

'A ring of individuals have protected this case'



Conor Lally

Security and Crime Editor

Broadcaster O'Callaghan says Cooke not linked to Cairns mystery

Having made his name in broadcasting and become one of RTE's marquee names, Gareth O'Callaghan has been commended for his bravery in recent years when speaking out about his depression.

Of late, however, he has taken on something of a new public persona, agitating for justice for a boy who has been missing, presumed murdered, for 30 years: Philip Cairns.

The 13-year-old was a distant relative of O'Callaghan, not that the veteran broadcaster knew of the link.

"I found out our family was related to the Cairns family around 10 years ago," O'Callaghan says. "We shared the same great-grandad; that was obviously a long time ago. But that was never my main reason for getting involved in the case."

"My interest in this started 30 years ago when I heard that a young boy had gone missing. This was a phenomenally big case in 1986."

As a broadcaster and author, O'Callaghan speaking out about Philip's disappearance, on the face of it, a little unusual, even if the boy was a relative.

But O'Callaghan, who is a psychotherapist and has a strong sense of social justice, has spoken out before on issues that were of concern to him and that he felt required airing.

His comments about what he said was the late Gerry Ryan's long-term cocaine use won him few plaudits, but he felt the issue needed to be faced.

Having become concerned that paedophile Eamon Cooke, the former owner of pirate station Radio Dublin, was being identified as Philip's abuser and killer, O'Callaghan decided to



Left: A garda directs operations during a search of the Dublin Mountains for missing schoolboy Philip Cairns (top). Above: parents Alice and Philip Cairns at a press conference in October 1986. PHOTOGRAPHS: TOM LAWLOR/PADDY WHELAN

put his head above the parapet. Using his profile and Facebook following of 21,000, he has written a number of posts outlining his concern that a paedophile ring – with well-connected men among it – was linked to Philip's disappearance.

Compulsion O'Callaghan says he has been contacted by a large number of people, from Philip's old school mates to people who say they were sexually abused by men operating in a paedophile ring in south Dublin in the 1970s, 1980s and beyond.

While he was moved by Philip's disappearance in 1986 and became even more interested when he learned they were part of the same family network, O'Callaghan says his interest became a compulsion to speak out in recent months.

"When I realised they were pointing the finger at Eamon

Cooke; he was a dead paedophile," he says. "I said to myself, 'hang on now, it's too easy to pin the blame on him and just leave it to die'." He says he appreciates the Garda believes the information alleging Cooke was behind Philip's disappearance was worth close examination.

"But if they are going to pin their hopes on this guy, I think they're letting a lot of guys go free. This has nothing to do with Eamon Cooke. I was beginning to get information from people who knew I had worked for Radio Dublin with Eamon Cooke who were saying, 'it's not him', including one of his family. His daughter had come to me and said, 'it's not my father, you do know that?'"

"I worked in 1979 for Radio Dublin for almost nine months. I moved on to another pirate radio station after that. I wasn't aware that he was abusing children; I was about 18 or 19 at the

time and all I wanted to do was be on the radio."

Asked what he recalled of Cooke, he says: "A strange, shifty, dirty guy; creepy, always had a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. He never washed."

"They were told their information was not accurate, that it was not a good idea to be saying what they were saying"

He looked despicable; you almost felt sad for the guy. He had a bit of a violent temper, but he just kept to himself and I kept to myself."

He does not believe the narrative that has taken hold in the media of late: that Cooke lured Philip back to the Radio Dublin

studio in Inchicore, Dublin to show him around and once there fatally injured him and disposed of the body, probably in the Dublin Mountains.

Philip was last seen leaving his home in Rathfarnham at about 1.30pm on Thursday, October 23rd, 1986, as he began his journey on foot back to Coláiste Eanna after lunch.

The mystery of what became of the 13-year-old shot back into the headlines in June when it emerged gardai were being aided by a witness who said she was present when Philip was in the Radio Dublin studio.

She said she saw him lying injured on the floor. She then passed out. When she woke up, she was in a car with Cooke. Philip was not there.

The witness, herself an abuse victim and who was just a child when Philip vanished, came forward and gave a statement to gardai earlier this year.

