

Sean FitzPatrick funeral: a traditional send-off for a dearly loved family man

Miriam Lord: Death of poster villain of the crash was always going to generate interest beyond his grieving circle



Sean FitzPatrick's remains are taken from church after his funeral mass at the Holy Rosary Church, Greystones, Co Wicklow. Photograph: Colin Keegan, Collins

Miriam Lord

Tue Nov 16 2021 - 21:35

It was a traditional funeral Mass for a dearly loved family man.

He seemed to have been very well got, judging by the size of the congregation inside and outside the old church. A typical sort of turnout: family, friends, sporting companions, work acquaintances, a fair few millionaires and at least two billionaires.

Sure, you know yourself.

There were also half a dozen press photographers and a television camera on the footpath across the narrow road opposite the gates and a handful of journalists loitering in the churchyard.

Not so typical.

But then, this was also the funeral of a man who bankrupted himself, his bank and beggared a nation. "Sean FitzPatrick was our Dad. And that is who I'm going to talk about today" was the opening line of the touching eulogy delivered from the altar by his daughter Sarah.

There was a tone of defiance in her fiercely loving tribute, as if she was countering all the words of condemnation and disgust spoken by strangers about her father after his key role in the collapse of the Irish economy.

Of course, there would be no talk of the cataclysmic day job. Sean was her Dad and “in our eyes” he was adored by his family as the best father ever, a unique and wonderful person and the finest man a friend could know.

But the passing of the poster villain of the economic crash was always going to generate interest beyond his grieving circle. The awful legacy of his days running Anglo-Irish as a greed springboard for profit obsessed business over-achievers is still with us.

Who would come to mourn him?

It was a big funeral.

Denis O’Brien – who places a huge premium on loyalty – was always expected to show up for the friend he staunchly defended after his death. He walked along the road to the church in full view of the cameras.

DOB could have had his driver drop him at the gates, but that short, public walk was important.

And after the Mass, when massive Mercs and trophy SUVs waited nearby with engines idling, O’Brien strode through the crowd and past the photographers to his car which was parked in a laneway around the corner.



Denis O'Brien at the funeral. Photograph: Colin Keegan, Collins

Some names of men from the Anglo-Irish days were helpfully provided by a business reporter who was able to identify the crombied clones as they beetled inside.

The congregation was strikingly and overwhelmingly male and mature. A lot of men who had the look of money about them – silver grey types with decent suits and expensively

overcoated. Fedoras were favoured by a few. Others sported the 19th hole, golf casual look. There were a few crested club blazers and ties – rugby and golf.

Two mourners caused the biggest stir among the watching and somewhat bewildered media contingent.

Denis O’Brien, well, because he is Denis O’Brien. And David Drumm, the man who took over from Sean FitzPatrick at Anglo-Irish Bank and made a disgrace of himself in the explosive “we need the moolah” Anglo tapes recorded in the run up to the bank guarantee.

It’s over a decade ago now. “So is Drumm the only one of them who went to jail?” asked an onlooker. “The Drummer”, as awe-stricken swashbuckling fellow bankers used to call him, arrived with two companions.

“Another day, another billion” he famously joked when the country was on course for oblivion and Anglo was losing a billion a day. His presence was a respectful signal to FitzPatrick that they still share fraternal “skin in the game”.

The hacks scanned the assembled mourners. Tailor Louis Copeland was spotted. Sean FitzPatrick was always a natty dresser. A couple of former Anglo executives were pointed out, along with businessman Leslie Buckley. A man stood outside with two magnificent and very well behaved red setters.



Former Banker David Drumm at the funeral ceremony. Photograph: Nick Bradshaw/The Irish Times

There was a brief frisson when somebody hissed: “Is that Charlie McCreevy over there at the wall talking to the woman with the purple hair?”

It wasn’t.

Covid masks over jowls didn’t help.

“Is he somebody?” “Was yer man at one of the tribunals?” “I know him from somewhere?” “Wouldn’t it be great if Bertie turned up?”

And so on.

“Dad had a lot of professional highs and lows in his life” Sean’s daughter told the congregation with arching understatement.

