

# Weekend Review

Saturday, March 24th, 2018 Editor Conor Goodman Phone 01-6758000 email [weekend@irishtimes.com](mailto:weekend@irishtimes.com)



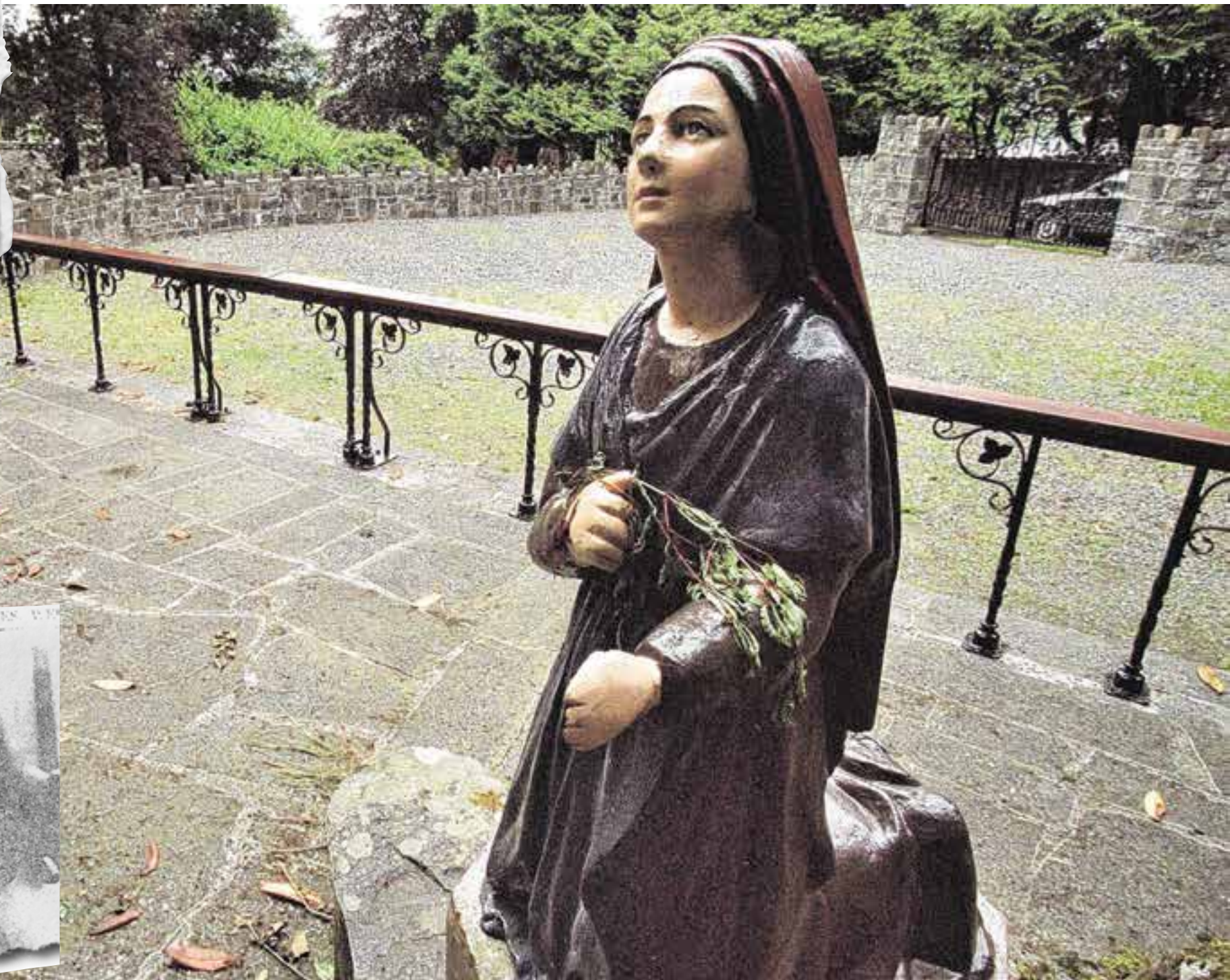
## Irish man in Syria

The Irish civilian who took up arms with the Kurdish militia. Page 5



## New Good Friday

Hoteliers and businesspeople on how this year will be different. Page 3



# ANN LOVETT: DEATH OF A 'STRONG KICK-ASS GIRL'

Ann Lovett died aged 15 after giving birth at a grotto in Granard, Co Longford in 1984 – a tragedy that still resonates in the town and in Irish society. Had she lived, she would be turning 50 next month



Rosita Boland

"I remember being outside the church when the hearse arrived . . . I remember when they were taking the coffin out of the hearse, there was a collective gasp . . . Usually at a removal, you'd hear a mumble of people talking. But apart from that gasp, there was silence. What could anyone say?"

Nuala Ledwith, who lived three miles outside Granard, Co Longford, at the time, is talking about the removal of Ann Lovett and her stillborn son to St Mary's Church in Granard on Thursday, February 2nd, 1984. Two days previously, Ann Lovett had died after giving birth in the grotto adjoining St Mary's. She was 15.

The repercussions of her death continue to resonate powerfully in Irish society, more than three decades later.

Ann Lovett was born in Cobh general hospital on April 6th, 1968, and if she had lived, would be celebrating her 50th birthday next month. She was given Rose as her middle name, according

to her birth cert. The family lived in the Co Cork town in a Victorian house on Graham's Terrace overlooking the harbour.

She was the third youngest of nine children born to Diarmuid and Patricia Lovett. Ann's father, who was from the village of Kilnaleck, Co Cavan, moved the family back there in 1972. In 1981, they moved to the nearby small town of Granard.

Diarmuid Lovett bought the Copper Pot bar on the town's Main Street and the family lived above it. The pub didn't seem to open much, or get much trade. He was also a carpenter, but was unemployed and didn't appear to have adjusted successfully to the role of publican.

Patricia Lovett, née McNamee, was a private woman who kept to herself and attended Mass regularly. "Lily", a close friend now aged 86 and still living in Co Longford, recalls her as "a lovely, lovely decent woman. She was a great parish worker and very religious".

At the time of Ann Lovett's death, also living at home were her younger sister Patricia (14), and brother Stephen (12). Some of the other children had left home by then, including her only other sister, Louise, who was working in Dublin. The other siblings were Neil, Gerard, Colman, Kevin and Diarmuid.

Both Ann and her sister Patricia attended the Cnoc Mhuire secondary school in the town. It was a mixed school, with 300 girls and 175 boys, and well-known in the county for its excellent basketball team. Ann had done her Inter Cert the previous summer and was involved in the school magazine, *Féach*. Her favourite subjects were art, English and biology.

Nuala Ledwith, who was two years ahead of Ann at school, describes her as "pixie-faced, with dark-brown hair", about shoulder length, slight and not much more than five-foot-two in height. "I always thought she was a strong kind of girl; a kick-ass kind of girl."

"Michael" was in Ann's year, and often sat beside her in class. "She was a pretty girl. She nearly always had her hair tied up in loads and loads of little plaits. Every so often, she would undo the braids and her hair would stick out in all these lovely curls."

Ann was "very engaging. She was very, very outgoing, very bubbly, and a bit of a tomboy. She was gregarious, and the life and soul of all the fun that was happening. The one thing I remember most strongly about her after all these years is that she seemed very independent and strong."

