

No foul play in deaths of couple in Co Kerry

Former colleagues in Cork pay tribute to 'brilliant, bright' Hazel Byrne

BARRY ROCHE

Gardaí have ruled out foul play in the deaths of a couple at their home in south Kerry after postmortem examinations confirmed both had died as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning, seemingly as a result of taking their own lives.

The bodies of David Byrne (52) and his wife, Hazel (51), were found in their home at Mountain Stage outside Glenbeigh on the Ring of Kerry in the early hours of Tuesday morning by members of Kerry County Fire Service.

The firefighters were called to assist after gardaí were alerted by concerned locals late on Monday night when they found a note attached to the door, advising people not to enter the building because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

“We will deeply miss her because she was a very gentle person and was well liked by everyone”

The badly decomposed remains of the couple were removed to University Hospital Kerry on Tuesday evening where State Pathologist Dr Yvonne McCartney carried out a postmortem yesterday that confirmed both had died of the effects of carbon monoxide.

Garda technical experts recovered a number of notes from the house in which the couple had indicated they planned to take their own lives. Gardaí found that they had last received social welfare payments in early October, suggesting they were dead for four months.

In Mallow in north Cork, where both Mr and Ms Byrne grew up, there was shock and

sadness as people remembered them as a quiet and reclusive couple, living at their isolated bungalow home at Ballinvuskig, about 5km southeast of Mallow town, before they moved to Glenbeigh seven years ago.

Ms Byrne had worked from 1999 to 2015 with local law firm David J O'Meara and Sons Solicitors. The principal at the office, David O'Meara, yesterday paid tribute to the dead woman.

“Everyone here was very saddened and upset when we heard the news yesterday evening, because Hazel was a good friend to all here and was very popular member of the staff. She was a probate clerk with us for over 15 years and she was brilliant at her job, very bright.

“It's only beginning to hit home today... we will deeply miss her because she was a very gentle person and was well liked by everyone.”

Locals remembered Ms Byrne as “nice, very pleasant, but also very private”, and she became more reserved and withdrawn when she married David Byrne, whom one local described as “very reclusive”, adding, “Hazel became more reclusive too when she met him”.

Another local, who did not wish to be named, said Mr Byrne was “an intensely, almost obsessively private man” who would often turn away from passing traffic to avoid having to salute motorists as he walked the roads near their home at Ballinvuskig.

Mr Byrne grew up in nearby Bearforest Upper, and is survived by his elderly father Terry, a retired veterinary surgeon originally from Arklow, Co Wicklow, and his siblings, John, Kevin, Brian, Maeve and Terence.

Ms Byrne, born Hazel Finnegan, grew up at Blackwater Drive in Mallow town. She is survived by her sister Breda and brother Tony.

Hats off Students graduate in style



Students from Trinity's Centre for People with Intellectual Disability (TCPID) celebrate after graduating yesterday having completed a Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice, a two-year programme for students with intellectual disabilities. The course aims to provide students with independent living skills. PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL SHARP

Increase in price of stamp by 25c gets mixed reaction

ROSITA BOLAND

An Post announced yesterday morning that the price of a national stamp will increase from €1.40 to €1.65 on February 27th. By early afternoon, at least half the people coming and going from Dublin's St Andrew Street post office were aware of the forthcoming cost increase.

“I think it's expensive; €1.40 was enough as it was,” says Paul O'Flaherty, who had been on an errand to withdraw money. “I do send letters now and again and I do use the post office.”

“I put all my post through the franking machine at work, and it's 10 cent cheaper to do it that way,” says Geraldine Quinn. She frequently uses the post office for registered letters and parcels and rattles off their various prices and weight limits instantly from memory. “Are they going up too?”

“It seems like no time since the last increase,” says Ann Morrissey. “Surely, the more you put up the price, the less people will be inclined to use the service? I don't post many things, mainly cards, but my husband still pays bills by post.”

“I think the stamp price increase is fair enough,” says Declan Cleary, who has been buying a Prize Bond. “I buy one every month.”

Cleary has relatives in England. “I post a lot of parcels to them. I think An Post is very good.”

Business

“Obviously people aren't sending enough cards or letters, so they have to put the price up, because An Post is a business,” says Raymond O'Brien.

“Christmas is really the only time I send cards. I have 17 stamps left over from Christmas. It definitely is more special to get a card or a letter than an email or a text message.”

Paola, who is Polish, and

doesn't wish to give her surname, thinks that “post in Ireland in general is quite expensive, especially if you send a lot of things.”

“No wonder people are choosing to use text messages and emails instead... I find DHL or other couriers are better.”

“I don't think putting the price up is a good way to try and increase business, but I don't see what the alternative is for An Post,” says Patricia Carroll. “So many people are using email now and less people are using the post office.”

“I was just in posting a birthday card to my nephew,” says Seán Earley. “I think the stamp increase is fair enough.”