However, by that time Cooke was out of prison – he was serving a sentence for historical child sex abuse – and was in a hospice in Raheny, north Dublin, dying of cancer.

When some of the allegations were put to him, he is said to have made a confession of sorts, though the import of any words he may have uttered has not been revealed.

Garda inquiry

The witness also gave information about Philip's schoolbag, which was found in a laneway near his home six days after he disappeared. She detailed how Cooke directed others to leave the bag there to confuse the Garda inquiry. The bag was tested for Cooke's DNA and no link found.

That, of course, does not mean that he wasn't involved. But O'Callaghan doesn't believe it was him.

"Quite a few indications seem to me that it's got nothing to do with Eamon Cooke; let's rule that out of the equation. There's no body as far as I am concerned buried in a field up the Dublin Mountains."

He has no confidence in the reported partial deathbed admissions by Cooke of being involved in the disappearance.

His information, from people who knew Cooke, was that he had Alzheimer's and was medicated and close to death when gardai spoke to him. O'Callaghan dismisses as "nonsense" the suggestion a person in that condition could contribute credibly to a historic Garda investigation.

While the allegation Cooke had killed Philip is now in the public domain, O'Callaghan says it is impossible to see where that line of inquiry would, or indeed could, lead. O'Callaghan has said one

member of the public who contacted him believes a man he worked for for many years was linked to Philip's murder and has nominated the garden at that man's home in south Dublin as Philip's burial place.

The former 2FM broadcaster, who now plies his trade with 4FM, told *The Irish Times* another man contacted him nominating the same suspect – who is now deceased – as the possible killer of another long-term missing person.

People have also contacted O'Callaghan with the names of men who abused them as part of a paedophile ring.

Influential

The deceased man, whose garden O'Callaghan believes may contain Philip's remains, has been named as a member of a Dublin paedophile ring by several people who have contacted the broadcaster and writer.

"This is a ring of individuals who have protected this case," says O'Callaghan, saying that, while the surviving members of the alleged ring are now into their 70s and 80s, they are still influential.

O'Callaghan has passed that information to the Garda, as well as the information about the garden in south Dublin he believes "should be searched" if only to rule it out.

Garda sources said they were aware of the information, saying it was being examined along with other lines of inquiry and the excavation of any land would take place if there were grounds for such a dig.

O'Callaghan says some of the people who contacted him went to the Garda, some about Philip, others about the abuse they had suffered, and had a bad experience.

"The individuals who have come forward to me confidentially have said they were treated like third-rate citizens," he says.

"Some of them were sexually abused; some of them were raped. They were told the information they were coming forward with was not accurate, that it was not a good idea to be saying what they were saying."

He says the Garda has told him they will examine all the information he has passed on.

"Why don't they just go and dig the garden?" asks O'Callaghan. "This is information that is not being given the respect it deserves."

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Transport disruption likely as Siptu votes for industrial action at Dublin Bus

CIARÁN D'ARCY

Stoppages to Dublin Bus services are likely in the coming weeks after Siptu members at the company voted yesterday to engage in industrial action amid a pay dispute.

About 95 per cent of the drivers balloted in the last two days voted for action up to and including strikes, while 80 per cent of Dublin Bus clerical workers aligned to Siptu expressed their support for work stoppages.

The union represents some 1,600 members of the company's 3,300 workforce, and 1,100 drivers at the company are Siptu members.

"This result today demonstrates the determination of members to bring this pay dispute to a fair conclusion," said Siptu organiser Owen Reidy.

"Drivers and other workers at the company have not had a pay increase for eight years, have suffered reductions in earnings over the recessionary period and have been through three comprehensive restructurings during that time."

The row over salaries has escalated over the last month, after unions rejected a pay rise of 8.25 per cent offered.

Recommendation rejected

They also rejected a recommendation by the Labour Court of pay rises of 8.25 per cent over three years for Dublin Bus workers.

Last week, some 1,500 members of the National Bus and Railworkers' Union (NBRU) at the company voted to engage in industrial action.