She was fond of hanging out with her friends in Granard's one small "pool hall" – in reality a little grocery shop with a pool table and four Space Invaders game machines crammed into it. A friend pierced her ears for her one evening when Ann called to her house.

In the fashion of the 1980s, she took to wearing baggy jumpers and big jackets, but she may not have been wearing them to be fashionable. In January 1984, Ann Lovett was nine months pregnant.

## January 31st, 1984 Dawn

Main Street Granard is anchored at one end by the Cnoc Mhuire secondary school, and by St Mary's Church on an small hill at the other end. That Tuesday morning the

sun rose over the town at 8.14am. The forecast was for a cold, wet windy day. Ann Lovett's mother saw her in the bathroom at about 8am. "She appeared to be her normal self," she would later tell the inquest.

Barely a quarter of an hour after the weak winter light dawned in Granard, Bridie McMahon, a neighbour of the Lovetts, was making her way home from early Mass at St Mary's church. She saw Ann on the street, carrying her red schoolbag, and did not notice anything unusual about her behaviour.

McMahon did not know until later, that along with her books, Ann's schoolbag contained a pair of scissors she had taken from the family home.

Diarmuid Lovett did not get up until about 9am that day. He thought Ann had gone to school as normal. According to her mother, Ann had never missed a day at school. But Ann Lovett did not go to school that day, and was apparently not missed by either teachers or classmates.

Bridie McMahon seems to have been the only person who saw her between about 8.30am and shortly after noon. It is possible she spent that time out of sight at the grotto, as she was not at school, not at home, not with friends, and was not seen around the small town with its one main street and population of 1,285.

Ann did not appear home for lunch either. "I was slightly curious about this, but it happened before," her father said. "I thought she might have stayed on to help out with the school magazine."

Sometime between noon and 12.30pm, Ann called to the house of her closest friend, Mary Maguire, on Moxham Street, less than a two-minute walk from Ann's home. Two days previously, she had told Mary she had a pain in her stomach.

It was to Mary she had come on December 27th, put her arms around her, and confided, "Mary, God, I'm pregnant." She didn't tell Mary how many months pregnant she was; perhaps she did not know herself.

On that January day, Ann wanted Mary to come out with her, somewhere unspecified, that they could go together. Mary couldn't leave the house, as she was babysitting. Ann asked her for a cigarette.

## 12.45pm Labour

Ann left the Moxham Street house at about 12.45pm, turned right, and walked towards the church and its grotto. It was now raining heavily, and whether she realised it or not, Ann was either in, or approaching, the early stages of labour.

The grotto was built in the 1930s, under the direction of Fr Peter O'Farrell who had been a curate in Longford town, and volunteered in the Royal Irish Regiment. The grotto's distinctive railings and water font that remain in situ today had come out of the chapel of Granard workhouse, which closed in 1922. The workhouse had long since been demolished, and on its site stands the Cnoc Mhuire secondary school.

Ann took the scissors out of her schoolbag, leaving the bag near the entrance. Sometime between 12.45pm and 4pm, she lay down beside the workhouse chapel railings, removed her underwear, and gave birth in the rain.

She cut the umbilical cord with the scissors she had brought from home, and wrapped her dead baby in her coat. He was full term and weighed 6½ pounds.

Then she lay down again on the wet mossy gravel, in her school uniform, in the persistent rain, without her coat, her body beginning to go into irreversible shock.

## 4pm 'It's a doctor you need'

At about 4pm, three boys were walking home from Granard Tech when one of them, Jimmy Brady, spotted the abandoned schoolbag. They heard moaning coming from the grotto, and they discovered Ann lying on her back and the dead baby nearby. Her knees and elbows were bruised, dirt lodged underneath her fingernails. There was a lot of blood.

"I took her hand and asked if she was alright. She opened her eyes and then closed them again," Brady said.

None of the boys stayed with Ann. They ran together for help, out on to Church Street, and hailed the first person they saw. It was a man called Tony Kelly.

"They said there was a girl after falling," he said. "I thought they meant, she fell from the top of the statue, like, when she was coming from school. So I went up and seen this little girl and her baby lying on the gravel. And I asked the big lad, 'Who is she?' and he said, 'It's Ann Lovett.'"

"So I held her hand to see was she alright, like, and she was very cold. I put her hand down again. So I went in for the priest, and I rang at the door.

"And the priest come out, and I told him, and he says, 'It's a doctor you need.' And I said 'I need you too, Father, the baby is after dying and this little girl might be dying too.'"

Despite the canon saying it was a doctor who was needed, he did not phone for one. Canon Gilfillan went instead to collect the items needed to perform the Last Rites.

Meanwhile, the three boys had again run out into the road and knocked at the

■ The grotto in Granard, Co Longford, where 15-year-old Ann Lovett died after giving birth to her stillborn baby boy, Pat, in 1984; and clippings from the *Sunday Tribune* (top left) and *The Irish Times* coverage of the incident and the resulting inquest. PHOTOGRAPH: BRENDA FITZSIMONS

door of a nearby house. It was the Gallagher home and Eugene Gallagher's young daughter answered. She went to her father, who was out back in his workshop, and told him something terrible was happening at the grotto. He rushed to the grotto, at which point the canon and Tony Kelly were arriving on the scene. Gallagher raced back across the road again to call for a doctor.

It was then 4.14pm, and Gallagher phoned the local doctor, Tom Donoghue, who was in his surgery. Dr Donoghue immediately called an ambulance, which had to come from Mullingar hospital, 42 km away. Gallagher took blankets from the house and hurried back to the grotto for a second time.

It was still raining heavily, and dusk was beginning to fall. When Eugene Gallagher arrived on the scene for the second time, Canon Gilfillan was administering the Last Rites to Ann and her baby.

By that time, the three boys had gone up Main Street, to the Copper Pot, to alert Ann's family.

Diarmuid Lovett was at home, pottering around in a corrugated shed in the back garden, when the boys burst in and told him: "Ann is up at the grotto having a baby."

The Lovetts' youngest son, Stephen, was also at home and the pair of them went at once to the grotto. Ann's mother was not at home. She was elsewhere in Main Street, grocery shopping.

Shortly after Diarmuid and Stephen Lovett got to the grotto, Dr Donoghue also arrived. His medical eye recognised that Ann was suffering from shock, exposure and haemorrhage. "I had a little hope for her, but not much. She was very critically ill," he said later.

At this point, standing over Ann, now covered in blankets, was Tony Kelly, Canon Gilfillan, Eugene Gallagher, Dr Donoghue, her father and her little brother. Nine people had now witnessed a scene at the Granard grotto which none of them were ever likely to forget.

The baby and Ann were carried to Dr Donoghue's car, and he drove Diarmuid Lovett, his dying daughter and dead grandson back to the family home on Main Street to await the ambulance.

## 5.55pm Cold to the touch

Back at the Copper Pot, Patricia Lovett had come home and out on Main Street word was rapidly spreading about what the three boys had seen at the grotto.

Diarmuid Lovett put two hot water

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bottles close to the body of the baby, although it was evident the child was dead. They lit an oil stove and attempted to keep Ann warm.

The ambulance arrived at 5.10pm, by which point it was dark. Patricia Lovett travelled with Ann and the baby, while her father remained at home.

Also in the ambulance was a Sr Damien, who was attached to St Joseph's Hospital, Longford. Ann was still conscious. "I asked the girl her name and she attempted to answer, but I couldn't make out what she said," Sr Damien said.

