



Villager

News Miscellany

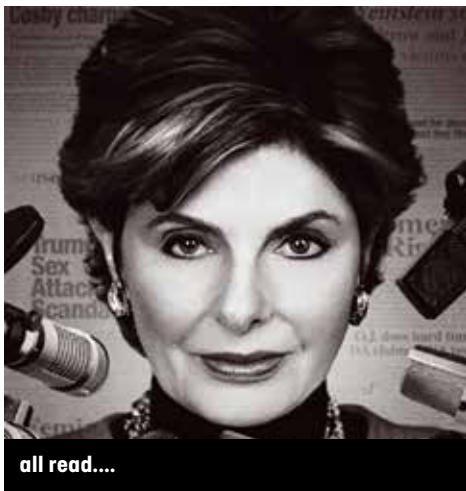
Nominative Determinism

In Westminster Chris Heaton is the new Tory chief whip. Clearly he'll apply the heat to recalcitrant MPs.

Christopher Pincher has become deputy chief whip and MPs are quaking. Mr Pincher resigned temporarily in 2017 after he was accused of making an unwanted advance at former Olympic rower and Conservative activist Alex Story before he was an MP, in 2001. The story appeared in the FT but it turned out it was only a Lex Story.

Thomas Fowler is director of sustainability at dirtbags Ryanair.

It seems daring to have appointed Aidaire Fox-Martin to replace the more obvious Nick Leader as head of Google's Irish operations.



Gloria Allred, a US attorney who has represented a number of Jeffrey Epstein's victims, analysed the recent Virginia Giuffre/Prince Andrew joint statement, committing him to burgle his mummy's purse to pay off his alleged paedophilia. Allred told the *Guardian* the wording was "vague" and would have been "carefully negotiated". All read, certainly.

Murray unhurried



Judge Brian Murray was in legal finishing school with the editor, though he says it was all compromised by an alcoholic fog except that the general view was that Murray (it was 1987) was a shoe-in for Chief Justice 2027. Murray and his quite good brain will now grace a very strong Supreme Court after his elevation to replace former Chief Justice Frank Clarke, who was keeping the seat warm for Murray and current Chief Justice Donal O'Donnell (who the editor claims tutored him in UCD where he was an irritatingly big hit with the ladies in the Dark Ages Constitutional Law tutorial). Clarke has the law library aflutter with reports that he will return to practice as a barrister. Unfortunately he will not be allowed to appear before newly smug Mr Justice Seamus Woulfe or indeed any of the Irish courts since it would be so weird for the system of deference that it is prohibited by law. He intends to focus on arbitration and mediation though he could, if he wanted, argue cases before the European Court of Justice.

Citizen Murray

Five years ago, as a barrister, Murray gave a talk to the Citizens Assembly on abortion establishing nine legal options. An issue of the complexity of abortion is ideal for such intense attention though Murray would find nine options in almost any situation.

Diverse assemblies



Everyone in *Village* loves the environment so Villager was pleased to see biodiversity being referred to a Citizens' Assembly as promised in the Programme for government. Being obscure, neglected, misunderstood, fractious, and existential it too is ideally placed for the process. Under the Programme for Government, the coalition aims to establish citizens' assemblies to consider the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited for Dublin; biodiversity; matters relating to drugs use; and the future of education.

Far-out Farrell

However, David Farrell, UCD's professor of politics, is not impressed with the Citizens' Assemblies. "First, the agenda is too tightly controlled by government, which can lead to rather daft issues being discussed, such



ad hoc in Clontarf

as the length of the Irish president's term of office, the Taoiseach's power to determine the date of Dáil elections, or the manner in which referenda are held...Following the mantra garbage-in-garbage-out, it is perhaps not surprising that none of the assemblies' recommendations in these areas were accepted, or even listened to, by government". Fine but the issues agreed for discussion during the term of this government are far from daft and that subverts Farrell's argument.

