

Wicklow murder accused broke down when confronted by wife

Man killed woman when she threatened to reveal sexual encounter, court told

Accused's wife told gardaí her husband started to cry when asked about victim

A man accused of murdering a woman he had a sexual encounter with broke down and told gardaí he beat her to death after being confronted by his wife.

Roy Webster (40), from Ash-bree, Ashford, Co Wicklow, has pleaded not guilty to murder but guilty to the manslaughter of Anne Shortall (47) on April 3rd, 2015 at the Murrrough, Co Wicklow.

His plea was not accepted by the State.

The prosecution's case is that Ms Shortall was beaten to

death with a hammer after she told Mr Webster she was pregnant and threatened to reveal the sexual encounter they had had four months earlier.

Yesterday, the Central Criminal Court heard from Det Garda Owen Martin, who told prosecuting counsel Paul Greene SC that Mr Webster first gave a formal statement to gardaí on April 6th, three days after Ms Shortall went missing.

Mr Webster had been linked to her by text messages found on her mobile phone which she had left in her home.

Det Garda Martin said Mr Webster had told him that the previous Christmas he was out with a few friends for drinks and met Ms Shortall, who he ended up kissing.

Some time later he received a phone call from her in the early hours in which she said: "Check your Facebook page".

Mr Webster called her the following morning but got no response. However, they later started exchanging text messages.

'Bad news'

In one text, Ms Shortall told him: "I hate to be the bearer of bad news but I'm pregnant."

Mr Webster told gardaí he did not believe her because he had consumed so much alcohol on the night of their encounter that he did not ejaculate. The court heard the accused asked to see a pregnancy test but Ms Shortall refused.

He told gardaí he arranged to meet Ms Shortall on the afternoon of Good Friday at the Leitrim Pub in Wicklow town. She got into his van and he told her he wanted proof that he was the father.

Abortion

She told him she was going to England for an abortion. He said the last time he saw her was when he let her out of his van and she walked back towards Wicklow town.

The following day Det Sgt Fergus O'Brien received a call from Mr Webster to say he had told his wife about the "fling".

He confirmed he had had sex with Ms Shortall on December 20th and she had asked him for €6,500 for an abortion. He said his wife calculated she would be about 15 weeks pregnant and an abortion at that stage would cost €700, not including flights.

Det Sgt O'Brien told Mr Greene he went to Mr Webster's home on April 7th, four days after Ms Shortall went missing. When he arrived Mr Webster's wife, Sinead, asked him why her husband had been linked to Ms Shortall's disappearance on social media.

The court heard she asked her husband if he had "anything to say" or if he had hurt Ms Shortall. Det Sgt O'Brien said Mr Webster's head went down and he started to cry.

"He said he had hurt her," Det Sgt O'Brien told the court.

Det Sgt O'Brien cautioned Mr Webster before his wife continued to question him, asking: "Did you hit her Roy?"

The detective told the court that Mr Webster said: "I did."

Mr Webster then began sobbing heavily.

When Mr Webster calmed down he gave a full statement. "She had me under so much

pressure," he said. "She was just threatening and threatening."

During the meeting with Ms Shortall, Mr Webster said, he got out of the van, opened the side door and grabbed the first thing he could find, a hammer. He said he hit her and it was a "mistake that is after ruining so many lives".

Body

He kept her body in the van that Friday and then moved it to the workshop the following day.

He then took gardaí to the workshop and opened the door to where the body lay. Det Sgt O'Brien said he saw a pair of hands wrapped in silver duct tape. He walked out and called for crime scene investigators to take over.

He then arrested Mr Webster on suspicion of the murder of Ms Shortall.

The trial continues.

Councillor calls for consultation on Tuam bodies

Coroner should not rule on future of burial site alone, says former mayor

LORNA SIGGINS

Western Correspondent

The decision on the future of the Tuam mother and baby home burial site is "too big" for the coroner to make on his own, former Galway county mayor Peter Roche has said.

The Fine Gael councillor also says there should be no exhumation at the site.

He has suggested instead that the site where up to 800 infants may be buried should be dedicated in their name, but that there should be widespread consultation with affected families and other stakeholders before any final decision is taken.

Mr Roche said he believes Archbishop of Tuam Dr Michael Neary "may have been premature" in suggesting rein-terment, given certain views about the role of the Catholic Church.

"It is also regrettable that the coroner has been charged as the only person who can take the next step," Mr Roche said. "It shouldn't be left to him when there are so many people whose views need to be taken into account."