At 5.55pm, Ann was admitted to Mullingar hospital, and it was noted her lips and fingertips were white on arrival; a medical state called cyanosis. Her school uniform was soaked, and she was cold to the touch. The obstetrician in attendance, Dr Marie Skelly, directed that blood and oxygen be given. "Momentarily there were signs of recovery, but almost immediately she stopped breathing," said Dr Skelly. She said it was difficult to ascertain whether Ann had hypothermia and exposure, or haemorrhage. Ann did not respond when her chest was opened for direct cardiac massage.

Ann Rose Lovett died shortly afterwards, aged 15 years, nine months and 25 days.

Diarmuid Lovett was phoned from the hospital at about 7pm to tell him that Ann was dead. By the time an unwitting Mary Maguire left her home on Moxham Street shortly after, the news was already out in the town. She heard it from a group of friends gathered together in a doorway on Main Street. "Ann Lovett is after dying," they told her bluntly.

It is a little-known fact that Ann's son was given the posthumous baptismal name of Pat. They were to be buried in the one coffin, and the child needed a baptismal name. The postmortem on the two bodies was conducted by Dr Ken Cunnane, a pathologist with the Midlands Health Board. The bodies remained at Mullingar hospital until Thursday, February 2nd, when they were removed to St Mary's Church in Granard.

The funeral was held the following morning, with Ann's shocked classmates making a guard of honour outside the church, and then singing in the choir inside. One of her teachers, Pat Kilvan, played the violin during the funeral service. Among those in attendance was Fianna Fáil TD John Wilson, a future tánaiste. Ann and her baby were buried together in Granardkill graveyard.

## February 5th Front-page news

Jim Gray was then a reporter for the *Longford Leader*. A colleague got an anonymous call about Ann Lovett's death, but it was too late for that edition of the weekly paper, which had already gone to press.

Gray can't prove it, but he believes the call came from a garda in Granard, where there was a rural station. He also believes that when the article was not carried in that week's *Longford Leader*, the same person contacted the *Sunday Tribune*.

Emily O'Reilly, then a reporter with the *Sunday Tribune*, was assigned the story. The first most people became aware of the death of Ann Lovett and her baby was after O'Reilly's report featured on the front page of the *Sunday Tribune* on February 5th, two days after her funeral. The news immediately convulsed the country.

That evening, Nuala Fennell, who was then a minister of state with responsibilities for women's affairs and family law, described it as a "national tragedy" and called for an inquiry, "regardless of whose sensibilities were hurt".

By the following day, Granard was the focus of intense media attention. The one question everyone wanted an answer to was: how could this have happened?

It was a question that led inevitably to other, difficult, uncomfortable, and important questions. Who knew Ann was pregnant? Who was the father – a person guilty of statutory rape for having sex with a minor – and where was he?

The Lovett family shut their pub and their front door, and did not open either to reporters.

## February 7th A public statement

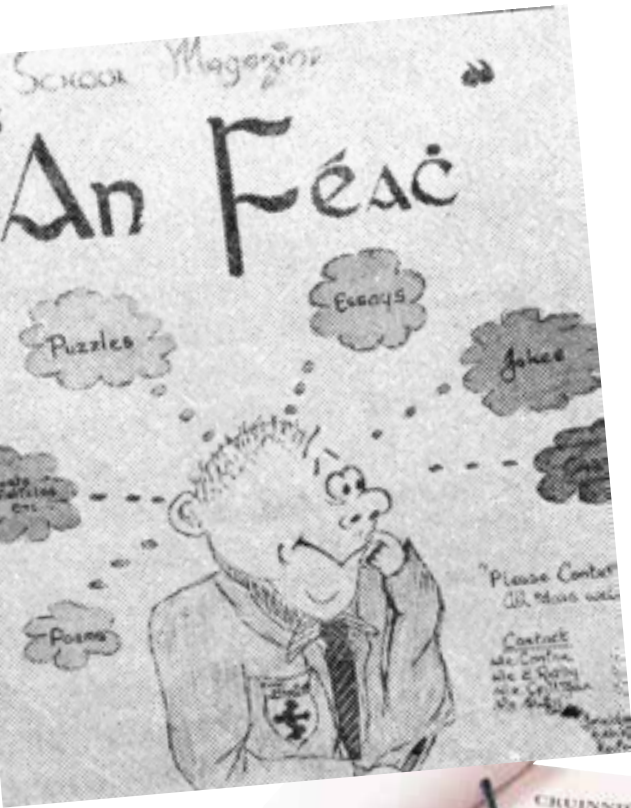
On Tuesday, February 7th, Sr Maria Plunkett, principal of Cnoc Mhuire, gave a public statement. It was common knowledge in the town that the school had consulted solicitors before writing this statement.

In front of the assembled media, Sr Plunkett sat among her silent staff and read out the following words in a shaky voice.

"It is difficult to express how the staff feel on this sad and tragic occasion. We have gone through the past week with Ann's family, and shared their grief and their sense of loss. Ann was an intelligent and bright girl who took an active part in school life and was interested in her studies. She seemed happy in school and gave no indication of being under stress. No one on the staff knew she was pregnant. Had we known about Ann's pregnancy, we would have taken her with understanding and compassion, as would be normal practice. We would have helped her to accept it, to cope with it, and also put her in touch with those who would enable her to make the necessary arrangements for the proper care of herself and of her baby. We respect and accept the personality and individuality of each of our pupils. The circumstances of this tragedy reflect an element of mystery on everyone's part."

Ann's classmate Michael lived outside Granard, on the school bus route. The first he heard of the news was on the day after Ann's death. "We were told the news in the gym, by the principal. I can't remember a single thing about how she phrased it, just that Ann was dead. I can distinctly remember all of us aligning around the edge of the gym and talking about it, and all of us being in shock. It was all very surreal.

"The people living in the town knew a



lot more, and the rumour mill went into overdrive. When we found out about the details, about how she died, and where she died, sure that was like something you'd write, rather than something that was real. We didn't know what to say."

After that morning assembly in the gym, students were expected to return to class. "It was not quite immediate business as usual, but it was definitely a get-back-to-work kind of thing," Michael says.

"I know some other students were unhappy with the way the nuns handled it. They could have been a bit more consoling. Or understanding, and empathetic. Or helped give us an opportunity to grieve. What happened to Ann was such a big thing at the time, and very, very, very unusual."

Carl Sullivan, who was a student in the school at the time, and who now runs a photography business in Longford, also recalls the atmosphere in the school during those days. "It was very morose . . . and quiet. There was none of the usual messing. It was an awful thing, because at that time, a teenage pregnancy was awful."

Jim Gray was there on that day when Sr Plunkett read her statement. He had hoped, representing a local newspaper, that the nuns would be more open with him, and give an additional interview. They did not. "They wouldn't deviate from their statement in any way," he says now, by phone from Sligo. They did however give him one of Ann's drawings, which she had made to elicit contributions to the school magazine, and which the *Longford Leader* carried on its front page that week.

The same day Sr Plunkett was reading out her statement to the media, a government meeting was being held in Dublin about the Ann Lovett case. Handwritten notes of that meeting were taken on a pink slip by the assistant secretary to the government, with various words crossed out, as if there was some uncertainty about what to write.

"Govt received a report from M/Health & Education; expressed sympathy with the parents and family; insofar as in inquiry is concerned, there will an inquest. Great personal tragedy [word crossed out] which shld not be compounded by [word crossed out] particular kinds of [word 'public' crossed out] attention."