Farrell considers the "Irish model" is sub-optimal. Writing in the *Irish Times* he was critical: "the organisation tends to be very top-down and managerial, tightly controlled by senior civil servants and a government-appointed chair, supported by a small advisory group whose remit is focused largely on the substance of the topic rather than on latest developments in the management of citizens' assemblies. No use is made of the expert services of professional agencies". Finally he complains "Path-dependency has set in, with the senior civil servant of one assembly passing on the baton and the lessons they've learned to the civil servant leading on the next one". If that's the case it would be interesting to know how Citizens' Assemblies come up with such thoughtful recommendations.

Acclaiming reclaiming

Imagine looking at an aerial photo of Dublin or any other Irish city with their meagre green spaces and concreted institutional lands with their sawn-off sports pitches, and thinking the solution is shovelling ten-storey blocks into each of them. Villager has an open mind about moving Dublin Port out but a good context is the following: think how foolish the city would feel if it covered every last green patch in concrete and then discovered it could fit half a million people in reclaimed land in Docklands, the best place for them – because of transportation and facilities; and leave its institutional lands as pleasure grounds for the citizenry to cavort, be sporty and edify itself.

Cyclincompetence

There is a lack of consultation in relation to new cycling infrastructure in Dublin city, according to local representatives at a recent City Council meeting. They were talking about the Clontarf cycleway. Many councillors said cycling infrastructure was being delivered on an "ad hoc basis" and there needed to be more external input.

22,000 leaflets on the project were delivered to local homes in January. However, Councillor Nial Ring said many of his constituents never received one. Meanwhile Councillors in Galway first approved then disapproved a cycleway for cartickling Salthill: "It was done in response to Covid; because of the public health issue and increased numbers of people walking and cycling, we felt we had to move quickly, so we couldn't use the traditional model of a long, drawn-out design process".

Meanwhile the *Irish Times* reported that Dun Laoghaire Rathdown used a "dynamic design model" for the cycleway there: "We designed it 80-90 per cent of the way, and then opened it to engagement with stakeholders – residents, community groups and emergency services... Council staff visited homes along the route. We went to people's houses and talked through how they would get in and out of driveways, made tweaks to the location of bollards where it was needed. Early talks with the emergency services were vital".

It's *all nonsense* though. Leaflets, dynamic 80-90% models, tweaks, going to houses, Gards. Makey-uppy stuff. *Just provide the Environmental Impact Assessments the law requires*, with the statutory consultation processes and timings, show us the schemes in photomontages, so we know what we're getting show us the alternatives and justify the choice so we're not left with tacky temporary (i.e. permanent) bollards etc; and avoid legal actions. Or the whole national urban cycle programme may collapse, with the Greens', who want to champion trial cycleways in probable breach of EU law, inept fingers all over it.

Lied on and on; corrupt too

Villager pressed the wrong button and found himself in Donal Lydon's Facebook site. Lydon (83), a conservative, and anti-abortion, psychologist and disgraced former Fianna Fáil Councillor, famously grabbed the Green Party Councillor Trevor Sargent in a headlock when Sargent waved a cheque, sent to him by a builder and asked the rest of the County Council if they had received similar.

Lydon received bribes for rezonings all over County Dublin and in 2007 the Criminal Assets Bureau secured a freezing order against him based on its investigation of bribes paid to Councillors by Frank Dunlop relating to the rezoning of 107 acres owned by Jackson Way Properties at Carrickmines. Lucky, the charges were dropped after a medical condition prevented dodge-meister Dunlop from giving his full testimony.

Famously in the 1980s when he had annoyed Charles Haughey and needed to make an exit, Lydon couldn't find the door, prompting Haughey's impatient injunction: "Try the window".

Anyway here (from his Facebook avatar) he is at the Casino in Monte Carlo and in some ritual in St Peter's Cathedral Belfast. There was never any end to the man.



Top, at the casino in Monaco. Above, weirdly dressed up at St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast

NI Criticism bombed



Northern novelist Rosemary Jenkinson is in trouble for a piece she wrote in *Fortnight Magazine* asking “Why is Northern Irish literature feasting on the dead corpse of the Troubles more than ever?”. And claiming: “we writers seem to have no more ability than our politicians to move on from the past. From novels like Jenny McCartney’s ‘The Ghost Factory’ to the raft of new Troubles-based memoir and TV crime shows, Troubles-mania is rampant...We are also subject to the Anna Burns effect where the success of ‘Milkman’ has engendered imitators... Lisa McGee’s sitcom *Derry Girls* has had its own cultural impact through humorous nostalgia for kidnappings, sectarianism and bombs”.

