

Weekend Review



My favourite story

Journalists recall the stories that changed them – or the world around them. Page 5

Arts & Books

Where did Ireland disappear to? Joseph O'Connor's new short story. Page 10

Saturday, August 17, 2013 Editor Conor Goodman Phone 01-6758000 email features@irishtimes.com

THE DUNDON LEGACY

Limerick breathed a sigh of relief this week with the sentencing of John Dundon. But a decade of shootings and intimidation – and chronic social problems – have left the city scarred



Carl O'Brien
Chief Reporter

It's a wet Thursday afternoon and Mattie Collins is standing at the doorway of his home on Clarina Avenue. It's no more than 30 metres from Hyde Road, which for the past decade has been the stronghold of the Dundon-McCarthy gang and the nerve-centre for much of Limerick's organised crime.

A decade of shootings, arson attacks and intimidation has left deep scars here in Ballinacurra Weston. Once proud homes now sit dead-eyed, with boarded up windows, peeling paintwork or collapsed roofs. Their owners either sold their properties – typically worth less than a luxury car – to the council or applied to be rehoused. Others simply fled. Dozens of homes have been demolished. Only overgrown grass and the ghostly remains of tarmac driveways and boundary walls remain.

"You have good people here. They've been trapped by circumstances," says Collins. "Decent people. They ran for their lives."

"I remember it was seen as a kind of posh area when we moved in during the 1960s... beautiful families, lovely homes." In better days, 75 houses lined his avenue. People poured their hearts and souls into making their homes and gardens beautiful, he says. In recent years, 36 homes have been demolished on the surrounding streets. Nine are boarded-up.

Fear has stalked these streets for years, the kind of gnawing terror that makes people keep their heads down, their mouths shut and their eyes closed. But today there is a sense of relief.

On Tuesday, John Dundon was sentenced to life for the murder of Shane Geoghegan, a young man mistakenly shot as he walked to his girlfriend's house.

Dundon joins his three brothers – Wayne, Dessie and Ger – in prison. His conviction comes after a period of sustained success by the Garda in placing high-profile gang members behind bars. In all, 30 criminals involved in Limerick's drug wars are in prison, while twice that number have served time in recent years.

The city is now a much safer place. Six years ago, more than 100 shootings were recorded in a 12-month period. Last year, there were fewer than 10. Organised criminal activity on the ground has also dropped dramatically.

Tougher antigang laws, a shift in policing tactics and better resources have all played a part in turning the tide against a rise in criminality, which for a time seemed to be out of control.

The fact that the Dundon gang appears to have cracked from within is hugely significant. The shells of burnt-out or abandoned houses are testament to the power of criminal gangs. But the evidence of April Collins, a former partner of Ger Dundon, along with her sister and her sister's partner – a first cousin of the Dundons – has broken that spell.

Public representatives say it is a sign that people are willing to stand up and give evidence. Time will tell. No one is celebrating just yet. True recovery for the city's most deprived communities will require sustained work.

It will hinge on fully regenerating ne-

glected areas and offering meaningful opportunities for people who have had little reason for hope. It is the kind of work that could take generations to complete. In the meantime, public spending cuts and thwarted ambition loom large on the horizon for a new generation.

But, for now, there are reasons to feel relieved, says Collins. The fear that convulsed neighbours such as his in Ballinacurra Weston has eased. "It's been happening for a couple of years now. The city is getting back on its feet. Things are better. The fear around here has been alleviated. It'll be nice to see the city in a better light, now."



The decline of Limerick's most deprived communities isn't explained just by the sad and inevitable legacy of history. There is a sense of neglectful, or indeed deliberate, public policies by local and national government that squandered opportunities.

These pockets of the city have some of the highest concentrations of social housing anywhere in the State. They have the highest level of deprivation. The extent of neglect was a shock for people such as John Fitzgerald, the former Dublin city manager, when he toured the areas in 2007.

"I knew the problems were serious, but it was probably worse than anything I had seen," says Fitzgerald, who is originally from Limerick. "People were living a short distance from the city centre, but it was extraordinary how fearful and threatened they felt. It had tortured a lot of people. Most had paid their taxes, done their duty to society and had retired to a place that was in deep trouble."



