

In the 1970s, many new houses and apartments were built in Dublin. In some parts of the city, the old houses were very bad. Dublin City Council knocked down these bad homes. The council built new houses and apartments for the people who lived in the old houses.

The worst houses were in Mayo Road. These houses were more than a hundred years old. Rain came in through the roofs. The walls were damp. People did not want to live in these old buildings any more.

In 1978, Dublin City Council built some new apartments near Mayo Road. The City Council bought the old houses in the road from their owners. The people moved out of their old houses and into the new apartments. Council workmen started to knock down the old buildings. The council was going to build a new shopping centre with a large car park in Mayo Road.

The council knocked down all the houses in Mayo Road - except one. One old man did not want to move out of his home. The council sent him many letters, but he refused to leave. At last, the council asked the police to help them. They asked the police to get the old man out of his house.

It was nine o'clock on a wet November morning. The sky was grey and the rain was falling heavily. The rain fell on the building site where the houses of Mayo Road had stood. The rain fell on the tarmac of the road and it fell on

the only house which remained - Number 38.

A police car came along Mayo Road. There were two men in the car - the young police driver and Chief Superintendent Hanley. Bill Hanley was in charge of all the policemen in this part of Dublin.

The car stopped outside 38 Mayo Road and the chief superintendent looked around him. A year ago, there had been houses on both sides of the street. But now only one house remained. Number 38 stood alone in the middle of the large muddy building site. The old man was still inside the house.

A big crowd of people was standing a few metres from the house. When they saw the police car, the people moved forward. There were council officials, council social workers, and council workmen in the crowd. The officials were from the Housing Department. They had asked the police to get the old man out of Number 38. The social workers were going to help the old man to move into his new home. Then the workmen were going to knock down the house.

Chief Superintendent Hanley got out of the police car and spoke to the officials from the City Council.

'Have you talked to the old man in the house?' the Chief Superintendent asked.

'Mr Larkin won't speak to us,' one of the officials replied. 'We've tried to speak to him. We've told him that he must leave before nine o'clock this morning.'

Hanley looked at the crowd. He saw two newspaper reporters. One of them had a camera.

Hanley thought about the front page of tomorrow's newspaper. 'There will be a picture of the old man coming out of the house with two policemen,' he thought. 'And there will be a headline above the picture - 'POLICE TAKE OLD MAN FROM HIS HOME.'

Bill Hanley spoke to one of the officials.

'I don't like this part of my job,' he said, 'but I have to do it.'

'The City Council has sent many letters to Mr Larkin,' the official said. 'We have told him that he must move out. We have told him that the council has bought his house and built a new apartment for him. But he hasn't replied to any of the letters.'

Chief Superintendent Hanley looked at his watch. The time was two minutes past nine. 'Speak to the old man again,' he said to the council officials.

The Chief Housing Officer from the council knocked on the door of 38 Mayo Road.

'Mr Larkin!' he shouted. There was no answer.

'Mr Larkin!' the Chief Housing Officer shouted again, 'we have an order from the court. If you don't come out, we'll knock down the door.'

But there was still no reply.

Hanley spoke to two workmen who were holding large hammers.

'Knock down the door,' he said.

The workmen went to the front door. They broke the door with their hammers. Mr Larkin had put a table and some chairs against the inside of the door but the workmen quickly pushed the furniture away. They walked into the house.

Hanley spoke to the social workers. 'Go in now, please,' he said.

The social workers followed the workmen into the house. A few minutes later, they were leading Mr Larkin out through the broken front door.

Mr Larkin was a pale, thin old man. He was ill and hungry and his hands were shaking. Bill Hanley felt sorry for him. A social worker put a woollen blanket round the old

man's shoulders. The social workers were going to take Mr Larkin to his new council apartment. But Hanley had an idea.

'Put Mr Larkin in the police car,' he said. 'We'll give him a good meal before he goes to his new home. There's a cafe near here.'

'OK, Chief Superintendent,' said one of the social workers. 'We'll wait in our car while Mr Larkin is eating. It's a cold morning.'

As the police took Mr Larkin to the cafe, the workmen were carrying the old man's furniture out of the house. Soon, all the furniture was gone.

The workmen opened the back door of the house. Behind Number 38 Mayo Road, there was a small garden. The work-men found two chickens in a shed in the garden.

'The old man can't have chickens in his new apartment,' said one of the men. 'I'll take these home with me. I have a little garden. I keep chickens too.'

At half-past ten, the council workmen began to knock down the walls of the old house.

In the cafe, Bill Hanley bought Mr Larkin a meal of eggs and toast and tea. And he bought a cup of tea for himself and for his driver. The old man ate the food. He did

not speak. Hanley and the police driver were drinking their tea when another police car stopped outside the cafe.

A policeman came into the cafe and spoke to the chief superintendent.