“He was a man who had enormous mental strength. When we were down he would pick us up. He would constantly remind us that the road in life is long and winding. But the measure of a person is not their successes, but in fact, how they could find a way to move forward when they’re knocked down off the horse. In that regard, our Dad was a giant of a man.”

She said he loved people.

“He always wanted to help out in any way he could, and by God, he left a lasting impression on anybody he met.”

He left a lasting impression, alright.

Since his sudden death, there have been many articles arguing that Sean FitzPatrick was made a scapegoat for all the reckless buccaneering carried out by a host of Irish banking bluebloods from more rarified, traditional big banks. Compared to the way these fallen masters-of-the-universe slithered off to other lucrative earners, Seanie was treated unfairly.

But he wasn’t. What is unfair is that the other fat cats didn’t get the same treatment, and then some.

Tuesday’s funeral marked the passing of a notorious figure in the saga of the bank bailout and crippling recession which followed. But he was also a devoted family man and a very valued friend.

A large framed photograph of a smiling and very tanned FitzPatrick was placed on his coffin, along with a large spray of white roses.

“Dad, you were our rock from beginning to end. We love you so much. We will miss you dearly, but we know you will continue to be with us for the rest of our lives.”

And, sadly, that goes for many victims of the crash too.

It’s over for him now. A family mourns. May he rest in peace.



Miriam Lord

Ashling Murphy's funeral: 'We grieve, we pray, we hurt – this is the heavy price we pay for love'

Miriam Lord: A young life needlessly ended. The world changed forever for those left behind

Ashling Murphy was remembered as a kind, talented, loved and admired young woman at her funeral mass in Mountbolus, Co Offaly.



Miriam Lord

Tue Jan 18 2022 - 22:29

In the middle of the unimaginable, at a minor intersection in a rural Irish village, bewildering reality and a crushing sadness merged in memory of a shining spirit cruelly cut short.

Mourners gathered from early at this little junction where Idle Corner Road runs down to the main street, ending at the gates of St Brigid's Church in Mountbolus. They waited quietly in the January cold and intermittent morning rain, still coming to terms with the awful circumstances which brought them to this crossroads in Co Offaly.

How could this be happening?



Ashling Murphy's brother Cathal, mother Kathleen, sister Amy, father Raymond and boyfriend Ryan, following her funeral Mass at St Brigid's Church, Mountbolus, Co Offaly. Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill

Less than a week ago, Ashling Murphy was their talented young neighbour from Culla in Blue Ball who played camogie with the local club and taught music to the local kids and could turn out a fine traditional tune on the fiddle. She was teaching the first class in Durrow National School, having graduated from teacher training college a few months ago.

Everyone knew Ashling.

And then the evil strikes. She is violently murdered and killed by a lone stranger when out for a run in the afternoon sunshine along the well-trodden banks of the local canal.

A young life needlessly ended. The world changed forever for those left behind.

Once upon a week ago Ashling Murphy is going about her daily routine like any other active young woman.

Six days later she is gone, taken from her family in the most unspeakable of circumstances.

Six days later her shell-shocked family are attending her funeral, accepting the personal condolences of the President and the Taoiseach in their village church. Seven priests and a bishop officiate at the Mass. The service is televised live. An area outside is cordoned off for members of the media – local, national and international.

Six days later and the astonishing outpouring of national grief and anger continues. Ashling's name is known the length and breadth of the country. Vigils held in her memory; makeshift shrines springing up in all sorts of places; prayers and poems offered; tears shed.

Six devastating days later, on the morning of Ashling's funeral, the local community gathers to remember her and stand in solidarity with her parents, Raymond and Kathleen, sister Amy, brother Cathal and boyfriend Ryan Casey.

"Together we grieve, we pray, we hurt – this is the heavy price we pay for love," said parish priest, Fr Michael Meade, during his homily.



Ashling Murphy's brother Cathal, mother Kathleen, sister Amy, father Raymond and boyfriend Ryan, following her funeral Mass at St Brigid's Church, Mountbolus, Co Offaly. Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill

Ashling was baptised in St Brigid's.

Around the church, farmers have opened fields for use as car parks. Local men wearing high-vis jackets direct the traffic. Others act as stewards on the approach roads and in the church grounds. Others man the doors to the community hall, where the Mass will be shown on a big screen.