Dire Doire

Galway-based Doire Press cancelled Jenkinson’s publishing contract with it, and in a slanted *Irish Times* article offered the excuse of “significant financial risk” and loss of audience/sales. Villager believes this a craven attempt to cover up their silencing of a writer. They are one of the most heavily funded publishers with c.€100k from the Arts Councils North and South for six books annually. Jenkinson’s new publisher, Arlen House, revealed on Twitter that they have already sold 300% more of her books in two months than Doire, a worthy outfit specialising in feminist poetry, sold in two years. The reason: Doire have poor distribution and minimal sales income. Public funding covers everything. Time for the Arts Council to introduce procedures to safeguard artists and free speech.

Same old formula

The government launched a food reformulation plan in December, trying to compel the junk food industry to decrease sugar and fat in its products. Ireland has the second highest level of obesity and overweight in Europe, affecting 60% of adults and over one in five children. The food industry, determined to pre-empt regulation and legally binding targets, has lobbied government for voluntary targets and self-regulation. It seems



to have prevailed: the lead is Nuala Collins on the back of a stellar career in Nestlé, SMA powdered-infant formula, and the National Dairy Council to name a few. The food health of the nation is in great hands. Still.

Don’t say fat unless you want to leave your husband

Meanwhile despite endless pieces decrying fat-shaming and noting you don’t have to be lose weight to be healthy the *Irish Times* is still publishing politically incorrect articles in its tacky ‘Ask Roe’ column: “My husband has put on so much weight that I’m not attracted to him anymore”: “You don’t have to stay in a relationship when you’re no longer attracted to your partner and you don’t enjoy the sex. That’s the reality”.

Gas

The Programme for Government commits to 7% annual reductions in Greenhouse Gas emissions. Despite the promise that it was introducing legislation mandating this the government recently announced that it was backloading it so this year’s target would be only 4.8%. Now the EPA is saying this year we’re actually likely to *increase* emissions this year. In six or seven years, long after the Greens are pensioned, we’ll be facing 9% annual reductions to meet their targets for the end of the decade, and we’ll miss those too.

Bypassing reality

A new N6 Bypass for Galway, first proposed in 1999 and estimated to cost €1bn, was approved by An Bord Pleanála in early December. The 18-km, €650 million route would run from the existing M6 motorway east of Galway city to Barna in the west, replacing plans for the Galway outer bypass, which was approved by the board in 2008 but was effectively struck down by the European Court of Justice five years later.

It’s been estimated that only 3% of the traffic using it would actually bypass the city. The remaining 97% would come and go from it.

It is feared that all this will do is achieve greater urban sprawl. It would tend to undermine the 2: 1 balance in favour of public transport agreed in the Programme for Government but risks being forced through by the bigger parties in government, though the Greens are nominally against it.

Green Party Chairperson Senator Pauline O’Reilly was prominently reported in the *Irish Times* to be considering a judicial review of the Ring Road on grounds it had failed to take into account Government travel and climate policies, particularly on assessment criteria for road building and the emissions created by such large roads. Never happened.

Meanwhile Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, Ireland’s most effective anti-environmentalist, who’s much more powerful, tweeted: “Fully support this project. Will take the traffic out of Galway City and make it more liveable for residents and visitors and safer for cyclists and pedestrians”. Former Lord Mayor Councillor Noel Larkin (Ind) had his finger on the unreconstructed local pulse when he said that “the vast majority of cars will be electric or hydrogen-powered within a decade, so mass transport such as light rail is not only unnecessary but totally unfeasible. The city’s transport future should be the construction of an ‘outer bypass”.

In the end as usual it was left to the underfunded and often vilified NGO Friends of the Irish Environment to whom the Greens provide so little meaningful support to pursue a judicial review. Friends of the Irish Environment have a better understanding of environmental problems, and are much more effective than the Green Rhetoric Party which is pathologically unable to distinguish between goodwill and action and between making rules and enforcing them, or to assess the necessity sometimes to say No.