'Will you come back to Mayo Road, sir?' he said. 'The workmen have found something.'

The old man stopped eating and looked at Hanley.

The chief superintendent stood up. 'You stay here with Mr Larkin,' he said to his driver.

He left the cafe and returned with the other policeman to Mayo Road.

The crowd was still standing outside Number 38. A man in the crowd called out, 'Is there some treasure in there? Is that why the old man wouldn't leave? Have you found some money?'

Hanley went into the house. The workmen had started to knock down the fireplace and the chimney. Bricks from the wall were lying on the floor. The workmen had made a large hole in a wall by the fireplace and they had found something behind the wall. They had seen something through the hole. They had seen something between the wall and the chimney.

'Look in there, sir!' one of the workmen said, as Hanley came into the room.

Hanley looked through the hole. Between the wall and the chimney, he saw a human body. It was old and black, but he saw that it was the body of a woman.

Hanley went outside to the police car. He made a call on the car's radio. He called Police Headquarters and he spoke to an inspector.

'I've found the body of a woman in Mayo Road,' Hanley said. 'She was behind a wall. She has been there for some years. I think that the woman was murdered. Please send someone to take the body to the mortuary. There will be a murder investigation.'

'Do you have a suspect?' asked the other man.

'Yes,' Hanley answered. 'Mr Larkin, the owner of 38 Mayo Road. I'm taking him to the police station now.'

The police car took Hanley back to the cafe. He went inside and he spoke quietly to Mr Larkin.

'We've found her,' he said. 'You must come with me to the police station.'

The old man followed Hanley to the police car. He did

not speak.

When they were in the car, Hanley asked Mr Larkin a question.

'Who is the dead woman in your house?' he asked.

The old man refused to say anything.

'Is it Mrs Larkin?' Hanley asked. 'We will find out soon. Aren't you worried? You'll feel better if you tell us about it.'

But the old man would not speak.

When they arrived at the police station, Hanley put Larkin into an interview room. He gave the old man some tea and some cigarettes. Mr Larkin drank the tea and took the cigarettes but still he did not speak.

'I'll talk to you later, Mr Larkin,' said Hanley.

Hanley went to his office and he phoned the police pathologist. The pathologist looked at dead bodies and found out information about them. Now he would help Hanley by looking at this body - he would do a post-mortem examination.

'I'm going to send the body of a woman to the

mortuary,' Hanley said. 'I want to know how the woman died and I want to know when she died. I need the information as soon as possible, please. This is a murder investigation.'

Next, Bill Hanley spoke to a police sergeant.

'Go to the council offices,' Hanley told the sergeant. 'Find out how many years Mr Larkin lived in Mayo Road. Also, try to find out who lived in the house before Mr Larkin.'

Then Hanley sent another sergeant to Mayo Road.

'Find out if the old man left any papers or documents in his house,' Hanley told the sergeant. 'Also, find out the names of his neighbours - the other people who lived in Mayo Road before the houses were knocked down. Talk to them. Ask them if Larkin was married.'

Early in the afternoon, the pathologist phoned Hanley.

'The body from Mayo Road is a mummy,' the pathologist said.

'What do you mean - a mummy?' asked Hanley.

'The dead body was between a wall and the chimney,' the pathologist replied. 'For years, the heat and smoke from the fireplace has dried the body. The body is like an

Egyptian mummy.'

'That's interesting,' said Hanley. 'But can you tell me how the woman died? And can you tell me when she died?'

'No. I can't tell you that today,' answered the pathologist. 'I have to do a post-mortem examination on the body. I think that the woman was strangled. I think that something was tied tightly round her neck. I think that the woman died many years ago, but I am not sure about that. I will have more information for you after the post-mortem.'

'When will you be able to give me the information?' Hanley asked. 'I need some help with this investigation.'

'The body is hard and dry,' said the pathologist. 'I'll have to make the body soft. I'll have to soak it. I'll leave the body in some liquid until the morning. I'll do the post-mortem tomorrow, when the body is soft.'

Hanley thanked the pathologist and he put down the phone. A few minutes later, one of the police sergeants brought him some more news.

'Sir, we've found some documents at 38 Mayo Road,' he said. 'We've found some papers. There is some information about the house in them. And we've found a British Army pay book and a photograph. Here they are.' He put a large envelope on Hanley's desk.

These things gave Hanley a lot of information and he made notes as he looked at them.

First, he looked at the army pay book. Every soldier in the British Army had a pay book. It showed how much money the soldier had been paid while he was in the army. And it showed the soldier's date of birth and his army number. Every soldier in the British Army had a number. The pay book which Hanley was holding had belonged to Herbert James Larkin. Larkin was an Irishman. He had been born in Dublin, in 1911. But he had been in the British Army from 1940 to 1946.

