

# LIMERICK AFTER

**C**ATHAL McCarthy stands at the door of his home in Weston Gardens, a terrace of nine houses built in the 1890s on a height overlooking the Hyde Road, the heartland of organised crime in Limerick.

It is Thursday morning, the day after Wayne and John Dundon were sentenced at the Special Criminal Court for threatening to kill three members of one family, their neighbours on the Hyde Road. They got six, and five-and-a-half years, respectively. The Dundon gang has imploded, brought down by a supergrass from within. The Hyde Road may never be the same again and residents like Cathal McCarthy are hoping to reclaim an estate that has been lost to crime for 40 years.

Mr McCarthy and his partner Cindy Fogarty bought 5 Weston Gardens in 2001, two years after Wayne Dundon and his three younger brothers Ger, Des and John, had moved to the Hyde Road from England, where they were brought up. There were nine houses on Mr McCarthy's row when he moved in, and within 18 months three were burned out. A local gang offered the occupants €20,000 cash for the deeds. When they refused, a campaign of intimidation and violence ensued.

Donie Flaherty, now deceased, was the first to leave in February 2001. He lived in 1 Weston Gardens. After he refused the €20,000 offer, gangs of youths began drinking outside his house, breaking his windows. When he was mugged in his own garden, he put the house on the market for €40,000. The day the 'For Sale' sign went up, the house was burned down.

'That was six weeks after I moved in. My neighbour remembers seeing a sign being put up outside by Hanly Donnellan [auctioneer]. When she came back from work the place had been gutted by fire and the sign was burned for good measure at the front of the garden,' Cathal said.

Once Flaherty left, the council refused to board up Number 1 because it was privately owned. It became a magnet for drug addicts and drunken teenage tearaways. Gangs stripped Number 1 of all its copper, then they burned it out and started on Paddy Hegarty, an elderly man who lived alone in Number 2.

They vandalised his house, put horses in his garden, held drug parties next door. Terrified, Mr Hegarty left in May 2002 after a fire was set under his stairs.

The gang moved on to Joan Higgins and her family in Number 3. They returned from holidays to find their house boarded up following a failed arson attack. The house had been ransacked. Mrs Higgins left in a taxi with whatever possessions she could carry in the summer of 2002.

'We were all getting targeted one by one,' Mr McCarthy recalls.

'They were working on Number 4 with kids throwing stones, battering the houses. It was like living in a war zone.'

Heather Cunningham had only bought 4 Weston Gardens in November 2000 but fled before the end of 2002, after two years of relentless abuse, threats at knifepoint, and several attacks on her property, including the demolition of her front wall by a stolen car.

Cathal McCarthy and Cindy, in Number 5, had a toddler son at that stage. The intimidation started with local kids, who were paid to throw bottles at their house.

'I filmed a lot of it,' says Mr McCarthy. 'There's one bizarre incident where there are children [aged] about five outside on the green area collecting bottles into bags. It looks like kids out recycling, then they all plonk themselves up to number 4 and start smashing their bottles off the front of the house. It was surreal.'

What Mr McCarthy did next doesn't sound so brave, but it was. He organised and became chairman of a residents association and lobbied the council to fulfill its obligations and make safe the burned-out houses



by **Brian Carroll**

in Limerick

next door to him. A father of three boys aged two to 11, he refuses to bow to the gangs, despite six men kicking in the front door of his house at 4am in June 2004.

The gangs would stash drugs and weapons in the gardens of the burnt-out houses at numbers 1, 2 and 3.

In 2004, the gardai discovered €80,000 worth of cocaine, two handguns, a sawn-off shotgun and ammunition buried there. After another attack in 2006, when all the windows in Mr McCarthy's house were smashed in, he finally secured agreement to have the houses demolished and rebuilt by Limerick City Council at a cost of €265,000.

We pass along Crecora Avenue, just second off the Hyde Road, where Josephine Ryan used to live.

She owned her own house there, but alone and in her 80s, she sold it to the council for the standard offer of €30,000. The house was boarded up and anti-social behaviour began, following the pattern McCarthy himself had experienced in 2001/2002.