EU Director is Direct



18 January was the first day of the 2022 Environment Ireland conference, chaired by the *Irish Times*' Kevin O'Sullivan. Laura Burke of the EPA was speaking; he conference was opened by Green Minister Ossian Smyth.

And then came the EU Commission's Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea – director of governance, enforcement action and compliance on EU environmental legislation, with a talk entitled 'EU environment policy post-covid-19'. The audience was ready to nod off.

But the Director soon turned his guns on Ireland.

"I would like to share with you elements which are not confidential and which we have discussed with the Irish authorities in the structured dialogue we had at the end of last year", he said, breaking the traditional confidentiality that cloaks the annual 'structural dialogue'.

He declared the Water Framework Directive was neither fully implemented nor addressing the growing pressure "particularly from agricultural sources. I very much hope that the competent Irish authorities will continue to reflect on this and act in 2022 more decisively than in the past in this area. Urgent action is needed for birds. Only 2.5% of your marine water is protected – one of the poorest records across the Natura 2000 network in Europe. Forestry and peat had not been subject to EIA, even though – or maybe because - particularly they are very important economic activities".

Warming to his subject, the Director went for Ireland over its failures to provide access to justice where "Many have accumulated significant costs simply litigating the question of cost clarity itself. We are not drawing the attention of the Irish authorities to this for the first time. It has important consequences. And the commission will act on this".

But it was the final paragraph that drew gasps. Of particular concern he said was the "increasingly aggressive stance being taken against environmental campaigners in Ireland. Not only are SLAPP suits appearing but we

are seeing aggressive and negative reporting in the mainstream media, threats to cut off funding, and negative reporting on actions by Friends of the Irish Environment".

Funny all that: Leo Varadkar believes judicial review needs to be reformed to root out vexatious actions that threaten vital infrastructure and "really important road projects". The EU demurs.

Varadkarrogant

Village has lodged a complaint with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland about the questioning of Leo Varadkar on RTÉ programmes. When dealing with an ongoing criminal investigation it is madness to allow the person into whom the investigation is being carried out to ventilate about the substance of the case and to make false, and unchecked, allegations about the motivations of the people who have made the complaints about him.

Biding until re-coming of Trump

President Joe Biden is in political trouble at home and abroad with his social and environmental programmes withering, and the unimaginative but jingoistic yanks reeling from retreat from Afghanistan and military paralysis over Ukraine. The Democrats seem set to lose control of both Houses in Congress in the forthcoming mid-term elections, barring some political miracle. Meanwhile despite facing nine sets of legal proceedings his predecessor Donald Trump, the worst President of all time, is well on the way to seizing outright control of the Republican party with the support of its National Committee. He has committed to pardoning the Capitol insurrectionists if re-elected. Senator Mitch McConnell is mounting last-ditch resistance to a Trump takeover of the GOP but there are good reasons to doubt his political and financial capacity to succeed.

In these circumstances Villager is always surprised that Biden doesn't hit the airwaves every day decrying the dangers of another round of Trump destroying America. A bit of sustained rhetoric and above all anger, would change the dynamic.

Trump Truth



Trump's behind a new Twitter-type app. Truth. Or Truthiness, better.

A young hawk

Wordle



Nobody cares about your Wordle score, nobody cares it's gone to the NYT (you can get it on Word Master anyway) and Soare is logically the best word to put down first, always.

Sometimes too Frank

Frank McBrearty Jr is a former Labour and Fine Gael, now Independent Councillor in Donegal, who became known nationally as a result of the Morris Tribunal's ruling that police had



Replacement Presidents

tried to frame him for the 1996 murder of Richie Barron.