"Exhumation would cause a lot of upset, it may be impossible to ensure everyone is accounted for, and local residents have been maintaining this location in memory of these little souls for many years," he said. "A mass commemoration in their honour would provide a lasting legacy."

'Utterly premature'

Independent TD for Galway West Catherine Connolly criticised Mr Roche, and said she felt it was "utterly premature to be consecrating the ground".

"This is an insult, when what families deserve is maximum information," she said.

"We need immediate publication of the commission's interim report on Tuam, and

this will help determine where we are going." A week ago when the commission revealed its findings of test excavations on the Tuam site, it said Galway County Council would engage with it in relation to immediate next steps.

The county council said it was engaging directly with local residents but was also awaiting a decision on what to do next from the coroner.

Investigating

The north Galway coroner Dr Val Costello, who has legal responsibility for investigating sudden, unexplained and unnatural deaths, has so far made no comment since confirmation a week ago from the commission of investigation into mother and baby homes that "significant" remains had been found on the site of the Tuam mother and baby home, which closed in 1961.

The excavations identified a decommissioned sewage

“It is also regrettable that the coroner has been charged as the only person who can take the next step”

containment system or septic tank, and a second structure, divided into 20 chambers, which may have been related to sewage treatment, but there was no evidence it had been used as such. The commission's report only refers to remains being found in the second structure.

It is open to the coroner to call on the support of the Garda and any other authorities deemed necessary.

Tusla has confirmed that all records it has about the mother and baby home in Tuam have been given to the commission of investigation.



Taking to the streets Protesters gather to mark Tibetan uprisings

Members of Ireland's Tibetan community gather on O'Connell Street in Dublin for a vigil to mark the 58th anniversary of the Tibetan National uprising of 1959 and the 9th anniversary of the 2008 uprising. PHOTOGRAPH: BRENDA FITZSIMONS

Briefs

RTÉ

Longwave radio service gets reprieve

RTÉ has agreed to change its plans to discontinue its longwave radio service following protests from representatives of the Irish community in Britain.

The national broadcaster will extend the service until 2019 and then introduce a replacement using an enhanced form of digital radio.

In September 2014, RTÉ announced the imminent closure of the service.

This was later deferred to 2017.

Campaigners against the move argued it would isolate elderly Irish people in Britain who relied on radio to keep in touch with Irish affairs.

About 12 per cent of live online listening to RTÉ radio is from the UK, representing about 600,000 streams per month.

But the broadcaster's contention that its channels could be accessed easily via the internet or online providers was disputed by campaigners, who cited research showing many elderly people were unable to access such services.

Yesterday a consultative group comprising RTÉ, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the organisation Irish in Britain and representatives of the Irish community issued a joint statement saying the service would close in 2019.

In advance of that closure, RTÉ will launch a replacement service on DAB+, an enhanced form of digital radio.

HUGH LINEHAN
Culture Editor

Dublin

Planning application for €300m maternity hospital lodged

The planning application for the €300 million move of the National Maternity Hospital from Holles Street to St Vincent's hospital was lodged yesterday.

The move follows the resolution of an 18-month dispute between the two institutions over governance of the hospital and the recent decision by An Bord Pleanála that the development constitutes strategic infrastructure and can therefore be fast-tracked through the planning process.

The estimated cost of the project has doubled since it was first announced, due to delays caused by the inter-hospital row, an increase in construction inflation and the fact that the building has to be inserted into an existing hospital campus.

The €296 million project cost also includes new facilities for the adult hospital at St Vincent's. The project is expected to be completed in 2021, three years after the original completion target.

The project is the largest single investment to be made in maternity services in the State, catering for up to 10,000 births a year.

Facilities will include five operating theatres; 50 neonatal intensive care and special care single-cot rooms and 24 delivery rooms. All expecting mothers will be accommodated in single rooms. The development will also include the provision of shared services for the overall campus including a canteen and waste management facilities.

Prison sentence

Surgeon jailed in Bahrain for treating protesters released

A paediatric surgeon who spent two years at Temple Street children's hospital in Dublin has been released from a Bahraini prison after five years.

Dr Ali al-Ekri was arrested by security services at Salmaniya Medical Complex in the capital Manama in 2011 while operating on a child.

According to Amnesty International, Dr al-Ekri was arrested for treating protesters during anti-government demonstrations and for criticising excessive force used by the military.

His incarceration became the focus of a prolonged

international campaign within both the human rights and medical communities.