Barry Desmond, now 82, was the minister for health. "The senior officials in the department were absolutely horrified and so was I," he says now.

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**The people living in the town knew a lot more, and the rumour mill went into overdrive**



■ Clockwise from above: Main Street, Granard, where Ann Lovett's father Diarmuid ran the Copper Pot pub; notes from a government meeting on February 7th, 1984, about the Lovett case; a drawing by Ann, reproduced by the *Longford Leader*, which appeared in the Cnoc Mhuire school magazine *Féach*; Bridie McMahon, who saw Ann on the morning she died, at the inquest into the 15-year-old's death; publican and carpenter Diarmuid Lovett; Ann's mother Patricia Lovett; and Mary Maguire, Ann's best friend, at the inquest. PHOTOGRAPHS: BRENDA FITZSIMONS, INM/GETTY

since said anything about it. It sounds ludicrous in this modern day and age where you have whistleblowers, but that's just the way it is."

Canon Gilfillan stood up at Sunday Mass on February 12th and delivered a strongly-worded sermon. "The secret of what happened is with that little girl in the grave," he said.

"What happened should have been left to the town to deal with in its own way. My firm belief is what happened should not have been covered by RTE or the newspapers: it should have been kept parochial, local. They gave us loud-mouthed publicity of the worst kind, but God is good and able to triumph over evil reporting."

On February 16th, 11 days after the story became public, the Midlands Health Board issued a statement about the findings of its report. Chief executive Denis J Doherty told the media that Ann had not accessed any of its services: the public health nurse, social workers, or community welfare officers.

She had, however, attended the local Granard doctor, Tom Donoghue, twice in recent months. The first time was on November 2nd and the second occasion was November 25th, at which point she was seven months pregnant.

The next time Dr Donoghue saw Ann Lovett was two months later, dying at the grotto.

"The consultations related to a medical condition [shingles] totally unrelated to her pregnancy," Doherty stated. "The diagnosis arrived at did not necessitate the taking of specimens for analysis and the physical examination required was of a type which did not reveal any indication that the patient might be pregnant."

## February 21st The verdict

Granard gardai had sent a file on the case to the coroner, which has never been made public. The one other person apart from the gardai who definitely saw this file was coroner Patrick Mangan. He is now dead, and never publicly commented on the Lovett case prior to his death.

The inquest into the deaths of Ann and Pat Lovett was held at 3pm on February 21st, 1984. It was conducted at the Westmeath County Council building in Mullingar, and the public gallery was full. Among those in the public gallery were friends of Ann, and one of her teachers. Granard gardai were represented by Insp Patrick J Collieran. The hearing lasted just 48 minutes, before an all-male jury of six.

Diarmuid Lovett told the inquest: "The family was united and we never at any stage knew she was pregnant."

He spoke of their "close-knit" family. He also said that he and his wife were aware that Ann had had a boyfriend who was a few years older than her and they

had advised her against seeing him, due to this age gap.

Ann's mother's statement was read out by Insp Collieran. The inquest heard that there was "no trouble" at home. "I never thought she was pregnant. If I had known, I would have made sure that she would have got proper care and assistance." She wept as her statement was read out.

Mary Maguire, the friend in whom Ann confided, also gave evidence. "Ann told me she was pregnant and she didn't know what to do about it. I wasn't shocked, as I had had my doubts. She had been getting sick fairly often," she said. "I thought she was going to seek help."

Pathologist Ken Cunnane reported that in his opinion, Ann's death had been caused by irreversible shock. This was due to a combination of exposure and blood loss in childbirth, with exposure being the main factor.

The baby had died from asphyxia, probably in delivery, and had been stillborn.

In summing up, coroner Patrick Mangan said it was clear Ann's parents did not know she was pregnant, otherwise they would have sought help for her. He directed the jury to deliver a verdict of death consistent with the pathologist's findings.

## Who knew? 'Several adults'

Around Christmas, 1983, Nuala Ledwith was in Granard with a friend, and they saw Ann walking on the street. "My pal said, I don't care what anyone says, but she's not pregnant."

"I said, is she supposed to be? That was the first I had heard of it. I took stock of her then. She had a kind of a big jacket on her, but baggy clothes were the style at the time. I felt a dread for her, more than a surprise at the news, because of what she might have to go through."

Michael says he did not know Ann was pregnant. "I was a 15-year-old boy. I had no clue about stuff like that then. Put it this way, why would you think your classmate was pregnant?"

As for the wider community, "I find it very hard to fathom that the adults didn't know. I think it is completely unusual that nobody would not have noticed she was nine months pregnant."

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**Granard people quickly stopped talking to the media: a silence which continues to this day**

He heard from the school rumour mill that it was suspected Ann had had an older boyfriend: some seven or eight years older. But people weren't sure. He never heard a name. "At the time," he says now, "it was all so taboo to talk about these things: being pregnant outside marriage, especially as a teenager, and especially when you were still at school."

John Aidan Byrne was a reporter at the time for the now defunct *Longford News*. He was 25 at the time, and has been living in New Jersey since 1986, continuing to work as a reporter.

Although from Co Louth, Byrne had relatives in Granard, and people trusted him enough to talk to him. It was Byrne who discovered that the baby boy had been baptised with the name of Pat.

One of the shops opposite Cnoc Mhuire was a small grocery, run by Michael McCarthy. It was here that the father of one of the school's students admitted to Byrne, while remaining anonymous, that his daughter had told him some months earlier about Ann Lovett's pregnancy.

In Byrne's news report at the time, he wrote, "If anyone in Granard stands indicted, it is the scandal-givers, the nod-and-wink moralisers who knew the girl's plight – and cracked jokes about it."

He tells *The Irish Times* from his home in the US that local people told him Ann's pregnancy had been known to them, to the extent that some people were joking openly about it prior to her death.

The *Longford Leader*, in its first report on the story on February 10th, asked the same question: who knew? "From our investigations, we are satisfied that many of Ann Lovett's school pals did know, and several adults in Granard knew," ran a sentence in Eugene McGee and Jim Gray's report.

How did they discover this, I asked McGee when I visited him. "I picked up the phone and talked to people in Granard who knew me," he says.

It appeared plenty of people in the town had either suspected or knew Ann Lovett was pregnant.

Emily O'Reilly went to Granard following her story on February 12th. Two local men, retired army officer Pat Scanlon and his friend Pat Maguire, told her about the rumours of pregnancy going around the town months before Ann died.

"At least four people knew," a distressed Mary Maguire told other reporters at the time. Of Ann, she said, "We were like sisters. It has not really hit me yet. I am just too sad to talk about it."

## February 23rd Gay Byrne Show

Two days after the inquest, on February 23rd, the Gay Byrne radio show gave over the entire programme to reading out letters sent in by people who had their own stories of concealed pregnancies. It was a landmark piece of radio lodged deep in the national consciousness.

The inquiry that an outraged Nuala Fennell had called for into Ann Lovett's death never happened. At the government meeting the following day, the results from the pending inquest were deemed to be enough.

The Garda file that went to the coroner has never been publicly seen. The Midlands Health Board had already publicly announced its findings, but the report did not make it to Dublin: Barry Desmond says he never saw it. "The archives of the Department of Health was a complete shambles at the time."

Gemma Hussey, now 79, then minister for education, tells *The Irish Times* she is not aware of any department report at the time in connection to Ann Lovett's case.