Dublin Bus drivers are keen

to bridge an impending pay gap with Luas tram drivers, who will benefit from salary increases of up to €11,000 over the next four years following an

8.25%

Pay rise offered by Dublin Bus management, which was rejected by workers

agreement in June.

Union chiefs have stated a willingness to continue discussions with Dublin Bus management over the dispute, but said failure to reach a deal could lead to strikes before the end of August, or even an indefinite stoppage.

"We would urge Dublin Bus to return to the bargaining ta-

ble immediately to reach a new agreement to avoid the very real prospect of 24- and 48-hour stoppages and perhaps an indefinite all-out strike in Dublin Bus," said Mr Reidy.

Speaking earlier this week, NBRU general secretary Dermot O'Leary accused Dublin Bus management of ignoring the rejection of the 8.25 per cent offer by workers.

Disruption to bus services in the capital may coincide with another wave of industrial action by Iarnród Éireann staff, who remain in a dispute with their employer over payments for past productivity and reduced working hours.

Minister for Transport Shane Ross has repeatedly expressed his unwillingness to intervene in talks, despite the imminent threat of strike action.

Plenty to do as Ireland enjoys late summer sun

RACHEL FLAHERTY

There is good news if you are hoping to get outside and be active this weekend, as summer sunshine is on the way for Ireland.

Met Éireann is forecasting that today will be bright and sunny, with just a few scattered showers, with temperatures of 17-20 degrees.

Tomorrow is expected to be mostly dry, but cloudy, with light breezes and temperatures the same as today.

Early next week will also be warm and sunny, with temperatures set to reach 23 degrees on Monday and 25 degrees on Tuesday.

If the jellyfish stay away, the Ironman 70.3 race will go ahead in Dublin tomorrow. More than 2,000 athletes are expected to tackle the race which is due to start with a 1.9km swim at Scotsman's Bay in Dún Laoghaire at 6.50am. Ironman organisers said they would monitor the jellyfish situation and take action if necessary.

Gardaí have advised there will be road closures along the course as it travels from Dún Laoghaire, north along Dublin Bay and turns on to the north quays. It will then head towards Phoenix Park for a circuit west of the city via Lucan, Maynooth, Kildcock, Dunboyne and back into the Phoenix Park.

Also tomorrow more than 60,000 people and 20,000 ve-

60,000

The number of visitors expected at the Tullamore agricultural show

hicles are expected to make their way to the midlands for the Tullamore Agricultural and National Livestock Show. It will take place in the grounds of Butterfield Estate at Blueball, Co Offaly.

In Kerry, the Revival music festival takes place in Listowel today and the Kilkenny Arts Festival continues over the weekend.

Tullamore hopes 25th show will break record

EOGHAN MacCONNELL

Tullamore Show organisers are hoping to break all attendance records at its 25th anniversary tomorrow.

Revised in 1991, the Tullamore Show and National Livestock Show attracts some 60,000 visitors annually.

From humble beginnings on a two-acre site, the show now occupies the 250-acre Butterfield Estate in Co Offaly. "We call it a country living showcase," said show spokesman and one of the founders, Christy Maye. "It has everything from rare animals to vintage machinery."

'First-class'

Recalling the 1991 show, Mr Maye said: "A small number of people got together and wondered why there wasn't a show in Tullamore in the middle of the agricultural heartland."

"From day one we decided to run a first-class show. From that show has grown the most successful agricultural show in the Republic of Ireland."

He likened the Tullamore Show gold medals in livestock to the Olympics for breeders. "The most coveted prize in Irish livestock is the gold medal," he explained.

'Wonderful'

The show, like the farming community, has had to prove its resilience over the past 25 years. It was cancelled due to foot-and-mouth in 2001, but it was last-minute cancellations due to extreme downpours in 2007 and 2008 that were almost catastrophic for the event – which was then located on the grounds of Charleville Estate in Tullamore.

"We had some reserves, but we had wonderful people and fantastic sponsors," said Mr Maye. "All those people left their sponsorship with us and that was a massive boost."

With the expectation for good weather, there are no such fears for this year's edition. "I would suggest that anyone going to the show go early in the day because it is a massive show," Mr Maye said.