Prof Damian McCormack, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Temple Street, described his former colleague as "unbroken" by an alleged four months of torture at the Jaw prison in Bahrain.

Prof McCormack raised Dr al-Ekri's case at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on several occasions and led a protest in Dublin in 2011 calling for his release.

Dr al-Ekri completed two years' training in Dublin in the 1990s before returning to his native Bahrain to work.



People still want truth, Minister tells students at awards for journalism

RONAN MCGREEVY

Journalists should stay independent, keep their integrity and stay out of political movements, Minister of State Finian McGrath has said. The people want "truth, honesty and integrity in the media", he said and when readers engage with newspapers, they engage with society.

Mr McGrath, who has special responsibility for disabilities, said he had been subjected to hard questioning himself recently but saw it as part of his role as a politician.

He said there was a desire among the public for good journalism with subscriptions to the *New York Times* rising tenfold since Donald Trump was elected as president of the United States.

of 8,000 transition year students.

Sixteen of those students were awarded for their original journalism, created as part of the Newspapers-in-Education programme. Some 70,000 students have participated in the programme in the past five years.

Imaginations

The overall winner was Tomás Ó hUallacháin from Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne in Dingle, Co Kerry. He wrote a story about Tomás Mac an tSaoir, who cycled half way across the US in memory of teenager Donal Walsh, who died from cancer in 2013.

Prof John Horgan, the chairman of the judging panel, praised his work saying that from a "deceptively low-key introduction, he engages us and our imaginations in a fascinating story, through short paragraphs which keep the reader

■ **Winning writers:** Tomás Ó hUallacháin, Jack Farrell, Emma McGoey and Caitríona Ní Chonaill. PHOTOGRAPH: COLM MAHADY/FENNELLS

racing ahead to a conclusion which ties up the events of the narrative in a way many professional journalists would salute."

Prizes were awarded in five categories. Kate Ní Dhubháin from the same school as the overall winner won in the newspaper category.

Caitríona Ní Chonaill from Coláiste Ghobnatan in Co Cork won in features; Siofra O'Dwyer from Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana, won the opinion category; Emma McGoey, Meanscoil Mhuire, Longford, took the prize for sport; and Jack Farrell, from Causeway Comprehensive School in Co Kerry, won the award for photojournalism.

Single public-private consortium to build 500 social houses

OLIVIA KELLY

Dublin Correspondent

A single development consortium is to be selected to build 500 social homes at six separate locations in Dublin and surrounding counties under a public private partnership (PPP) deal.

The social housing projects would be the first PPPs pursued since the collapse of the developer-led social housing system nine years ago.

Dublin city councillors have raised concerns about handing control of the provision of housing at six sites to a single project group after developer Bernard McNamara backed out of a PPP deal to develop five council sites for housing in 2008, leaving council housing complexes derelict.

The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in 2014, proposed returning to PPPs as an off-balance-sheet mechanism for providing housing for local authority tenants.

In October 2015, then minister for the environment Alan Kelly announced six locations had been chosen for the 500 homes. Two of the sites were in Dublin city at Airyfield on the Malahide Road and Scribblestown in north Dublin. Sites at Dunleer in Louth, Convent Lands in Wicklow Town and Craddockstown in Naas, Co Kildare were also selected.

The homes were to be built over a three- to four-year period at a cost of about €100 million. Unlike previous PPP models, the sites stay in the ownership of the State and the developer gets payments for a 25-year period, after which the houses or apartments return to State ownership.

City council chief executive

Owen Keegan will seek councillors' approval next month for the city council to act as the contracting authority on behalf of the other councils. The council management wants to start the process of seeking a project group to develop all six sites next month.

Sinn Féin councillor and chairman of the city's housing committee Daithí Doolan said PPPs had "been a disaster" for the capital. "PPP's have a very sorry history in Dublin. They have left communities scared and abandoned."

Mr Doolan noted Minister for Housing Simon Coveney had said funding was not a barrier to building social housing. "This commitment clearly removes the need for any PPP."

Independent councillor



■ **Daithí Doolan said PPP's have a very sorry history in Dublin**

Christy Burke said any developer who "failed to deliver" previously should be excluded from the process.

The council had entered into a PPP deal with Mr McNamara to redevelop five council-owned sites with a mix of social, affordable and private housing. Following the the property market crash, Mr McNamara backed out of the deal. Three of the sites, O'Devaney Gardens in Dublin 7, St Michael's Estate in Inchicore and Dominick Street in the north inner city, were existing council flat complexes and most tenants had been moved from their homes when the PPPs foundered.