Extensive efforts by *The Irish Times* to determine what, if any, archival documents relating to Ann Lovett are held in the Departments of Health, Justice, or Education, have yielded no results. Nor have inquiries to the Garda press office.

"Rural Ireland was a closed society then on matters relating to the care and protection of children," Desmond says. "Had the tragic remains of that baby been found today, the State would immediately have taken DNA, and it would have been preserved for any future inquiry."

## The Lovett family 'Shunned'

On April 22nd, 1984, less than three months after Ann died, her sister Patricia, aged 14, died by suicide.

Diarmuid Lovett died three years later, aged 57. Patricia Lovett remained living on Main Street, Granard, until her death in June 2015, aged 81.

Louise Lovett, the one remaining daughter of the family, is now the chief executive of Longford Women's Link: an organisation that aims to "link women in the pursuit of justice and equality."

She is also a board member of the National Council for Women in Ireland, and of Safe Ireland, a social change agency working on domestic violence. She did not respond to requests for an interview.

None of the family has ever spoken publicly about the events of 1984.

Lily, Patricia Lovett's close friend, says that in all the years she knew her, she never once talked about either of her daughters. "I remember one day saying something about Ann's death, and she said, 'That was a good while back.' She kind of closed it down herself."

Lily considers the Lovett family were "shunned" by people in Granard after Ann died. "It was the shame. That Ann was pregnant and not married. That she died. All of what happened, but mostly that she was pregnant."

"Nobody ever knew who the culprit was who made her pregnant. I never knew. That was kept top secret. Isn't it funny how the men always get away with it?"

"Ann was a girl who was full of life, and had a great energy about her. I'm sure she would have done great things in her life, had she been able to live it," is the last thing Michael says, looking haunted at the memory of his former classmate.

*The Irish Times* made sustained attempts to contact a number of people associated with this story. Of those who responded, most declined to be interviewed. Some names in this report have been changed. Their identity is known to *The Irish Times*

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# Weekend Review

Saturday, May 5th, 2018 Editor Conor Goodman Phone 01-6758000 email [weekend@irishtimes.com](mailto:weekend@irishtimes.com)



## Cancer scandals

Adrienne Cullen on what the Netherlands and Ireland could teach one another. [Page 3](#)



## Judging Bertie

'If we all partied, Bertie Ahern served the drinks'. The former taoiseach, 10 years on. [Page 4](#)



# I was the boyfriend of Ann Lovett

Ann Lovett died in 1984 after giving birth at a grotto in Granard, Co Longford – a personal and national tragedy that still resonates. Today, Ann's former boyfriend Ricky McDonnell speaks publicly for the first time



## Rosita Boland

**R**ichard "Ricky" McDonnell is standing at the gate, staring at a house on Colmcille Terrace, Granard, Co Longford. There was a time, 34 years ago, when he knew this house inside out. It was here he had lived from the age of six to 17 – including several years on his own – until he had to leave. It was here he had spent many hours with his former girlfriend Ann Lovett, who died aged 15 after giving birth at the grotto in the town on January 31st, 1984. It was here, on that January day, Ricky McDonnell's life changed utterly.

Ann Lovett's death became one of the most soul-searching events of 1980s Ireland. It continues to resonate in the national psyche more than three decades later, in part because so many questions were left unanswered.

Ricky McDonnell has never talked publicly about those traumatic days in Granard. Why has he now chosen to break his silence?

"At the beginning I was silent out of fear, and then it was out of respect," McDonnell, now 51, says, when asked why he took so long to speak out. When *The Irish Times* published an in-depth article on the death of Ann Lovett last month, he was encouraged by friends to contact this reporter. "I'm now hoping that other people will come forward and tell what they know about that time," he says.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the day Ann Lovett died, Ricky McDonnell had been fixing fences with a local farmer in the freezing cold rain before they abandoned the work just after midday. McDonnell went home to Colmcille Terrace, where he was living alone,

and got into bed to keep warm, Radio Luxembourg playing in the background as usual. It was still bright, gone about 4.45pm, when he heard urgent, insistent banging on the door downstairs.

"A friend that I had in the town, who had often borrowed a bike off me before; he was knocking on the door. I got up and answered the door, and he was just standing there, talking gibberish. I could get 'Ann', 'the Palms', 'accident'." ("The Palms" is the name local people call the town's grotto, beside St Mary's Church, with its tall fir-tree palms.)

"It sounded gibberish to me, what he was going on about. He looked in a bit of a daze. And he kept repeating what he was saying, 'That Ann has been up in the Palms, there's been an accident, come on.' I thought he was messing with me. I didn't grasp what he was on about. I kind of ran him from the door. I told him to f\*ck off."

"I left my house, and I went to [a friend who lived on the terrace]. His wife was there, and I asked her had she heard if there was anything wrong. I said my friend was after coming to the house, and he was on about something crazy: Ann in the Palms, and that there was an accident. I said, have you heard anything? She said no. And then her husband arrived on the scene. He told me I had to go down to my aunt's; that something was after happening."

Confused, and with rising dread, McDonnell began the short walk to Main Street. Once he reached Market Street (known locally as New Road), he began to hear disturbing sounds. "I could hear screams and crying as I was walking down New Road. It just got louder and louder as I approached the Market corner."

Unbeknownst to McDonnell, scarcely an hour earlier, Ann Lovett had been found in the town's grotto grounds, where she had given birth, her stillborn child beside her wrapped in her coat. By the time he reached Market corner, the ambulance taking Ann, her mother Patricia and her dead baby to Mullingar Hospital had just departed from outside her home on Main Street, where the Lovett family lived above the Copper Pot bar.

On Main Street, "everybody was screaming. It was just horrific. Everybody

was screaming and crying; everybody who was on the main street, and that's probably half the town. All the schoolchildren were coming up from the convent. I saw one girl pulling handfuls of hair out of her own head, screaming."

Bewildered, McDonnell still had no idea what was going on. "But I knew that something bad had happened. Because this, you just wouldn't see it anywhere. Nobody could think up this, and act it out in a movie scene; all them young kids screaming and crying and wailing. I felt as if I was floating down the main street through all this. And everybody the whole way up to my aunt's was screaming and crying. And when I got to my aunt's some of my cousins came out and brought me in from the gate. They took me into the house. Everybody was distraught. Everybody."

He learned then that Ann had been taken away by ambulance. Within a couple of hours, someone called to the house to say she had died in Mullingar Hospital shortly after 7pm. "It was evident at that stage that she was after having a baby. Everything just descended into chaos," he says.

The local doctor, Dr Tom Donoghue, was called. "I don't know what happened after that. I was sedated. I don't know whether I woke up that evening or the next evening. I lost track of time."

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard McDonnell was born in Bedford, England, on July 29th, 1966, the second of two sons to Irish-born Austin and Philomena McDonnell. When he was six, his parents' marriage broke down. His father remained in England and his mother returned to Ireland with her two young sons. She took them to live in Granard, where she had family, and rented the council house on Colmcille Terrace.

McDonnell attended primary school in the town, and then spent three years in Granard Tech. He did not take any State exams, and left the tech before the end of summer term in his third year.

In the late spring of that year, in 1981, his father, who had tuberculosis, became ill. His mother left Granard to look after him. McDonnell's older brother had

already left Granard by then for England, where he has lived ever since.