66
You have good people here. They've been trapped by circumstances Decent people. They ran for their lives

The Fitzgerald report led to the establishment of Limerick Regeneration and the unveiling of an ambitious plan to transform the sprawling local-authority housing estates of Moyross, Southill and other parts of the city.

The plan involved demolishing up to 2,500 houses, creating two new town centres, co-ordinating responses to social and education problems and, ultimately, breaking the cycle of disadvantage that has gripped these neighbourhoods.

Five years later, progress is slow. The economic downturn hit shortly after the



■ Behind bars: almost 30 Limerick gang members are now in jail, including John Dundon (above); Mattie Collins (below) at his home on Clarina Avenue in Ballinacurra Weston.

plans were launched and much of the money earmarked for the €1.6 billion project dried up. Homes were demolished, but just a handful of new developments have been built.

For those involved in regeneration, there is a sense that recession hasn't necessarily been a bad thing. Putting up new homes, without tackling underlying social problems, is a recipe for disaster, says Fitzgerald, who has since moved on.

"We were under a lot of pressure to start building houses. That used to drive me mad. But that's the easy bit. Knocking down homes, putting up new ones. You've got to be insane to start that off without tackling the underlying issues. Otherwise, it will go the way of other new homes, which ended up being destroyed after a few years."

Much of that work is quietly taking place in places such as the Moyross Community Association. It's normally a hive of activity, but the young people involved in the summer camp project – an eight-week programme of activities for 30 seven- to 12-year-olds – are on an outing.

"This kind of social stuff is making a real difference," says Geraldine Clohessy, a community development worker who lived in Moyross for more than 20 years. "It's teaching them about responsibility, discipline... Otherwise, they'd be just hanging around during the summer months."

Above St Munchin's family resource centre, in Ballynanty, are high-quality pre-school, homework and afterschool clubs. Older children can take part in the "follow your dream" project, which encourages young people to fulfill their potential. Other programmes are aimed at giving teenagers a taste of the college environment, along with more practical courses in welding and motorbike maintenance.

But reversing neglect like this is slow-burning, generational work. The scale of the challenge of recovery is daunting. Dr Niamh Hourigan, a Limerick-born sociologist, carried out an indepth community-level study of fear and feuding in the city between 2007 and 2010.

Hourigan spoke to dozens residents in the area, including mothers who con-

sciously decided to raise their children tough to enable them to survive; children who worked hard to acquire the mannerisms of hard men; and serious players in gangland feuds whose stress disorders are comparable to those of soldiers in war zones.

Her study quotes Sharon, a local resident: "The gardai were down making an arrest and they had the squad car down and as usual, the kids were up kickin' the tyres and chattin' to them and I heard one garda say to this young fella about five sayin', 'So what do you want to be when you grow up?' and he turned to him, cool as you like, and said, 'I want to kill one of those fuckin' Reds.'"

"Early intervention is crucial," says Hourigan. "I think things have improved a lot because of regeneration work... If you can hold young kids back from sliding into the [criminal] lifestyle, it will pay dividends."

She worries that cuts to public spending will threaten these projects and that history is in danger of repeating itself. The progress made over recent years, she says, is fragile, and political will and resources are needed to keep regeneration as a priority issue. "Cuts to things like welfare and resource teaching hit these communities very hard," she says.

"The success of early intervention and diversion schemes could unravel very quickly and end up creating the same conditions that allowed criminal gangs to thrive... The turnover of a new generation is very quick. Within five years, you'll be looking at the emergence of a whole new generation."



The issue of the regeneration programme is hotly debated locally and has no short-

66

I heard one garda say to this young fella about five... 'So what do you want to be when you grow up?' and he turned to him, cool as you like, and said, 'I want to kill one of those fuckin' Reds'

age of skeptics. Some of them have formed Limerick Regeneration Watch to chronicle what it sees as broken promises, missed opportunities and a lack of meaningful consultation with the community.

"The past five years have actually resulted in living conditions worsening for many residents, yet we are told that regeneration is being done for us," says Cathal McCarthy, chairman of the group, who lives in Ballinacurra Weston. "We have no say in the decisions that affect our lives and our 'representatives' on the residents fora were not elected by the residents."

A spokesman for the Office of Regeneration insisted it has been consulting communities and that these views will feed into a revised implementation plan to be launched shortly. "The focus of the programme has now moved to the new build of modern, well-designed, energy-efficient homes in the communities, and the refurbishment of houses to be retained," a spokesman said.

