

GARDA MEMORIAL REMEMBERS FALLEN HEROES

A special monument to honour two Gardaí who were murdered 37 years ago by armed bank robbers near Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon was unveiled in July. Retired Detective Sergeant Michael Carty, who knew the area very well, reflects on the bravery and admirable courage shown by Detective Garda John Morley and Garda Henry Byrne on that fateful July day in 1980.

More than 700 people joined together on 26 July at Shannon's Cross, Aughaderry, near Loughglynn in North Roscommon to witness Justice Minister Charlie Flanagan unveil the monument on 26 July last.

Thirty seven years ago at this exact place, Detective Garda John Morley and Garda Henry Byrne were murdered by callous criminals when their patrol car was ambushed by gunfire on intercepting an armed gang who a short time previously had carried out an armed robbery at a bank in nearby Ballaghaderreen.

The ceremony and proceedings were attended by the families of the slain Gardaí, both serving and retired colleagues and members of the wider community. It was indeed poignant to see the families of the two men stand with the hundreds of people amid the strains of the Army band paying tribute to the memory of the two "fallen heroes" who gave their lives while upholding the rule of law on behalf of the citizens' of Ireland .

As Minister Flanagan put it "the ultimate sacrifice made by John and Henry in protecting the citizens of the State will never be forgotten". And everyone present agreed this monument will ensure their brave deeds will always be remembered.

FRIENDSHIP AND SUPPORT

Speaking at the ceremony Detective Garda Morley's son Shane referred to the constant friendship and support offered to the Morley and Byrne families by the people of Loughglynn since July 1980 and has been "an immense sense of comfort down through the years".

He also paid tribute to his mother, Frances for all she had done for him and his siblings and remarked she was forced to take on the role of both parents after her husband was killed.

On behalf of the Byrne family Henry's son Paul described the monument as a "beautiful and fitting memory to John and Dad". Henry Byrne thanked his wider family members for being "a rock of strength" to his mother Anne and siblings and spoke eloquently about his mother's strength through these very tough times.

Members of the Morley and Byrne families planted two



Minister for Justice and Equality Charlie Flanagan unveiled the monument at Shannon's Cross, Aughaderry, near Loughglynn in North Roscommon on 26 July – at this exact place 37 years ago, Detective Garda John Morley and Garda Henry Byrne were murdered by bank robbers.



Widows Anne Byrne and Frances Morley pictured at the ceremony.



Assistant Garda Commissioner Ann Marie McMahon lays a wreath at the memorial sculpture.

oak trees at the monument while Assistant Garda Commissioner Ann Marie McMahon laid a wreath in their memory. Also in attendance were Assistant Commissioner Barry O'Brien, Chief Supt Pdraig Rattigan and Garda Supt Joseph Boyle, together with retired Assistant Commissioner Martin Donnellan.

PLAYING A PIVOTAL ROLE

No stranger to armed encounters, Martin Donnellan was proudly wearing his Scott Medal for bravery awarded for arresting armed criminals, who had carried out an armed robbery at a bank in Dublin.

Also present with his family was retired Garda Derek Kelly, who was also involved in the incident. Sadly, Sgt Mick O'Malley who was also involved is no longer with us but his family was present. We should not forget the courage of both members who were unarmed during that horrific encounter.

Both Gardaí displayed admirable courage on the day, and although having undergone a traumatic and horrendous ordeal both members played a pivotal role in the subsequent investigation which resulted in the arrest and conviction of the killers, Peter Pringle, Patrick McCann and Colm O'Shea.

After lengthy court trials they were convicted and served prison sentences. But they are now free to resume their lives and enjoy leisure activities. Not so for the two Gardaí. But this is the price for living in a democracy.

BOOK TO COMMEMORATE

A commemorative book *'Remembering our Fallen Heroes'* outlining events surrounding the incident was launched by Minister Flanagan. Available in shops in the surrounding area at a cost of €5, the book captures the disbelief, sadness and numbness of the community and indeed the country in the days following the murders.

The organising committee are to be commended and the local community were highly praised by all present in making this memorial happen; the organising committee for their tireless work and members of the local community who gave their time and financial support.

At the unveiling, Justice Minister Charlie Flanagan said it was "a testimony to the great regard the local people had for John and Henry and continue to have". Local volunteers assisted the Gardaí from the Roscommon/Longford Division with traffic regulation and the provision of transport to and from the venue.



Two-year-old Harry Byrne, grandson of Garda Henry Byrne, tries on a Garda Assistant Commissioner's cap while in the arms of his father Paul Byrne.

I did not know Garda Henry Byrne but the circumstances surrounding his murder are enough to place him in a unique position in terms of bravery and commitment to serving the community.

He was finishing his tour of duty and choose to travel unarmed to confront a dangerous and armed gang who had used firearms and terror tactics to rob a bank in Ballaghaderreen. Such was the calibre of the man.

COURAGE COSTS A LIFE

I knew Detective Garda Morley. We trained at the same time in Templemore in the early 1960s and we were later stationed in Kilmainham Garda Station Dublin. At that time Kilmainham policed the notorious Keogh Square as well as the volatile areas known as Fatima Mansions, Dolphin House and Dolphins Barn.

John Morley never stood back from conflict or danger. Indeed it was his courage that cost him his life on that fateful day at



Dáire Morley, grandson the late Detective Garda John Morley, rests on his father Shane's shoulders during the ceremony.

GARDA MEMORIAL

Shannon's Cross. John transferred to Ballaghaderreen and I frequently met up with him when home on leave. He missed Dublin but the quality of life in the country attracted him as well, with him being a star footballer with his native Mayo.

He was later appointed a Detective Garda and transferred to Castlerea where he took up residence and became part of the community. Indeed, shortly before his murder I was in communication with him in relation to security issues.

On 7 July 1980 I was a Detective Sergeant based in Portlaoise, Co Laois, and was attending a security meeting in Garda Headquarters Dublin when the tragic news came through. It was chilling to hear in the context that I knew the location so well; prior to joining the Force I travelled past Shannon's Cross many times along with my pals to dances, football matches and the occasional swim in Loughglynn Lake.

I was, therefore, in a position to point out the exact locations on the Operations Room Map. It was certainly surreal to hear of such an outrage involving the death of two Garda members in a hail of bullets in a place that, for me, was a calm and relaxed place.

RENEWING ACQUAINTANCES

After the unveiling, I met many retired colleagues and the war was fought once again. I also had the pleasure of meeting members of the Morley and Byrne families, and one could not but be impressed at their dignity and the

manner in which they have successfully coped and moved on with their lives.

While they were delighted and appreciative of the monument to honour Henry and John, it would be unrealistic to think that the horrors of that July day in 1980 can ever be fully put behind them.

Michael Carty is a member of the Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association (GSRMA) Roscommon Branch.