"My mother was gone a couple of weeks," McDonnell says. When his father died in May, he went to Bedford for the funeral, and remained there for the summer. At the end of the summer, the English authorities informed his mother he needed to attend school. Aged 15, he was enrolled in St Thomas More Catholic School, Bedford, but spent less than one term there. He didn't want to stay in school, or in England.

"I had a part-time job in a pub there and I used to collect glasses. I used to serve as well, but I shouldn't have been serving. I saved up a few quid and I told my mother I was going back to Granard and I didn't want to stay in England any more. She was totally against it, but I went ahead and did it anyway."

McDonnell returned to Granard on his own. "I told her I'd be alright, that my aunt was still living there in Granard. And the street, Colmcille's Terrace, you could have walked into anyone's house there and you'd be at home. So I knew I'd be alright."

His mother, who had continued to pay rent on their home, had refused to give him the key, presumably hoping this would encourage him to come back to Bedford. For several months, McDonnell stayed with friends on Colmcille Terrace, and then with a brother of one of those friends. His mother wrote to him frequently during this time, and they also spoke on the phone regularly, but he remained determined to live an independent life in Granard.

McDonnell got work with a local farmer, and ate meals in the farmer's family home. "That man was so good to me," he says. He also worked at the local mart, and with the friend he was staying with, regularly went hunting by day and "lampping" – hunting using lamps – by night. "He used to have hunting dogs; greyhounds and terriers. We used to go hunting, any spare time we had."

The pair hunted for foxes. "We used to get 18 quid for a dog fox," he says. The foxes were passed on to a third party. "A lad up in Cavan, who used to skin the fox for us and then pass them on to the people who'd make coats or jackets from them." They also caught hares. "If we were out

in the daytime with the dogs and we caught a hare, we'd keep it and eat it; make soup and stew."

"At night-time, we used to go lampping hares and would catch them alive, and then they'd be sold to the racing-dog trainers outside of a racing track before the races. The hare's leg would be broken in the car park and it would run away on three legs and they'd let the dogs after it. The dogs would kill it. When the dogs would catch the hare, their temper would be bolstered up and then they'd be brought in for a race, so they'd be fired up for the race."

"And that's what used to happen back then. This is what we done to survive, to get money. I wouldn't dream of doing it now."

One winter night, in 1981, McDonnell and his hunting partner decided to go for a few drinks before going lampping. They went to the Copper Pot on Main Street, where Ann Lovett, then 13, was helping her father Diarmuid behind the bar. McDonnell was 15.

"I was bowled over. Absolutely bowled over," he says, about his first sight of Ann. "I thought she was funny, she was nice looking, she was friendly. I think she liked me immediately as well. It was like love at first sight."

By the time McDonnell left the Copper Pot that evening, he and Ann had arranged to meet later that week. In the 1980s, there were a few established popular places where Granard's teenagers hung out.

"There was a pub down the town, Phil Smith's, which had a pool table in a backroom, and there was the pool hall next door. They had a pool table and a jukebox and a pinball machine. There was a chip shop in the middle of the town. So we would just hang around there. That's where all the young people would hang around."

For the first few months after they met, the two young teenagers hung out at these meeting places.

"At the beginning, we used to meet at the pool hall or the chipper and we'd hang around there smoking fags and having the craic, messing about. And then I'd usually walk her home. It could be 10.30pm or 11pm. It didn't seem to bother Ann that

■ **Richard "Ricky" McDonnell**  
PORTRAIT: BRENDA FITZSIMONS ©THE IRISH TIMES

she stayed out late. I never seen her parents come out looking for her."

Their friendship deepened. McDonnell describes her character. "Ann was always messing about, always having the craic. She was very sharp, very witty. She could hold her own, she could stand up for herself, about what she thought; she was able to back it up. She was brilliant at drawing. She was intelligent. She was also loving and caring and kind. I could just go on and on, the things to say about her. She was fun to be with; a fun person to be in the company of."

Meanwhile, Philomena McDonnell had resigned herself to the fact her youngest son was not coming back to England, and had sent him the key to the Colmcille Terrace house. He was living there alone.

He says Ann often stayed at his house till late. Despite the fact they were openly boyfriend and girlfriend, McDonnell says he had little to do with Ann's parents Diarmuid and Patricia Lovett.

Was he surprised Ann stayed out so late?

"I was very surprised," McDonnell says. "You'd want to know where your kids are. If it went past nine o'clock at night-time, you'd want to know where they were. I was surprised that there wasn't more about Ann staying out. You would have thought somebody would have stood up and said something. But nothing. It didn't happen."

Shortly after Ann's 14th birthday, on April 6th, 1982, they began a sexual relationship.

"It started to get serious after that," McDonnell says. "She started to come to the house more often and stay later and later as the relationship intensified. It got to the point she was staying with me four or five nights of the week, every week, sometimes going home at 4am or 7am, and I would say virtually everybody in Granard knew that at the time."

They never used contraception. "We were worried, and we tried to take precautions, but hormones take over, and that

■ Continued on page 2



# I was the boyfriend of Ann Lovett

■ Continued from page 1

doesn't always happen. We were so in love, we didn't care."

They told each other many times they loved each other. They also often discussed what would happen if Ann became pregnant. She always had the same answer: that she would go to a close family member in Dublin and ask for help.

\* \* \* \* \*

A fortnight after Ann's 15th birthday in April 1983, McDonnell was home in bed. He'd come in from the mart about 9pm, made a cup of tea, and headed upstairs to bed. The house was heated by a range, which was unlit, and needed an hour or so to get going, so he didn't bother with it when he came in late in the evening. He turned on Radio Luxembourg, and at about 10.15pm, heard banging on the door. It was Ann.

"She was very upset. She was sobbing. I was asking her what was wrong and she was crying."

She told him she had been beaten. "I said to her, look Ann, I'm upstairs in bed, come upstairs and we'll talk. And she wouldn't stop crying. She was crying and sobbing. I held her. She still had her school uniform on."

McDonnell turned the bedroom light on, and asked Ann to show him her injuries. Her thighs were bruised and scuffed. "I just went ballistic. I asked her what happened. And she roared and cried and begged me not to tell anybody, or say anything. She was very distressed. I held her. The two of us cried. She begged me not to tell anybody, not to say anything, not to breathe a word of it."

McDonnell asked Ann if she had been raped. She did not reply. "She just cried. And she begged me not to tell anybody, not to say anything."

After that night, things began to change gradually between the two of them. "The frequency that we would meet wasn't there anymore. We just kind of drifted, those couple of months coming up to the summer."

Ann came to his house no more than half a dozen times after that. They last had sex in early summer of 1983, he says. Their drifting apart was, as McDonnell describes it, "subtle".

"I didn't see it. I just didn't see it."

They never formally broke up; there was no break-up conversation. As McDonnell saw it, "I honestly thought we would get back on again. And I had asked her several times, and tried, but I got the impression she was pushing me away. Nobody knew what was coming down the road."

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The first time McDonnell became aware of the rumours that Ann was pregnant was, he believes, October. He recalls exactly where he was when he first heard. "I was standing in the doorway of Paddy O'Hara's pub with a group of lads, and Ann was coming from the shops, and she walked past us and said hello to everybody and as she walked away, one of the lads said, 'She doesn't look pregnant to me.' And that's when the penny dropped for me. That was the first I had heard of it. Or even suspected that anybody had rumours or anything about her."

Shocked, he asked her straight out if she was pregnant the next time he saw her. "She denied it. That was the way it was for any other kind of meeting that we had. I'd broach the subject and she'd laugh it off, or she'd say, she'd just put on a bit of weight, and she was embarrassed."