Inside and outside there are trestle tables with catering flasks of tea and coffee and trays of homemade cakes and sandwiches.

People want to help, help in any way they can. At least it's something they can do.

The VIPs are among the first to arrive at the church. Ministers Helen McEntee, Catherine Martin and Norma Foley along with Ministers of State Pippa Hackett and Seán Fleming.

And then Taoiseach Micheál Martin, followed by President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina.

But outside the gates, the children have been in place for almost an hour. The seven year olds from the two local primary schools, including Ashling's class, wait in a line at the entrance, the saddest most innocent little guard of honour you ever saw.

The boys and girls are so well behaved, taking everything in with wide-eyed wonder. They each hold a single red rose and a copy of Ashling's beautiful

graduation photograph. A few of them quietly play Rock, Paper, Scissors. One little boy asks if Joe Biden is coming when he hears talk of the president.

Their teachers stand behind them, trying hard not to get upset.

The Kilcormac and Killoughey GAA club form a guard of honour at the bottom of Idle Corner Road, which runs past the Lowertown cemetery and down to the junction with St Brigid's. The older men wear yellow and green sashes and the tearful members of Ashling's camogie team wear green and yellow tracksuits. Girls from the Sacred Heart Secondary School in Tullamore form another guard of honour.

Around the corner to the side of the community centre, Joe Freeley has come from Mayo with five white doves. He will release them towards the end of the Mass.

Glass lanterns lit with flickering candles are placed outside the front gates of many houses on the main road into the village. The strains of traditional Irish music fill the air as more and more musicians arrive with their instruments. Then the music gives way to the sound of engines as the funeral cortege appears on the cemetery road, a Garda motorcycle escort leading the way, blue lights flashing.

The children stop fidgeting at the sight, standing up straight. When the hearse passes they hold up their roses. There is a message on the photographs: "Fly High in the Sky. Our Shining Light."

The principal mourners line up behind the coffin. Heartbroken and clinging to each other for support, they follow it inside. President Higgins approaches the Murphy family before taking his seat, touching the coffin as he passes it. There are hugs and tears from his wife Sabina.

The Taoiseach also offers his condolences to the grieving parents. He looks distraught as he talks to Ashling's father.

Symbols reflecting her life are brought to the altar. They include a family photograph, a school book and a camogie stick.

In a lovely touch, as decided by the family, young women from Ashling's family and friends provide the music, readings and prayers of the faithful.

"You have been robbed of your most precious gift – a gift that gave only joy and love, fun and laughter to many," Fr Meade told the family.

Bishop Tom Deenihan spoke of "a depraved act of violence which deprived a kind, talented, loved and admired young woman of her life which has since united the country in grief and support".

Mourners outside struggled to catch his words on the failing public address system. “We all know that no individual should die like Ashling and no family should suffer like Ashling’s. Respect is an old-fashioned word but it is an important one. Respect was missing last Wednesday but it has re-emerged here all the stronger. Let us respect each other.”

There is, however, “a chink of light”, he said. It was carried by the vigils and the outpouring of support and sympathy and the local effort in recent days.

“Community is needed to overcome evils such as this.”

As the Mass drew to a close, one group of musicians set up on the road outside the gate. More made their way up to the cemetery. There were fiddles and button accordions, banjos, concertinas and guitars and Uilleann pipes. The guard of honour reformed.



Ashling Murphy who was killed while out for a jog in Tullamore.

The funeral bell tolled as the family lined up behind the hearse in the churchyard, traditional music drifting on the air.

The President and his wife came to say farewell, both exchanging emotional embraces with the distraught parents, siblings and boyfriend.

Michael D and Sabina were there on behalf of the nation, conveying the feelings of the people.

Both crying as officials guided them back to their car, through the middle of the unimaginable, at a minor intersection in a rural Irish village.

Miriam Lord: Golden girl Kellie, the pride of Portland Row

'She's like a beacon of light in the area now after everything that has gone on in the last few years'

Crowds welcome Irish boxer and Olympic gold medallist Kellie Harrington home to Portland Row in Dublin's north inner city after victory in Tokyo.



Miriam Lord

Tue Aug 10 2021 - 22:26

Bernie Hanaphy looked up and down her street.