All but two of the houses on her row have been demolished in the past

**'Within 18 months three were burned out'**

three months. Two squatters live in one of the surviving houses, without any running water.

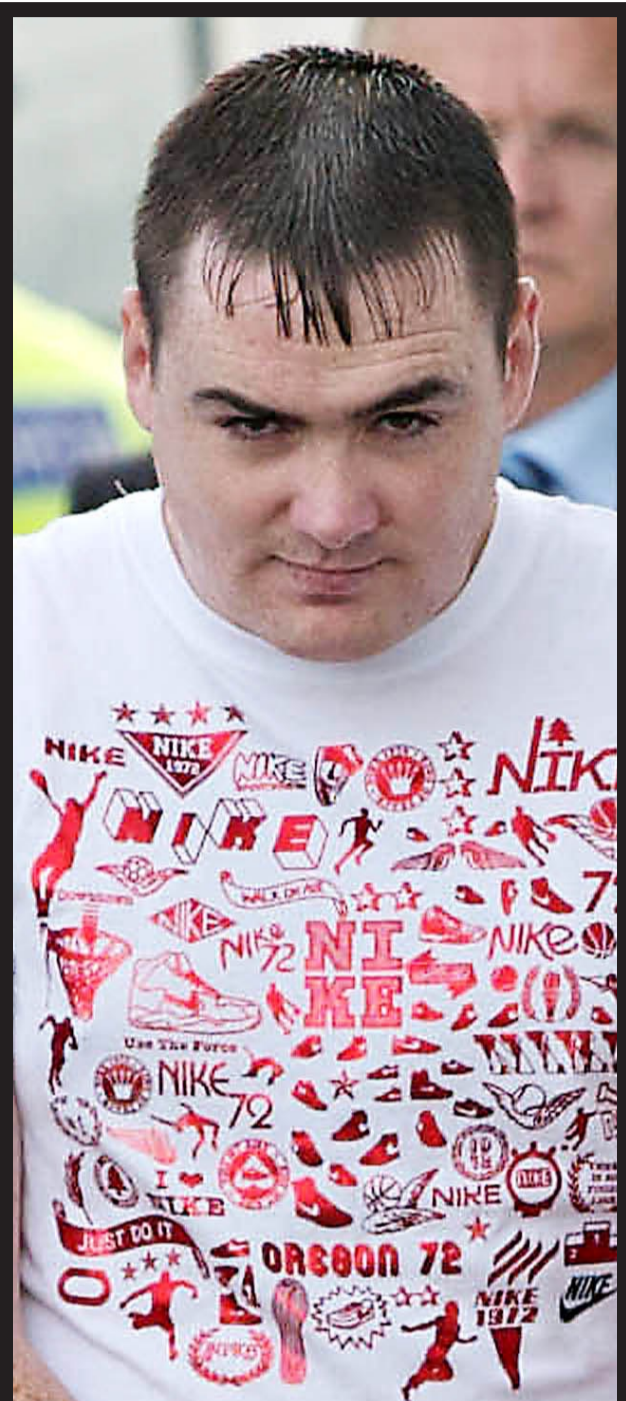
'It's like a domino, one-by-one houses get boarded up, the parties start, gangs strip the houses of copper pipes, and burn them out. People start dumping rubbish. Then the people in the next house can't take it anymore, and the council buys that, boards it up. After Mrs Ryan's house was boarded up, the Moloney family living in the corner house got battered by gangs. Their daughter got hit with a slate thrown from the roof of the boarded-up house.'

On Thursday morning, we walked down to a wall about 20 yards from the end of his driveway and looked down into what used to be Clarina Park. Another chairman of a residents' association, James Hannon, was killed here in a gruesome attack 15 years ago, when thugs stabbed him in the testicles and then drove over him in a car.

Hannon had been trying to stop drug dealing in the two handball alleys on the estate. McCarthy points to what is now wasteland — all 43 houses in Clarina Park have been demolished, including the handball alleys, as part of a regeneration programme launched in 2007 after two children — Gavin and Millie Murray, aged five and seven — were horrifically burned in an arson attack in Moyross.