McDonnell says he asked Ann seven or eight times after that if she was pregnant, and each time, she denied it. "She just didn't look pregnant," he says. "I told her several times that if she was pregnant, that I would stand by her."

Given that it was possible he was the father, was he surprised Ann did not tell him she was pregnant? McDonnell shakes his head in bafflement. "I don't understand that." He says he will never understand why Ann did not confide in him.

The last time McDonnell saw Ann was either on Stephen's Night 1983, or New Year's Eve. They had both travelled separately to the Fountain Blue Nightclub, between Edgeworthstown and Longford. McDonnell had got a lift with friends Martin Kelly and Brendan Martin.

At the end of the evening, Ann took a lift with them back to Granard. "That was the last time I seen Ann. I had probably had a few bevies as well [at the nightclub]; pints of lager. We shouldn't have been drinking at all. We were under age. We dropped her off at her house. We probably went back to Martin Kelly's house afterwards. I don't remember. It didn't stand out at the time. We didn't know what was going to happen."

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On January 31st, 1984, a Tuesday, Ann Rose Lovett did not go to school. She was nine months pregnant; a full-term pregnancy that both her parents were to state at her inquest they had had no knowledge of. She was found about 4pm that afternoon by three passing schoolboys, post-childbirth, semi-conscious in the grounds of the grotto that adjoined Granard's Catholic church. She died later in Mullingar hospital.

On Thursday, February 2nd, the day of the removal to St Mary's Church, McDonnell and a friend wanted to go to the mortuary in Mullingar hospital, where Ann was reposing, but they had no transport.

They walked down past the mart, and out along the road known locally as Ball Alley, intending to hitch a lift. There were two priests in the parish at the time. Canon Francis Gilfillan was the parish priest and lived at the parochial house beside the church. Fr John Quinn, the Catholic curate, had been appointed to Granard parish in the summer of 1980. It struck McDonnell and his friend that Fr



Quinn, who lived at the end of Ball Alley, might also be going to Mullingar, and could give them a lift.

"And as we crossed over the road, and approached the bend, we met all the Lovett brothers. They were coming from Fr Quinn's house. This is like half-past 10 in the morning, 11 o'clock, something like that. And I thought it was the end for me. I thought I was going to die. We walked straight into them. And they threw their arms around me and hugged me. All of them. We all cried. They told me not to blame myself."

There were a lot of people at the mortuary, McDonnell says. "All I saw was her face, her hands. It was just unbelievable, was what it was," McDonnell recalls, still visibly upset at the memory. "It was just unbelievable. I kissed her. I don't remember much about the rest of the day."

The funeral took place the following day. McDonnell went to the church, but found himself unable to go in. "I wasn't able, 'She doesn't look pregnant to me.' And that's when the penny dropped for me. That was the first I had heard of it. Or even suspected that anybody had rumours or anything about her."

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**I asked her what happened. And she roared and begged me not to tell anybody. She was very distressed. I held her. The two of us cried. She begged me not to breathe a word**

that Ann had loved me, and how sorry she was for doing what she was going to do. She had never meant to hurt me. That she had loved me. That the reason she was doing it was that nobody would believe I was the father of that child."

What does McDonnell think Ann meant when she wrote she was sorry for what she was going to do?

"It was obvious what she was going to do. She went up to the Palms, to the grotto, to have that baby. Ann wasn't stupid. She could have walked into any place, anywhere in Granard, and said, 'I'm having a baby,' and they would have called her an ambulance. Anybody would have done that. Anybody that's logical would have done that. But she didn't. She went to the grotto. And she done that for a reason. That isn't an accident. This was not about her going off somewhere quiet on her own. That is not Ann Lovett. That's not Ann. Ann could have gone to any woman in Granard. And they would have got her help."

"So to me, this was a protest, on her behalf. That's what I feel. I don't believe any other thing. Ann just wasn't like that. She could have got help anywhere, and she would have got plenty of help. This is well out of her character to do this. In the letter, she said she was sorry for what she was going to do. None of it adds up. I knew Ann better than anybody. And no way would she have gone to the Palms on her own, to have a baby, because she could have asked anybody for help, anybody, and they would have helped her. It's just unbelievable."

About two hours later, Fr Quinn arrived at the house, McDonnell says. "He had heard that Mrs Lovett and Louise had come down to the house and had a letter that Ann had written. He demanded to see it."

Fr Quinn and McDonnell went into the sitting room together, where the priest read the letter twice. "Then he turned round and put it into my hand, and said, 'Burn that letter. Because that's going to cause so much trouble. It'll destroy the town,' he said. And I burned it."

The story of Ann's death had gained national media attention and reporters were all over the town. Philomena McDonnell came over from Bedford, at the request of Granard garafai. The evening of the day she returned, word was sent that McDonnell was to be interviewed at the

barracks on Main Street. His mother went with him, but when McDonnell gave his statement, only he and Det John Murren were present in the room.

"He asked me everything. He asked me every question under the sun. The times we had sex. Where we had sex. Did I know anybody else who had had sex with Ann. Was there anybody that I suspected. Did she have any other boyfriends. And then I told him about the assault and what had happened."

Det Murren said nothing about the assault, McDonnell says; he just continued to write down the statement. At the end of what he thinks was a 60 to 90 minute interview, McDonnell read and signed it. He was not given a copy.

"It was probably the next day then that Fr Quinn came down to me auntie's and said he wanted to take me off; that the bishop wanted to see me in Longford. He said the bishop wanted to hear my story. I'm not a religious person. I thought it was very odd, but I knew it was very serious as well."

At the time, the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise was Colm O'Reilly, who held the post from February 24th, 1983, until he resigned on July 17th, 2013.

McDonnell says that he and Fr Quinn went into a room in the Bishop's Palace, with the bishop and another member of clergy associated with the bishop, whose name McDonnell did not know. "He [the bishop] wanted to know what I had told the guards," McDonnell repeated everything he had told Det Murren the day before, including the part about the assault.

"There was some kind of discussion at the end of it, between Fr Quinn and him and the other person. I was sitting there at the table as well. I just wasn't listening to them. I was miles away. The bishop told me he was swearing me to a vow of silence. And that I would have to kiss the seal of St Peter and he held out his hand with his bishop's ring. I was never to breathe a word of it again, he said."

In response, Bishop O'Reilly told *The Irish Times* in a statement he had never met Ricky McDonnell.

Within a day or two at most, but before his mother left Granard, McDonnell says Fr Quinn told him he wanted to take him away from the town because of the press. They spent three days driving around Ulster, McDonnell says; first to Donegal,

then Antrim, then Belfast. Both overnights, one in Malin Head and the second near Ballycastle, were spent in private houses, owned by people known to Fr Quinn.

By the time they arrived back in Granard, Philomena McDonnell had left. She had been in Granard less than three days. During that time the authorities had "demanded the key back off me mother", McDonnell says. This effectively rendered McDonnell homeless from the house he had lived in since the age of six.

"That's when he [Fr Quinn] said I could have a room in his house."

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The inquest into the death of Ann Lovett and her son, who had been baptised Patrick, was held on February 21st, 1984. A Garda file had been sent to coroner Patrick Mangan. Her mother Patricia Lovett's evidence stated that there was "no trouble" at home. Diarmuid Lovett testified that the "family was united".

