

A dark event in Stradbally's history recalled by release of Garda files

By Dermot Keyes

A dark chapter in Stradbally's history re-entered public discourse this week following the release of secret Garda files which formed part of the investigation into the disappearance of postman Laurence Griffin.

Mr Griffin, who had served as the area's postman for a decade" set off on his round from Kilmacthomas Post Office on Christmas Day 1929.

Little did he know, as he set off on that raw Christmas morning, that he was never to see his home" wife and three children again.

An investigation into Mr Griffin's disappearance was personally commandeered by then Garda Commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, who would subsequently lead the Blueshirts and fight on General Francisco Franco's side in the Spanish Civil War.

Large numbers of reporters descended on Stradbally to attend a press conference addressed by O'Duffy himself. An essay catalogued and edited by Waterford County Library states that some of the press pack were 'appointed permanently to cover the story'.

In fact, the news of Mr Griffin's disappearance also attracted the attention of English daily newspapers. To this day" the body of Laurence Griffin remains unfound.

The Garda files, handed over to the National Archive by outgoing Justice Minister Michael McDowell on Monday, reveal the force's persistent contention that foul play was at work in the postman's disappearance.

On the morning of Saint Stephen's Day 1929, Mr Griffin's bicycle and cape were found two miles from Stradbally by a local farmer who was on his way to the creamery at the time.

After a month of extensive searching, which involved civic Gardaí dispatched from Waterford and interviews of all living in the wider area, O'Duffy arrived in Stradbally to spearhead the investigation.

Though murder charges were brought against no less than 10 people, including two civic Gardaí, all 10 walked free from Waterford District Court. Among the legal team representing the accused were local TD Captain Willie Redmond and Olympic long jumper Peter O'Connor.

Garda memos addressed to Commissioner O'Duffy claimed that Mr Griffin had been drinking in Stradbally on Christmas Day and suffered injuries on that day 'which resulted in his death'.

The memo writer claims that there were many in Stradbally aware of what had happened but refused to 'state the facts'. He went further" informing his superior that he was "fully convinced" of the guilt of those suspected of killing Mr Griffin.

The files also reveal that some officers were a tad too heavy handed in trying to acquire the evidence needed to bring the mystery to a conclusion.

Three Gardaí, along with an inspector were sued by a person considered a suspect for 'assaulting him to procure evidence they believed he was suppressing'.

The then government, despite strong objections from O'Duffy, ordered that the Gardaí in question be dismissed. After the 1932 general election" all four were reinstated to the force.

The disappearance of Laurence Griffin and the subsequent controversy caused by the case, remained keenly felt in the area.

"Many of those arrested sued many of the newspapers' both local and national, for being too liberal in their reporting and were awarded various sums of money, and an English paper in 1970 suffered the same fate", wrote the author of Laurence Griffin - the missing postman.

And so years later, the story of Larry Griffin the missing postman, has gained immortality and will live forever in the folklore of our country.