McCarthy says one of the most appalling features of the programme is the depopulation of the area. More than 1,000 families have been relocated, he says, which is undermining the community and crucial services, such as schools.

While some local authority tenants were relocated to other estates in the city or county, home owners were given the option of either waiting for their new house to be built; selling their home to the council at the "market" rate – typically €30,000 – to €80,000 depending on the area; or giving up their home in exchange for €35,000 and rented accommodation elsewhere in the city.

The schools in some areas – such as St Enda's postprimary school, the only secondary school in the southside regeneration area – are due to close. Numbers in recent times have fallen as low as 127 pupils.

Numbers have also been falling at primary schools, new figures show. In 2007, Corpus Christi National School, in Moyross, had 272 pupils; now it has 178. It's a similar story at Our Lady of Lourdes National School, Rosbrien, down from 224 to 144 pupils; and at Southill Junior School, down from 71 to 51 pupils.

McCarthy says the voices of residents are being ignored and describes the regeneration as a "State-sponsored land grab". He says he and others in the organisation have been dismissed by authorities in a whispering campaign as being linked to republican or fringe political groups. McCarthy insists he has no political affiliations. "We just want to be heard. We want to

Continued on page 2

A family feud that took over a city

The history of gangland violence in Limerick is intertwined with family feuds, money and control of the region's lucrative drug trade. While feuding in parts of the city go back decades, its modern roots are linked to a falling-out between criminals Christy Keane and his close ally, Eddie Ryan, in 2000.

A now famous schoolyard row between their daughters – in which one girl received a slash wound to the face – inflamed a widening rift between the former associates. Shortly afterwards, Keane was sitting in a parked car outside a school waiting for one of his two children. Ryan approached and produced a gun. The weapon jammed.

Two nights later, there was a reprisal. Two men entered a bar in which Ryan was drinking and shot him dead. On leaving the bar, the two masked gunmen sprayed the front of the bar with automatic gunfire.

As the feud developed, Ryan's family formed an alliance with the McCarthy-Dundon faction, who were quickly developing a huge drugs network in the city.

The Dundon brothers were born in England, where their father Kenneth had emigrated. During the late 1980s or early 1990s they began to drift back to Limerick and linked up with their cousins, the McCarthys. They quickly established themselves as major players in the drugs scene from a base in Ballinacurra Weston, on the southside of the city.

The McCarthy-Dundon-Ryan alliance plotted to avenge the murder of Eddie Ryan. Keane's gang was by now aligned with the Collops, other major players in the drugs trade. The murders or attempted killings grew in savagery. One involved a man being stabbed 17 times and left for dead; another involved a man tortured and then shot. At least a dozen killings have been linked to this current feud, although some put the figure far higher.

Today, in all, almost 30 gang members are in jail. John Dundon and his brothers, Dessie, Wayne and Ger are all in prison for various offences, ranging from murder to intimidation. So too are associates of the Dundon gang, such as Nathan Killeen and Barry Doyle. The main members of the rival Collopy gang are also serving time. Kenneth Collopy is serving life for the murder of an innocent victim in 2008; other Collopy gang members are serving sentences of up to six years for intimidation or threats to kill.

THE DUNDON LEGACY

Continued from page 1

have an input into how our communities are run. Is that too much to ask?"

It's not just the city's deprived communities that need help. Limerick as a commercial centre faces real challenges. The city has one of the highest proportion of vacant shops of any town or city in the country, at 15-20 per cent, depending on various studies.

For business owners like Kevin Hogan, who runs Melt Chocolate Cafe, it's about survival. Various plans to beautify the city are taking place, such as pedestrianising streets and laying down stone paving. But it makes little difference without shoppers.

"The authorities need to make rates cheaper, make parking more accessible and affordable," he says. "It's tough for the businesses left. The more shops you have, the more people you have."

This week it was announced that Marks & Spencer is to set up a large out-



“Shane was every mother's son. Limerick must never forget him, or what happened

let. It is good news, bringing hundreds of jobs, but the plan is to locate on the outskirts of the city.

Eoghan Prendergast, of the newly established Limerick Marketing Company, accepts it's not ideal, but says a new plan, Limerick 2030, offers a more coherent blueprint than what went before in developing the city and surrounding areas.