On 4 Feb 2022 he complained in a long letter to Ministers Darragh O'Brien and Helen McEntee about Donegal County Council (DCC) from which he has now been suspended by a High Court Judge until 27 February for alleged disorderly conduct in trying to air issues of alleged corruption or at least impropriety. McBrearty claims he had less than 48 hours to file a defence in Dublin to the action seeking to suspend him, that he ran out of time and that it is all a tactic to stop him ventilating important allegations. He believes his fellow Councillors, 33 out of 37 of whom voted for his suspension, have had it in for him since the Morris Tribunal and a few other things. Anyway obviously all the media are too scared to report his allegations but Villager can reveal that they concern purchase by Donegal County Council of properties with Mica, at market prices rather than prices that reflect the Mica remediation cost – often more than the value of the property. In passing, after noting that there was no reason to impute corruption, Villager took a minute out to wonder by how much Mica devalues a property if owners can get 100% compensation for their losses.

Village alleged corruption at the highest level in Donegal a decade ago when the County was under different management. A review of the matter by senior counsel Rory Mulcahy has never been published by the recalcitrant Department of Planning, now led by Darragh O'Briens [see Moore St story p17].



No Fool, O'Toole

Villager is envious of Fintan O'Toole. He's more talented than him. O'Toole is in the top 100 Irish public intellectuals and that's just the start of it. In a 2011 *Village* interview, he was asked if his life had changed as a result of the new-found celebrity, the topical books

and all the international media interest. Not really: "I've been saying the same thing for thirty years. The difference is that people are now listening".



Of course it was only after his *Village* interview that his *celebratedness* really took off: 2012 TV3 Tonight Show Journalist of the Year; 2013 Irish Book Awards (Best Irish Published Book of the Year), 'A History of Ireland in 100 Object's'; 2014 Honorary Doctorate in Letters for services to broadcasting by Queen's University Belfast; (now it's getting meaty: 2017 European Press Prize; 2017 Orwell Prize for Journalism; 2017 Honorary Doctorate in Laws from NUI Galway; 2019 Awarded Honorary Doctorate in Letters by Trinity College Dublin.

2020 (and several other years) NewsBrands Ireland Journalism Awards Broadsheet Columnist of the Year; 2020 Member of the Royal Irish Academy; 2021 Irish Book Awards (An Post Irish Book of the Year 2021) for 'We Don't Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland Since 1958'.

O'Toole spends at least a semester a year teaching in Princeton where he is lecturer in Irish letters. He's got several big salaries, a serious reputation, awards and the best Twitter bio: and there's just a suspicion he has lost his anger, lost his edge. You won't know this from his awards or from his ego. You might suspect it from his proud unwillingness to address or even read the under-the-line comments under his pieces. You might guess at it from the reduction in his output in the *Irish Times* and the number of formulaic 'Five Point' analyses. But you'd be close to confirmed in your view if you noted the reduction in his focus on the controversies of the day in Ireland, the aggrandisement of his often predictable views on Brexit and Donald Trump (easy targets) and his view that "maybe" there has been a "shift in Irish political culture" away from corruption.

The problem is this all leaves nobody in the *Irish Times* who is angry, articulate, persuasive and leftist. Unless you count Una Mullally. Clearly, there is no less reason intrinsically to be angry now than there was in the past. The planet is after all in a death spiral the quality of life is shocking, especially for the young, and community is on the precipice.

Yet Ireland's leading polemicist has gone all *unedgy*.

What of his latest book then? The clumsily named 'We don't know Ourselves is offensively expensive at €30. Villager wanted to hate it but couldn't quite. It's a 'Personal History of Ireland since 1958' full of the events that determined O'Toole. Wide-ranging.

Mullally doolally



Mullally wrote an entire one of her weekly columns recently under the heading 'Planning system conspires to paint out murals'. In fact murals don't really matter that much, unless you paint them or know people who paint them. Planning has bigger failures than that.

Podcast



Village is launching a Podcast in March. It's also going to have a *do* for its loyal subscribers before the summer and will revert to coming out eight times a year, from July. And we are composing a *Village* song. Next edition, May/June. Details to follow.

And, finally, the poem

How Civilised You Are

It's partly she can't be sure
you aren't the half wild animal
who stalks the plains,
and she the antelope
you could bring down in a blink.

But more that to her, and her
and her, in the three quarter light
your swagger

is that of a Chicago Police Department captain
with the power to, in the moment,
do anything you want,
the pullable billy club and gun
she can't be certain you won't use.

KEVIN HIGGINS