In total €1.6billion was promised by Dick Roche, then environment minister, to regenerate four crime-ridden estates in Limerick.

Defence Minister and local TD Willie O'Dea was quick to take the credit: 'This package will be a major



Dundon brothers in arms: Wayne, who was jailed for six years, and Ger, serving five for violent disorder;

**They may be in prison but the legacy of Hyde Road. In a chilling dispatch, our street became the epicentre of their stood their ground and discovers what**

benefit to the people of Limerick. Though it will be expensive in the short-term, the long-term benefits will be very worthwhile and cost effective.'

After the economic crash, however, the money never materialised. The regeneration programme ends in June, having spent €116million of the €1.6billion promised, and built not a single house in five years. They have begun building 33 houses, to be completed this November.

'All they are doing now is boarding up houses, knocking houses and not replacing them, and knocking houses that could be refurbished. It looks like a State-sponsored land grab,' Mr McCarthy says.

Since the programme began, 900 houses have been demolished in Moyross, Southill, St Mary's and Weston. Across all four areas, some 52 per cent of the homes are in private ownership, and surveys found up to 70 per cent of residents wanted

to stay there, rather than be rehoused. However, an incredible 1,000 families chose to leave because of anti-social behaviour.

The domino effect of anti-social behaviour doesn't stop in Weston. At

**'It looks like a State-sponsored land grab'**

least 12 significant criminals were dispersed under the regeneration programmes, taking up three-bedroom houses — subsidised by the taxpayer via the HSE — in outlying rural areas. Other anti-social tenants were dispersed into apartments, or houses purchased for over €40million

by the city or county councils in residential areas like Caherdavin, Raheen and Castletroy.

A source involved in prosecuting many of Limerick's criminal cases said: 'It would be impossible to put an exact figure on it, but you see all these new addresses on the charge sheets. I'd say a dozen of the serious guys were moved, but it's their families and the wannabes that come with them, that cause most of the anti-social problems.'

In some cases, the consequences of associates of criminals moving into middle-class estates can be fatal.

In 2008, Garryowen rugby player Shane Geoghegan was shot in a case of mistaken identity, when a Dundon associate mistook him for illegal gun-dealer Johnny McNamara who was living two doors away.

McNamara's girlfriend bought the house in Kilteragh, Raheen, at a subsidised price from the council under a social housing scheme.

# THE DUNDONS



John was jailed for 5½ years for making threats; Dessie is serving life for the murder of Kieran Keane

these four brothers is etched on writer explains how an ordinary depravity, meets the residents who became of those who fled in fear...

In 2009, in the Glen Court estate in Emly, Co. Tipperary, a resident was stabbed in the leg. The lead suspect is a member of the Keane-Collopy gang, who had been relocated to the rural village.

In 2010, Richard Higgins, 42, a Dundon associate originally from Ballincurra Weston but relocated to Lattin, Co. Tipperary, stabbed his next door neighbour, Sean Murphy, 29, to death. He was jailed for life in July 2011.

A detective described one 15-year-old transferred to Shannon in 2010 as a 'complete tearaway, a one-man crime wave'.

Relatives of leading Moyross convicted criminals were moved to Murroe, a village 15km from Limerick.

The village was your classic rural outpost, with a Catholic Church, Garda station, post office, and a few pubs and shops servicing a population of less than 200, who largely worked farms in the shadow of the

surrounding Slieve Felim mountains. Developers saw it as classic commuter belt territory, however, and it went from having 40 houses before the Celtic Tiger to having almost 500 houses now. Murroe's population is now 800 and many of the houses built since 2004 are empty and available for purchase by the county council, or for rent by the HSE. A three-bedroom house rents in Murroe for €600 a month.

In April 2011, April Collins, daughter of gangster Jimmy Collins, and estranged partner of Ger Dundon, fled the Hyde Road to set up home in Murroe with convicted rapist Thomas O'Neill.

One neighbour, who asked not to be named, describes the mayhem that ensued: 'The Dundons were feuding with her. The house was attacked with people shouting outside. There was a high speed car chase, one guy waving a gun threatening to shoot the others.'