The joining of the city and county councils will help to market the city in a more effective and collaborative way. Ambitious plans are under way to develop the riverfront, attract new business into the city and reverse a tide of decline, he says. "Manchester took a similar approach in the 1990s and turned things around. Now, it's the second most popular city in the UK for international visitors. It's an example we intend to follow."



This week's progress, while positive, is just a milestone on a much longer road to recovery for the city and some of its embattled residents.

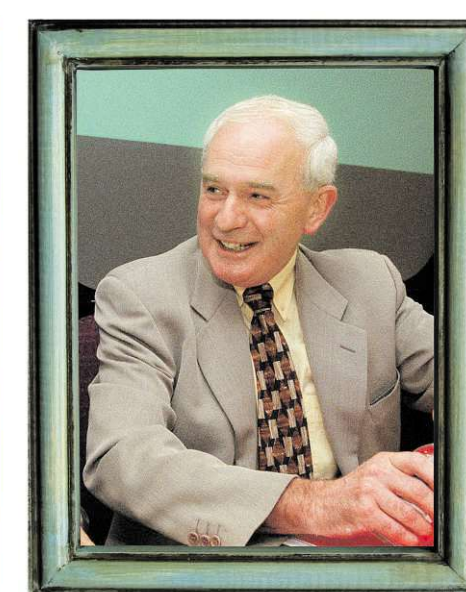
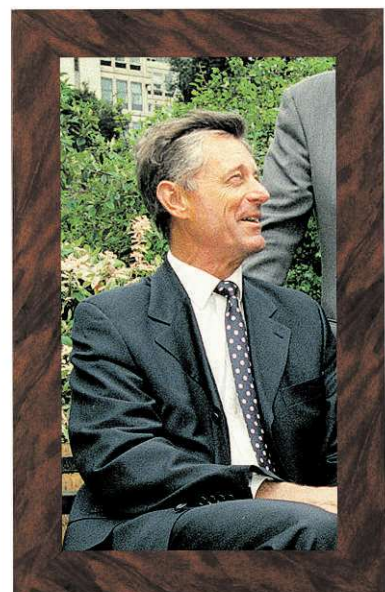
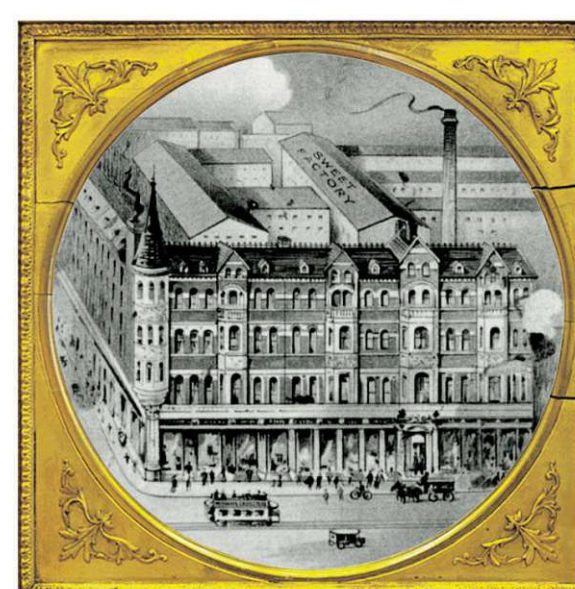
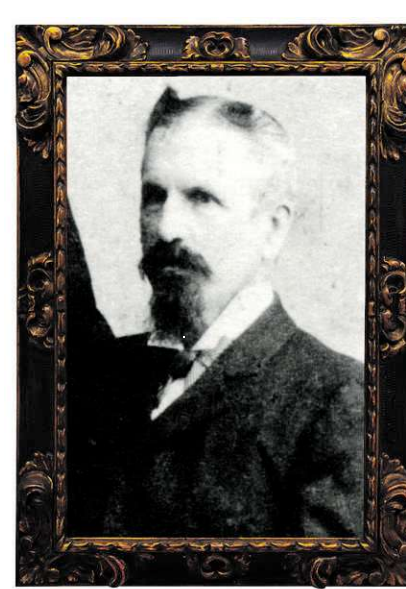
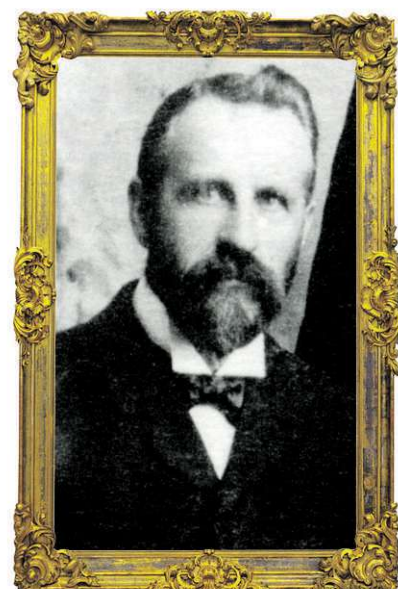
That recovery will be a daunting and tentative process. All agree that providing meaningful alternatives for young people who see little option outside of drugs as a way of life will be crucial.