The place was buzzing.

Like St Patrick's Day had collided with all the cancelled festivals and lost All-Ireland final celebrations and exploded in a riot of bunting and balloons, music and merrymaking. Two missing years of colour and excitement suddenly rolled into one exhilarating neighbourhood party.

She was thrilled to see it.

"We done her proud, didn't we?"

You did, Bernie. You certainly did.

For this was Portland Row, where hearts are bursting with pride, returning the compliment to its Olympic champion, Kellie Harrington.

But while the focus of the gold medallist's homecoming on Tuesday was on the road where she grew up, her success was celebrated by all her community in Dublin's north inner city.

They came from the surrounding streets and schemes to pay tribute, decked out in "Golden Girl, Kellie" T-shirts and all their finally liberated Patrick's Day regalia.

The party atmosphere on Portland Row was irresistible.

With just a couple of hours to go before their heroine was due to parade by in an open-top bus, two cherry pickers were deployed to get the overhead triumphal arches of balloons and flags in place. Gold ribbons and bows were tied to the crush barriers. Green and orange Christmas tinsel was pressed into early service. Kitchen and garden chairs were placed up against the barriers by residents to reserve viewing positions in case there was a sudden influx of fans at the last

minute. The children were eating chocolate gold medals faster than the Italian relay team. It didn't matter, because they had plastic gold medals for hanging around their necks.

Cheryl Howard and Kadie Curtis from Sheriff Street were waiting at a spot opposite Kellie's parents' home. They had two three-month old Staffordshire Bull Terriers. Rocky and Apollo were named after the Sylvester Stallone boxing films "because they have two black eyes".

The dogs wore matching white Kellie Harrington tops. "I just ironed on the pictures to baby vests with the ends cut off them," said Cheryl. "You make do with what you have at short notice."

The aunt and niece are proud of Kellie's sporting achievement but also very proud of what she has done for her home place.



Supporters line the streets to welcome Olympic gold medal winning boxer Kellie Harrington home to Portland Row in Dublin 1 on Tuesday. Photograph: Alan Betson/The Irish Times



Kellie Harrington waves to fans as she returned to Portland Row on Tuesday following her success in Tokyo. Photograph: Alan Betson/The Irish Times

“She’s like a beacon of light in the area now after everything that has gone on in the last few years,” explained Cheryl as Kadie said it was wonderful to see all the community come together in celebration. “It’s not just Portland Row, it’s Sheriff Street, Ballybough, the North Strand, Seán McDermott Street . . .”

Everyone on the street is in great form as they await the arrival of their homegrown heroine.

“I nearly wrote Ant ‘n Dec instead of aunt and niece,” said the Irish Times to the two women.

“You can call her Dec,” retorted Cheryl like a shot. “Because I feel like decking her half the time.”

St Patrick was lighting up a ciggie halfway down the road at the barrier, down from the big red-brick former convent which locals always knew as “the old maids’ home” and is now apartments.

“I wear the outfit for the soccer matches and the parade. I just go out for the craic,” said Liam Mooney from Grenville Terrace. “Even for the last two years I done the walk down O’Connell Street with the parade cancelled. Couldn’t let them take me thunder away. I had to turn out for Kellie today.”

Emma O’Leary-Carabini from Sheriff Street was on the decks for the afternoon, in a little corral with her laptop, mixing desk and speakers. She used to be a full-time singer doing funerals and weddings and gigs in local pubs and clubs. But

with the pandemic her work as a singer and DJ dried up. Now she is back performing, but only at weekends.

“I became a homecare worker in palliative care. I absolutely love it. I don’t know how I could do without it now. I do the singing and karaoke and all with the old people. I just couldn’t give it up. Kellie, coming from here and being such a great success and role model, that’s great for us here.”

Directly across from Emma and her sound system were musicians and buskers Mick McLoughlin and Eddie Sherlock. They were set up in the small front garden of the house opposite, alternating with Emma.

Eddie belted out a fine number he wrote specially for Kellie, to roars of approval from the locals.

Thomas (he didn’t give his full name) was back selling flags and scarves “and the aul bubbly coloured wigs”. He sells outside matches and other events. “The pandemic has robbed us of a living. It’s hard to get a shilling and we’re trying to get a few bob back.”

