthy share price

FANS OF Moneybags got a quick reward this month following recent analysis of dairy and nutritional outfit Glanbia’s struggling shares.

€

Jun 2025 Aug 2025

The Phoenix 16/5/25

In the article (see *The Phoenix* 16/5/25), it was noted: “At €11.85, Glanbia’s share price looks ridiculous. Even at the lower end of [Hugh] McGuire’s earnings guidance for the current year, the shares are standing on a prospective p/e multiple of 9.5 – less than half that of Kerry Group. Despite the dreadful performance of management, this is far too low.”

In the weeks since then, Glanbia’s stock has risen steadily and currently stands at €14.20, representing a jump of 20% in two months. Nice.

THE PHOENIX €4.55

Annual 2025

Vol. 43, No. 16 August 8 – August 21, 2025 €4.35

THERE’S A NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN

Hopefully you will inspire the rank and file ...not to leave

Vladimir Putin’s captured Brits
Profile: Leo Varadkar
Young Blood: Nick Delehanty
Denis O’Brien’s radio interference
Kitty Holland v John Waters

ALSO: Dermot Desmond’s bumpy ride; Clever Trevor White; Bertie Aherne to lose out; O’Connell O’Hagan’s €15m prescription; Dan O’Brien’s OTB warnings; Ian Hyland’s bad call?

www.thephoenix.ie

THE PHOENIX €4.55

Vol. 43, No. 15 July 25 – August 7, 2025 €4.35

LORD OF THE ÁRAS BID?

Regrettably, we’ve had a poet, why not a dancer? Or even a total clown?

Sinn Féin divide on Mary Lou
Profile: Jamie Bryson
Young Blood: Jennifer Bray
Maurice Regan’s \$6m setback
AIB’s €1bn headache

ALSO: Mary Robinson’s documentary; Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s latest plot; Eoin Keenan’s wellness boxes; Albert Manifold’s new gig; Eddie Ivin’s track record; Backing Kneecap

www.thephoenix.ie

THE PHOENIX €4.55

Vol. 43, No. 14 July 11 – July 24, 2025 €4.35

WHO’S FOR THE PARK?

I see absolutely no reason why I couldn’t win The Art Comhairle hasn’t made up my mind yet It’s time for a Blueshirt Jaynes Maizead, I might run so!

Patrick O’Donovan v Maureen Kennedy
Profile: FG MEP Seán Kelly
Young Blood: Eilish Keating
Stefan Klinecicz’s starring role
Veronica Guerin and the ‘Sindo’

ALSO: Shrewsbury Road’s high-flyers; Baroness Bevan’s second shot; QAnon comes to Cork; John Keegan digs deep; Alan Glancy’s hospitality headaches; Dublin Beer Factory floored

www.thephoenix.ie

A GREAT SUMMER GIFT!

Keep Informed In 2025

SENDER

Quote Code (PHX2025)

Name:

Address:

.....

Phone:..... E-mail:.....

If this subscription is intended as a gift to someone other than yourself, please fill in their name and address below, as well as your own details and email above.

RECIPIENT

Name:

Address:

.....

☐ I enclose a Cheque/Postal Order for €.....
(Make cheque payable to Penfield Enterprises Ltd)

☐ Please debit my Credit/Debit Card

VISA ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ AMEX ☐ DEBIT ☐

Card No _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ / _____

Expiry Date ____ / ____

Name on card:..... Date:.....

Annual Print Subscription Rates:

Ireland/NL - 1 year €89;

UK €99; Europe €99;

Elsewhere €125.

ORDER NOW!


Tel: 01-661 1062



**MERRION
VAULTS**

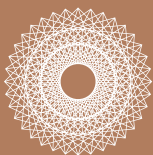
Safe Deposit Box Rental

from
€5
per week

 (01) 254 7900


 MerrionVaults.ie

SCAN HERE
FOR MORE INFO



**MERRION
GOLD**

Invest in Gold & Silver Bullion

 (01) 254 7901

 MerrionGold.ie

SCAN HERE
FOR MORE INFO



Things are looking up.



Now available without prescription.
Available in a 4 or 8 pack

Always read the leaflet. Sildenafil will only help you get an erection if you are sexually stimulated. Erectile dysfunction can affect men differently.