Maintaining the momentum, political will and resources involved in the regeneration of Limerick will be crucial, too. Trying to get State and community agencies to work together is another constant challenge.

An end to violence, and a rejuvenated city, would be a fitting testament to Shane Geoghegan. His aunt, Margaret Walsh, sat through much of the trial, along with the rest of the family. She was the driving force behind the "pitch for Shane", in which 20,000 terracotta figurines were moulded by people around the world to show solidarity with the family.

"When I think of Shane now, I think of a man who brought a smile to everyone who knew him," she told *The Irish Times*. "You couldn't be in bad form around him. He'd make a joke, and you'd forget your troubles."

"You know, we think of him all the time – hundreds of times a day. Shane was every mother's son. It just happened to be him. Limerick must never forget him, or what happened. Losing Shane was too high a price to pay. We have to stick up for the community and never let anything like this happen again."



WHO ARE THE MUSGRAVES?

The media-shy family behind SuperValu, Centra and (for a few more months) Superquinn play no senior executive role in the business, but they collectively earn millions in dividends every year



Ciarán Hancock
Finance Correspondent

The Musgrave Group's decision last week to ditch the Superquinn brand that it acquired in 2011 put the spotlight on the Cork-based wholesaler. From February 2014 Superquinn's 24 stores will be rebranded as SuperValu, a move that will give that brand a significant foothold in Dublin for the first time. It will also allow SuperValu to overtake Dunnes Stores as the country's second-biggest retailer, behind Tesco, with a 25 per cent market share.

But who are the Musgraves, and what's the secret to their long-running success?

This wealthy merchant family is intensely private and media-shy. None of them was prepared to be interviewed for this article.

The Musgrave company is essentially a wholesaler that supplies groceries to a network of franchisees who run its retail brands. These brands range from SuperValu and Centra in Ireland to Budgens and Londis in the UK and Dialprix in Spain. It dates back to 1876, when Thomas and Stuart Musgrave, brothers from Leitrim, set up a trading company in Cork. Over the years it has been involved in many sectors, including tea, sweets and hotels, before settling on running cash-and-carries and supplying the grocery trade.

Although it bears the family name, the company has no Musgraves working in senior roles. The Trinity-educated "Dublin cousin" Hugh MacKeown was the last family member to run the business, but he stepped down as chairman in January 2011. He was managing director, chief executive and chairman during a 40-year

stint dating from 1971. MacKeown is credited with modernising the business by building a chain of top-notch cash-and-carry outlets, establishing the SuperValu and Centra retail brands in the Republic, and expanding the business into Britain and Northern Ireland.

Musgrave is now run by Chris Martin, its English chief executive, and Seamus Scully, its chairman. Neither is related to the family. The group has annual sales of €4.9 billion, and more than 60,000 staff are employed by the company or its independent retailers.

"Although the family is not directly involved in the day-to-day running of the business, their influence plays a big part in defining who we are and how we do business," said a statement from the company.

The family influence is exercised at board level. It underpins the company's values as a community-based, ethically run business. One of the core values drummed into staff is that "we are not greedy". This is credited to the family's Methodist religion.

One experienced executive at a leading Irish-owned supplier says Musgrave is one of the best companies to deal with.

"They're tough negotiators, but when they strike a deal they stick to it. They don't try to change terms midcontract, unlike some other retailers here," he says.

Three branches of the family are represented on the board. MacKeown's eldest son, Philip, who is 47, Switzerland-based Peter Musgrave, who is 61, and Stuart Musgrave, whose great-grandfather of the same name cofounded the initial trading company in 1876. All three were executives in the company before pursuing their own careers. Peter had an export business. Stuart, who ran his own tea business until a few years ago, will be 65 next month, an age that under the family constitution requires him to step down as a nonexecutive director.