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– Raymond O'Brien

They have a business to run. I don't use the post office a huge amount, but I do use it to post some documents from time to time.”

A middle-aged man who didn't want to give his name said he uses the St Andrew Street post office every week to receive his social welfare, but never sends any cards or letters: “I can't really read or write.”

→ Despite the fears that AI will take our jobs, it won't be AI that replaces you; it will be someone who understands AI who does – Ciara O'Brien, page 12

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Demand for HSE's free 'talk therapy' reaches 1,000 patients a month

SHAUNA BOWERS

Annual demand for an online free talk therapy service is almost 12 times what the Health Service Executive forecast when it launched the programme, new figures show.

In 2021, the HSE partnered with Amwell to launch SilverCloud, an online service that provides free cognitive behavioural therapy, a talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave.

Under the service, people with mild to moderate mental health difficulties can be referred by a GP or other approved mental health team for online treatment.

Derek Chambers, HSE lead for mental health operations, said demand for the service

took off “much quicker than anyone expected”.

“In April 2021, we anticipated there would be 1,000 licences [approved patients] a year. Now, we're reaching around 1,000 a month,” he said.

“Capacity has been challenged, both in terms of provision and funding. But it will plateau, and it's just about keeping up with that demand.”

The programme today launches its 2024 annual report, which looks at a 12-month period from April 2023.

There were 13,548 referrals and 9,206 account activations within this period, an 18 per cent increase in referrals and a 17 per cent increase in activations compared with the same period in the previous year.

The majority of users were female (72 per cent), white Irish

(85 per cent), and aged 18-44 years (76 per cent).

The anxiety programme is the most used (47 per cent) followed by depression (35 per cent) and depression programme (15 per cent).

Anxiety or depression

Furthermore, 62 per cent of users with clinical levels of anxiety or depression achieved “reliable improvement”, while just over 50 per cent of users with clinical levels of anxiety or depression “transitioned to recovery”.

Dr Aoife O'Sullivan, mental health lead at the Irish College of General Practitioners, said it was great to have interventions that are “not just medicine”.

“The difficulty can be affordability and availability. This re-

moves that. But it's not a sticking plaster and it isn't a replacement for in-person,” she said.

Dr O'Sullivan added that the free in-person counselling for people with medical cards has a three to six months' waiting list.

“This is almost immediate. It is somewhat counterintuitive that people with more severe difficulties are on a waiting list while those with mild to moderate are not.”

Elaine Martin, clinical director of the service, said given the scale of mental health needs in Ireland, it is “really vital” intervention is provided at the “right time”.

“It can stop a problem snowballing and stem the tide. Not everybody needs, wants or should have intensive talk therapy,” she said.

Childhood trauma affects 60% in North

FREYA McCLEMENTS

Almost two-thirds of the adult population of Northern Ireland has experienced at least one traumatic childhood event, according to a groundbreaking report published today.

The study found that 60 per cent of adults reported at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) and 17.6 per cent experienced four or more, a critical threshold which is more likely to lead to poorer health and educational outcomes.

The North's Minister for Justice, Naomi Long, said the findings were “striking and sobering” and “for the first time, the true extent of childhood trauma and its impact on all people in Northern Ireland has been documented and measured for all to see”.

“That 60 per cent of our adult population reports at

least one traumatic childhood event, with nearly one in five experiencing four or more, represents a major public-health challenge,” she said.

The study, by Queen's University Belfast, and commissioned by the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime, is the first comprehensive assessment of ACEs among the adult population of Northern Ireland and is one of few such studies in post-conflict societies.

ACEs are defined as traumatic or stressful experiences that occur in childhood and can have enduring consequences on mental and physical wellbeing throughout life.

The report found that 30 per cent of respondents experienced adversities specific to conflict, which the Minister said “illuminated the unique context of trauma in Northern

Ireland”, and ACEs were more likely to be concentrated in deprived communities.

Though older age groups (45-65) reported higher rates of conflict-related adversities, reflecting their direct experience of the Troubles, younger adults aged 18-24 were “not immune to ongoing paramilitary violence even in post-conflict Northern Ireland,” it concluded.

Significant findings

Speaking ahead of the launch of the research, Ms Long said there was now “crucial evidence of how childhood trauma shapes life outcomes in Northern Ireland”.

“The findings show clear correlations between higher exposure to trauma in childhood and many negative outcomes, including poorer educational achievement, chronic health

conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and chronic pain, increased exposure to domestic violence, addiction, poor mental health and health-harming behaviours.

“These are significant findings, which will impact and inform policy and delivery across the Executive.”

“Perhaps most concerning is the evidence that, despite being almost 27 years past the Good Friday Agreement, our younger generation continues to experience trauma linked to paramilitary activity,” she said.

The director of the Northern Executive's Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime, Adele Brown, said: “We very much hope that the study's findings will inform policy development and service provision across health, education, justice and social services sectors in Northern Ireland.”