

Farewell to Tawdy



The late Thomas 'Tawdy' Morrissey pictured at Steinberg Fireplaces on the Tramore Road.

"AW no, Tawdy as well? Jaysus." The thoughts of Jamie Beamish on Facebook after news broke of the death of Thomas 'Tawdy' Morrissey captured the mood of Waterfordians last Wednesday morning.

Tawdy's death was met with widespread and, more importantly, sincere sadness. It really did feel like a bit of Waterford went into the Ballinaneeshagh sod with him on Friday morning last.

Everyone who frequented the Tramore Road in particular, along with the Cove Roundabout on the Dunmore Road where he often made a perch for himself felt like they knew Tawdy.

Even if it was down to nothing more than his acknowledging the toot of a car horn with a friendly wave from his spot near the Halfway House, Tawdy connected with the general public in a way politicians can only dream of.

His smile and an upraised arm, regularly with a can within his grip, drew a grin from many a motorist, cyclist and jogger.

It may only have been a fleeting moment of good humour, but there was something about Tawdy that we warmed to

. A bit like the bench that Waterford City Council built for him near the Halfway House, recessed from the road for his own safety, Tawdy was a part of our furniture. But now he is gone, and he shall be missed.

Stories told about Tawdy have come in thick and fast since last Wednesday, and it speaks volumes of how fondly he was considered by such a cross-section of Waterford and Tramore society.

If one stands back and attempts to assess the reality of Tawdy's life from an outsider's perspective, it would be all too easy to suggest that his was a pitiful and sad existence.

But was it? I'd suspect there are a great many people living what social convention would regard as 'regular' lives, who find life to be an altogether greater struggle than Tawdy ever did. I'd even 'hazard' to suggest that Tawdy was relatively happy in the manner in which he lived. And that sentiment was suitably illustrated in a poignant poem penned by Jim Duffin, simply titled 'Tawdy'.

"To me, you were just good O! Tawdy A legend known by name, Known all throughout the Deise, Ballygunner in your veins, Coolgower was your chosen spot, On the way to Tramore, It's here you found solace, Friends & plenty more, Oh you had no recession, Lucky bloody sod, Who needs faith in society, with such strong faith in God Often times I envied you, A carefree life at best, Doing what you want, when you wanted And two fingers to the rest."

How many of us truly live our lives on our terms and our terms alone? Think about it. The President of the United States, for all his power, can enact few of his goals without the support of Congress.

Forget not, that's the nominal 'most powerful man in the world' we're talking about. Barack Obama couldn't walk between off-licences in Waterford and Tramore without the route being 'neutralised' for both him and his security detail.

Where's the freedom in that? So, Thomas 'Tawdy' Morrissey, in the course of his existence as a private citizen, enjoyed a level of liberty and independence that 'POTUS', for all the esteem and trappings of office, can only dream about.

To anyone who looks upon Tawdy's life as a pitiful one, I can say only this: you're wrong.

He lived his life as he best saw fit and in so doing became one of our city's true characters.

In December 2008, John O'Connor wrote a lovely piece for this publication about a reunion between Tawdy (a Castle Street native) and the great Brendan Bowyer (originally from St Otteran's Terrace), who were childhood acquaintances.

"Tawdy was on his way back to the city following a visit to his friends in the religious community at Mount Melleray when his companions noticed that Brendan was performing that night in Cappoquin," wrote John.

"Before the show, on hearing that Tawdy was hoping to meet him, Brendan and his daughter Aisling, both came to greet him and accorded him great kindness and courtesy.

"It turned out that Tawdy's mother, Maggie, once worked in Delacato's Fish and Chip Emporium in John Street and she often went out of her way to ensure that Brendan and the other members of The Royal Showband got their meal no matter how late the hour."

John's piece also added that Tawdy had appeared as an extra in the 1966 BAFTA-winning movie 'The Blue Max' starring George Peppard and Ursula Andress, which was shot in Wicklow.

We also know that Tawdy served in the FCA and reportedly worked for Waterford Corporation as then it was known.

He enjoyed a close relationship with his mother, but his life took a different direction after her passing, which ultimately led him to the Tramore Road (and the kindness of the Power family) and a life less ordinary that so many of us caught no more than a fleeting glimpse of.

Amidst the litany of tributes posted online, the following comment from David Jackman encapsulated the man laid to rest last Friday morning.

“One of the few interactions I had with Tawdy was in Ardkeen Stores queuing at the till and he was behind me. He saw 50 pence on the floor (this was before the Euro), picked it up and put it in the poor box, saying someone needs it more than himself. Never forgot it. Pure gent.”

Rest in peace, Tawdy.