“They're tough negotiators, but when they strike a deal they stick to it.

He will be replaced by his first cousin Christopher, who runs a number of farms in England.

Stuart and his brother Nicky both have holiday homes in Baltimore, in west Cork. Sailing and messing around with boats are said to be part of the family DNA. Other family members live or socialise in Kinshale; some are based abroad, in Australia, the Caribbean and parts of Europe.

About 60 family shareholders between them own 78 per cent of the business. The balance is owned by staff or tied up in a profit-sharing scheme. This makes the family members the main beneficiaries of the €16 million dividend that the company pays out each year.

The company also had shareholders' funds of €461.6 million at the end of 2012. The family share amounted to €360 million.

In early 2000 a Musgrave family shareholders' conference was instituted to update the disparate strands of the family on the company's performance and to put a bit of structure on their engagement with the group. It's a one-day affair that allows the family members to catch up with each other and involves management making detailed presentations about the business.

"There's a very structured way in which the company deals with the family," says one informed source. "If there's a problem, it's brought to the shareholder committee and sorted out there."

The conference is held every three years. The next one will take place next month in Cork city. "Don't bother turning up – the media aren't welcome," says a source close to the family.

In a book published in 2001, *A History of Musgrave: The First 125 Years*, Hugh MacKeown said it was sad that no family members were employed in the business. "It is very difficult to integrate family members into a company of this size," he added.

In many ways it is easier for the family to employ professional managers to run the business. "What happens if a family member didn't work out?" says one former Musgrave executive. "How would you get rid of them without spilling a lot of bad blood? It's tricky."

Younger members of the family are encouraged to work in the business to get a feel for the company, and it is understood that the Musgrave Group is working on establishing a one-year internship programme for family members. "It would be like a gap year," says a source close to the business. "It's good for the company to have them around the business, and customers and suppliers like it."

This would give the younger generation a taste for the business, but they would be expected to develop their careers elsewhere before staking a claim for a senior role at Musgrave.

Over the years there has been much speculation about the future of the Musgrave Group. It was often tipped for a stock-market flotation in the Celtic Tiger years. The family-owned Roches Stores cashed out in the boom by selling to Debenhams, and Fergal Quinn and his family pocketed €420 million by selling Super-

■ Clockwise from top left: Musgrave founders Thomas and Stuart Musgrave; the Metropole Hotel and sweet factory, Cork, which the company sold in 1977; Centra; chairman Seamus Scully; current CEO Chris Martin; SuperValu family member and former chairman Hugh MacKeown.

ILLUSTRATION: IRISH TIMES PREMEDIA

quinn to a consortium of property speculators in 2005.

The Musgraves resisted such temptations, instead backing management's plans to expand by acquisition in the UK and Ireland. Ironically, it rescued Superquinn from receivership in 2011 by paying €229 million.

"The family's stated aim is for the company to remain private for as long as possible," says a family source. "That's not likely to change anytime soon."

From the beginning Expansion of a family business

- 1876: Founded by 25-year-old Thomas and 18-year-old Stuart Musgrave, brothers from Leitrim, at 103 North Main Street in Cork city.
- 1908: Thomas's son John L. Musgrave becomes managing director and runs the company for the next four decades. He hands over to his son Jack in 1955. By 1960 Musgrave has signed up 150 retailers to its group trading system and established the VG franchise model.
- 1971: Family member Hugh MacKeown becomes managing director.
- 1972: An ambitious expansion begins with the opening of Robinhood, the first Dublin cash-and-carry.
- 1972: The company sells its tea business.
- 1973: Musgrave Brothers becomes Musgrave.
- 1977: Musgrave sells the Metropole Hotel and adjoining sweet factory in Cork.
- 1979: 47 SuperValu and Centra stores come into existence.
- 1994: Musgrave acquires the Spanish grocery company Dialsur.
- 1997: Non-family member Seamus Scully takes over as group managing director.
- 2000: Musgrave purchases 43 per cent of the British food retailer Budgens. It acquires 100 per cent control of Budgens in 2002 and buys the Londis brand in the UK in 2004.
- 2011: Pays €229 million for Superquinn's 24 stores.
- 2012: Generates operating profit of €82 million from revenues of €4.9 billion.