The *Westmeath Examiner's* report of the inquest stated "he and his wife were aware their daughter had a boyfriend and had advised her against seeing this boy because of her age. Replying to Dr Patrick Mangan, county coroner, Mr Lovett said he was sure if their children had any difficulties, they would have discussed them with his wife and himself. . . Mrs Lovett said [of Ann] she appeared to take the advice we gave her concerning her boyfriend."

McDonnell was not called to give evidence at the inquest, nor asked to attend. Cause of death for Ann was given by pathologist Kevin Cunnane as irreversible shock, due to a combination of exposure and blood loss in childbirth. Despite extensive efforts by *The Irish Times*, the current whereabouts and contents of the Garda file in relation to Ann Lovett's death, if still in existence, could not be established.

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During this period, McDonnell says he was working for Fr Quinn, doing odd jobs around the church grounds; weeding and painting. He was still living in Fr Quinn's house when, in the early morning of Easter Sunday on April 22nd, 1984, Patricia Lovett (14), died by suicide.

McDonnell had been one of the last people to see Patricia alive. He says Fr Quinn had driven him and Patricia home from a dance at the Mickey Mouse Club in Edgeworthstown in the early hours of Easter Sunday.

At the inquest into the death of Patricia Lovett on July 16th, 1984, Mrs Lovett stated she had gone to bed at midnight, and her husband at 3am. (Diarmuid Lovett had since had a heart attack and was unable to attend the inquest.) *The Irish Press* of April 23rd had reported that "the Granard curate, Fr Quinn, drove Patricia and a boy back to Granard and dropped her off at her home at about 2.45am".

Mrs Lovett stated at the inquest that after her husband had come to bed at 3am, he had woken her later that night to say Patricia was crying.

Pathologist Kevin Cunnane found that Patricia had died from an overdose. She had been pronounced dead before 5am by the local doctor, Dr Donoghue. The pathologist also told the inquest that there was a bruise on the left side of her chin and an abrasion on her left cheek.

After Patricia Lovett's death, McDonnell felt his continued presence in Granard "was a reminder to everybody" of the double tragedy of the Lovett sisters.

McDonnell says Fr Quinn took him to Dublin that summer to meet Patrick Cooney, then minister for defence and a TD whose constituency was Longford-Westmeath. "He [Fr Quinn] explained who I was to Patrick Cooney and

■ Left: What is believed to be the first photo to be made public of Ann Lovett: 'I was bowled over. Absolutely bowled over,' says Ricky McDonnell of his first sight of Ann. Below: the grotto where 15-year-old Ann Lovett gave birth  
PHOTOGRAPHS: © COPYRIGHT THE IRISH TIMES/BRENDA FITZSIMONS

what had happened," McDonnell says. "He said I had been interested in joining the Army when younger and would it be possible to put my name on the recruiting list." McDonnell recalls Cooney telling him to stay out of trouble and made no promises to him.

Cooney told *The Irish Times* he had never met Ricky McDonnell and had "no recollection of any incident like that". However, solicitors for Fr Quinn said their client recalled bringing McDonnell to an appointment with Cooney.

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The pressure became too much for McDonnell, and he left Granard for Bedford. After a few weeks, a letter arrived, via the home of a relative, requesting him to present for a medical for the Army. "Back then, if you were called for a medical and passed it, you knew you'd made it through," he says.

McDonnell enlisted in the Army in August 1984, not long after his 18th birthday. "I enjoyed the training and Army life, but my mind was engulfed by the death of Ann," he says. "I often thought of ending it all when alone and armed but the thought of what I would be leaving behind for my relatives and friends stopped me from going through with it."

He remained in the Army until requesting a discharge at the end of three years. After that, he returned to England, and began working as a plasterer.

The impact of the traumatic events in Granard in 1984 continued to haunt him throughout his sometimes troubled adult life. He drank to excess for many years, until giving up alcohol more than a decade ago. "I drank to forget everything," as he puts it. "I couldn't settle into a relationship for fear of rejection, or from becoming too emotionally connected with another girl for fear of messing everything up again."

For years, he kept silent. "I was scared of them; I was spooked by what happened to me that day [at the Bishop's Palace]; I thought something bad would happen to me."

Then, as the decades unfolded, his continued silence was out of respect for Patricia Lovett senior, a mother who had lost two daughters in unimaginably tragic and public circumstances.

Patricia Lovett died in 2015: Diarmuid Lovett had died in 1987.

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When *The Irish Times* contacted Patrick Cooney and asked if he had ever met Ricky McDonnell, he said, "No". When asked if he had helped recruit him into the Army, he replied: "I have no recollection of any incident like that at all," adding, "anyway, I couldn't offer to recruit him into the Army; he would have had to go through the recruitment process."

Fr Quinn is now a parish priest in rural Co Leitrim. *The Irish Times* called on him at his home, and left a letter with a number of questions. He replied through his solicitors, who stated Fr Quinn "had made it clear that he felt it was inappropriate that he should be contacted in this way".

*The Irish Times* then submitted a number of questions through Fr Quinn's solicitors. In summary, these questions included the following: after the death of Ann Lovett, had Fr Quinn read a letter from her addressed to McDonnell and instructed him to burn it? Had he driven McDonnell to Longford after he had given his Garda statement to see the then bishop, Colm O'Reilly? Had McDonnell been asked by any person to swear an oath of secrecy about his statement? Had McDonnell travelled with Fr Quinn to Ulster at this time? Had Fr Quinn accompanied McDonnell to Dublin to see Patrick Cooney, to solicit for McDonnell's recruitment to the Army?

Fr Quinn, through his solicitors, confirmed he knew McDonnell and that he had tried to assist him.

Fr Quinn's solicitors stated: "Our client has no knowledge of a letter written by the late Ann Lovett and accordingly did not request to see such a letter. . . our client did not drive Mr McDonnell to see Bishop O'Reilly and this meeting did not take place with Bishop O'Reilly and the suggestion by Mr McDonnell that he was requested to swear an oath of secrecy about a statement which is on the Garda file and therefore on the record is absurd and erroneous. . . There was an intense level of media coverage of events in Granard and it was decided that Mr McDonnell needed a short break and this was arranged in consultation with his relatives. . . He travelled to Donegal with our client and stayed with relatives of our client. . . Mr McDonnell expressed an interest in joining the Irish Army and he made the necessary application and representations were made on his behalf and arising from the representations our client brought Mr McDonnell to an appointment with Mr Cooney."

The former Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, Colm O'Reilly, resigned in 2013. *The Irish Times* put a number of questions to him. Now Bishop Emeritus, he issued a statement in response via the Catholic Communications Office. "Bishop O'Reilly has never met, or communicated, with Mr Richard McDonnell. Bishop O'Reilly has never asked anyone to meet or communicate with Mr McDonnell on his behalf."

*The Irish Times* made repeated efforts to contact members of the Lovett family, but they did not respond.

Ricky McDonnell is unsure how his story will be received, but he says it is time his voice is finally heard. "I'm now hoping that other people will come forward and tell what they know about that time," he says. "What kind of signal is it that we are sending out to our children, that it is OK to brush things away under the carpet and remain silent for decades?"

\* Róisín and Fiona are pseudonyms. Their identities are known to *The Irish Times*.

Rosita Boland can be contacted at rboland@irishtimes.com



**She was found about 4pm by three passing schoolboys, post-childbirth, semi-conscious in the grounds of the grotto. She died later in Mullingar hospital**