John and Wayne Dundon were arrested for threatening to kill or intimidate April Collins later that month. April Collins is the supergrass whose evidence helped to send the Dundons down this week. She has since been moved from Murroe to an apartment in Limerick city.

We pass April Collins' old house at 84 Hyde Road, now boarded up. There's graffiti about 'Collins Rats' on walls along the Hyde Road, near the home of April's mother on Hyde Avenue, which runs on to Hyde Road.

On Wednesday night, after the Dundons were sentenced, a relative of April's was assaulted by Dundons out celebrating the 'light' sentences given to John and Wayne.

John Dundon's wife, Ciara Killeen, lives with their two children in Number 80 Hyde Road. Across the road on the corner of Lenihan Avenue, Wayne Dundon's home is empty at Number 92. His wife, Ann Casey,



Dispersal: Some families have moved out to rural villages like Murroe



Legacy of brutality: Boarded-up houses at Hyde Road in Limerick

has decamped to England and put their children into schools in London amid threats from rival gangs owed money by the Dundons.

The Dundons' sister, Annabelle, has moved to London too. All four Dundon brothers and their key henchmen are behind bars at present. Their 13-year reign as criminal kings of the Hyde Road is suspended, possibly over. Cathal McCarthy isn't so sure.

'Reported crime is down since the Dundons went to jail a year ago, but you still have problems with anti-social behaviour.'

'It's mostly young kids, but there's still some gangland stuff. There was one house recently in Crecora Avenue where the person was offered cash and refused it. A gang petrol bombed it. The council bought it back for €3,000. If it hadn't been burned down, it would have cost the

The community is responding, slowly, but as surely as McCarthy did in the face of intimidation a decade ago. Resource worker, Eimear Purcell, said: 'It's not as turbulent as people lead you to believe.'

'I have only been here since October but I haven't seen the chaos that was there before. There's hockey, rugby, tennis, soccer, there's talk of relaunching scouts in the area. There's plenty of services here.'

Other communities are not as well resourced.

In Cappawhite, Co. Tipperary, some locals attending a meeting with local gardai complaining about anti-social behavior. Martin Butler, who works as a volunteer at the local resource centre, commented about anti-social elements moving in from Limerick. Several hours later he was attacked with a sword and suffered such severe head injuries that he is currently unable to walk or talk, and is being tube-fed in hospital.

The violence associated with the Hyde Road hasn't ended, it has merely been dispersed.

We return to the higher land of Mr McCarthy's house at 5 Weston Gardens. The burned out houses at Numbers 1-3 remain just as they have been since 2002. The demolitions and rebuilding promised back in 2007 never happened.

'Regeneration should be about the people not houses,' Mr McCarthy says. 'We still have all these disaffected youths and lonely old people living here. The Dundons being gone won't change that. Another gang will come along, but maybe they won't be as violent as they were.'

The 42-year-old goes inside to complete a paper for the MA in sociology he's studying at the University of Limerick, courtesy of a back to education allowance. It doesn't affect his social welfare allowance so he can keep up the payments on the mortgage he took out to buy 5 Weston Gardens in 2001 for IR£37,000 (€47,000).

His special area of interest is 'Youth, Community and Social Regeneration.' He could write the book. He might as well have graduated already.

**'Regeneration should be about people not houses'**

council €30,000.' We walk up a street off the Hyde Road. Grass grows through the wasteland. Not far away, we pass a green area with freshly planted flowers, seating, trees and a religious mural.

It's called the Garden of Hope and it's part of a project McCarthy hopes to extend. He and a group of other residents reclaimed one piece of waste, where houses had been demolished, and in four hours, planted a fully designed garden. Other 'memory gardens' are planned.

We have coffee at a new resource centre that opened on Thursday, coordinating services for everything from drug-addiction to housing. On Monday, John Giles will officially launch a new all-weather pitch for the youth of the area. Children have painted murals. The employment centre is getting a fresh lick of yellow paint, and a new public space is being built in front of the local church.