You're fired LOL: why it's not cool to get sacked by text or email

Rosita Boland

A US worker was fired by conference call last week. Is there any right way to deliver the bad news?

'You're fired!' is the familiar climax to almost every episode of *The Apprentice*. But the unlucky contestants competing for a job or investment from Donald Trump or Alan Sugar aren't losing their jobs. They're just being booted off a television show.

Last week the expression was used very publicly for real by Tim Armstrong, chief executive of AOL, the multinational media company. Armstrong was in the middle of giving a speech about future cutbacks. Several hundred staff were listening in from other locations when he became irritated by Abel Lenz, his creative director.

Lenz was taking photographs of the meeting; apparently, he frequently posted such company images on his Twitter account. In the middle of his speech Arm-

strong saw Lenz with his camera. This is what he said, as about 1,000 staff listened: "Abel, put that camera down right now! Abel, you're fired. Out!" Then he continued with his speech. Armstrong later apologised – after the audio clip went viral – but Lenz remains without a job.

Fired, laid off, made redundant, let go, sacked, contract not being renewed: no matter how it's phrased by an employer, the outcome for the employee is the same – they no longer have a job. But how that news is imparted varies.

In some US companies employees are not even told in person. That happened at the *Plain Dealer* newspaper, in Ohio, last week, when it laid off a third of its staff. Notice came via an unexpected email late in the evening saying that employees should expect a call between 8am and 10am the next day. It would let them know if they had been "separated from employment", as the company described it.

It seems obvious that treating people with dignity and respect – such as taking the time to inform them in person – is the least an employer can do. Everything else is being taken away from the employee. Yet firing people by email or phone is now common in the US. Even sacking by text message is not unheard of.

“Treating people with dignity and respect is the least an employer can do – everything else is being taken away from the employee



Lenz was fired, seemingly on a whim, because his employer didn't want him to take photographs of a company talk. Most employees who lose their jobs fall into one of two categories. Either they have done something that merits being fired or the company needs to downsize, to cut costs.

It's not too hard to figure out the things that will get you fired. Turning up drunk or under the influence of drugs. Stealing company property. Dishonesty in any form. Sexual harassment. Prolonged absenteeism without a medical cert. Publicly bad-mouthing your boss, colleagues or organisation. Using company resources to promote your private business. Continually surfing the web on company time: spending mornings watching porn, doing your shopping online, updating your social-media accounts and generally avoiding work.

There was "Developer Bob", an American employed by Verizon, who outsourced his job as a coder to someone in China, paid them a fraction of his salary, and sat in his office watching cat videos and looking at Facebook until he was finally found out, earlier this year. You could call it Tom Sawyer for the digital era, or call it cheating your employer. Either way, Developer Bob was fired.

Things not to say to an employee you're firing

- "This is really hard for me." No, it's not. It's not you who's losing your job and income.
- "This is not the right job for you." Why the hell did you hire me in the first place?
- "I wish we didn't have to do this." Actually, you don't have to do this.
- "Things haven't worked out." Now you tell me.
- "Unfortunately, we overexpanded." So I take the hit for the company's bad planning.
- "Think of it as an opportunity." Yeah, right.

Things that you can no longer get fired for (in most western countries) are: being pregnant, being gay or of a certain age, being a particular race or gender, or having a

disability. In theory, anyway. Earlier this summer the Russian journalist Anton Krasovskiy, a news anchor, came out live on air. "I'm gay, and I'm just the same person as you, my dear audience, as President Putin, as Prime Minister Medvedev and the deputies of our Duma," he announced. When the broadcast ended he was fired by text message.

Probably the highest-profile firing in the US this year was that of the celebrity chef Paula Deen, who had three shows on the Food Network cable TV channel and is the author of many cookbooks. She made what a lawsuit defined as "racial slurs" about African-Americans, and has since been very publicly dropped by the network.

Ironically, people don't often seem to get fired for simply not being good at their jobs. Most commonly it's down to numbers and costs, and trying to run the same organisation with fewer people. Payroll is the single biggest cost for most businesses.

Often, the more you're paid the more likely it is that, when times are lean for the company, some accountant will be doing the maths in a way that will not favour you. It's probably the only democratic aspect of a round of firings – not that that is much consolation if you are one of that number.