Suddenly, a number of gardaí on bicycles swooped in like an Olympic cycling team and asked for his licence. But Thomas had already been on to the council and was told no permit necessary as it wasn’t an official event.

He went on selling. His next customer was Ruth from Latvia who has three daughters and lives around the corner. They are delighted with Kellie. Ruth bought three flags “€2 each and three for a fiver, love” and a large Tricolour.

Paddy Murdiffe is a member of the city council-funded North East Inner City initiative and on its Public Implementation Board. He is retired “and in nearly everything around here except the women’s sodality”. Her win has buoyed up morale in a vibrant community frustrated by pandemic restrictions. The local Monto festival hasn’t been held in two years.

“I think Kellie is a total credit to this area, and she’s also the nicest woman you could ever meet.”

Just after 4.30, the Garda mounted arrived. The four greys made quite the impression, although not the best one as the horses liberally manured the upper end of the street.

“Typical. The guards shite-ing all over Dublin 1 again,” sniffed one resident, holding her nose.

Lily Fagan (84), who has been appearing 24/7 on television and radio as The Queen of Portland Row, was sitting out in a collapsible chair and holding court.

She has become something of a tourist attraction. Beside was Cllr Christy Burke, who was handing out plastic gold medals. Across the road from Christy, Cllr Nial Ring was holding forth at some length on live radio, like a GAA pundit.

The word went around like wildfire. “Two minutes! Two minutes! She’s nearly in Ballybough!”



Liam Mooney welcoming home Olympic gold medal winning boxer Kellie Harrington to Portland Row in Dublin 1 on Tuesday. Photograph: Alan Betson



Members of the Russell Family welcoming Olympic gold medal winning boxer Kellie Harrington back to Portland Row in Dublin 1 on Tuesday. Photograph: Alan Betson

Christy O'Brien, ex-Irish Army pipe major and a member of the IUNVA pipe band, got ready for action. A veteran of two tours of the Lebanon, Christy, from Sheriff Street, was resplendent in his gold Irish kilt and green jacket.

"I'm going to play her favourite song, The Wild Colonial Boy, when the bus goes past her house."

A helicopter was circling overhead. "The lift this has given to this place is unbelievable," said Christy, who was standing outside Christy and Yvonne Harrington's front door.

Then, at five-past five, the cheers came from the corner at Summerhill. Blue lights appeared at the top corner. Then the bus itself.

A show of gold balloons went up in the air. "Are yis right? Wave your flags now. Don't forget to wave your flags!"

Christy started piping. Kellie's aunties – with lovely hairdos – appeared on the front step with family and friends. A number of men from a few doors down were out on the street laying a line of gold stair carpet across the street. The horses were there, with the motorbikes and the push-bikes. Christy segued from The Saints Go Marching in to God Save Ireland Say the Heroes. "We're all part of Kellie's Army" sang the crowd.

And suddenly, she was there. Kellie, their Kellie Harrington. Waving from the top of the bus, crying her eyes out.

"Aaah, God love her," blubbered a man at the crash barrier. Everyone was crying. "She waved at me. She waved at me!" shouted a little boy to his mammy. "I saw that. I definitely saw that," she said, wiping away the tears.

And then she was gone. But not for long as the bus was doing a loop around the northeast inner city and due back shortly. "Christy is a hero, Christy is a hero, lah-lah-lah-lah, lah-lah-lah-lah," sang the crowd. He was doing requests on the bagpipes at this stage. "Put him in the paper, Put him in the paper, lah-lah-lah-lah."

Then she was back. More composed this time, slowly past her house, the crowd going wild. Somebody threw up a gold Simba soft toy and she caught it. As the bus slowly rounded the corner from Portland Row on its final sweep, Kellie Harrington held up the little gold lion in one hand and her gold medal in the other.

More tears. More kisses to blow to friends.

Past the five lamps, the landmark of her life. Three of them lit in green, white and orange.

The crowd dispersed. Elated. Exhausted.

“That was just brilliant. Wasn’t it?”

The musicians were still going. And the last song they played?

Dublin in the Rare Aul Times.

Welcome home Kellie.