Hanley phoned the British Embassy in Dublin. He spoke to the military attache at the embassy. Hanley told the attache Larkin's army number and he asked the attache to get some more information about Larkin.

'I'll check the Army's files,' said the military attache. 'I'll phone Army Headquarters in London. I'll call you tomorrow, when I have some news.'

Next, Hanley looked at the papers. They were the deeds of 38 Mayo Road. These papers told Hanley that Larkin had bought the house in 1954. Now, Hanley wanted to know where Larkin had lived between 1946 and 1954.

The chief superintendent phoned an official at the City Council.

'I want to find out about Herbert James Larkin who lived at 38 Mayo Road,' said Hanley. 'Please give me any information that you have.'

The official asked Hanley to wait while he got some files. After a minute he spoke again.

'From 1946 to 1954, Mr Larkin lived in North London,' said the council official. 'He returned to Ireland in 1954. He was a security guard in Dublin from 1954 to 1976. Mr Larkin retired in 1976.'

Hanley thanked the official and he put down the phone. Then he looked at the photograph. It was many years old. It showed a soldier and a young woman. The man was Larkin. He was dressed in army uniform. Who was the woman? Was it Larkin's wife?

Later that day, the sergeant who had been to speak to Mr Larkin's neighbours came to see Hanley.

'I've spoken to some of the people who used to live in Mayo Road,' the sergeant said. 'I spoke to a woman called Mrs Moran. She lived next to the Larkins and she remembers the time when they moved into Number 38.'

'So, Larkin was married,' said Hanley.

'Yes, sir,' said the sergeant. 'And Mrs Moran remembers the man who lived at Number 38 before the

Larkins. That man's wife was dead when Mrs Moran moved to Mayo Road. The man himself died in 1954. Five weeks after the man died, the Larkins moved into the house. Mrs Moran said that Mr Larkin was about forty-five years old at that time. But his wife was nearly twenty years younger than him. Mrs Moran said that Mrs Larkin was English - she came from London.'

'And what happened to Mrs Larkin?' Hanley asked.

'Mrs Moran says that Mrs Larkin disappeared late in 1963.'

'Disappeared? Is Mrs Moran certain about the date?'

'Yes,' replied the sergeant. 'She said that Mrs Larkin disappeared in the autumn of 1963. She had disappeared before President John F. Kennedy was killed in November 1963.'

'Was Mrs Moran worried when Mrs Larkin disappeared?'

'I don't think that she was worried,' the sergeant said.

'Mrs Larkin had an argument with her husband and she disappeared. The neighbours thought that she had gone back to London.'

'Sergeant, I think that Larkin killed his wife,' said Hanley. 'I think that he hid her body. That's why Larkin didn't want to move out of 38 Mayo Road. He knew that someone would find the body when the house was knocked down. That's why he didn't want the council workmen to knock down the house.'

'I think that you're right, sir,' said the sergeant.

Hanley went to the interview room and sat down opposite Mr Larkin. The old man looked very worried.

'Mr Larkin, we know that your wife disappeared in 1963 - fifteen years ago,' said Hanley. 'Tell me what happened. You knew that someone would find your wife's body one day. Now we have found it. You must speak to me. This is a murder investigation, Mr Larkin. Now, tell me about your wife. You'll feel much better!'

Larkin said nothing.

'Was the woman behind the wall in the house your wife, Mr Larkin?' asked Hanley.

Larkin looked at the chief superintendent for a moment. Then he smiled. Suddenly his eyes were bright and calm. But still he said nothing.

'Herbert James Larkin,' said Hanley. 'I charge you with the murder of your wife. You do not have to say anything.'

But anything that you do say will be written down. It will be used in evidence in a court of law.'

The next morning, Hanley waited for a phone call from the pathologist. But the first call that he received was from an official at the City Council.

'Chief Superintendent Hanley, your men are stopping our work at Mayo Road,' said the council official. 'We want to cover the ground with concrete and tarmac. The building site is going to be a shopping centre and a car park. There is a lot of work to do. Can we start work today?'

'Yes, OK,' said Hanley. 'We've looked at the house. You can knock down all the walls now. You can build your shopping centre. You can make your car park.'

Twenty minutes later, Hanley received the phone call from the pathologist.

'I'm going to start the post-mortem examination now,' said the pathologist. 'I'll call you again in a few hours.'

While Hanley was waiting, the military attache at the British Embassy phoned. He gave Hanley some information about Larkin's life in the British Army.

'Herbert James Larkin joined the army in 1940,' said the attache, Major Dawkins. 'Mr Larkin fought in the Second World War. He fought in Egypt in 1941. The German Army

captured Larkin at the end of 1941 and he was taken to a prison camp in Poland. He was at that camp until 1945.'

'Thank you, Major Dawkins,' said Hanley. 'Do you have any information about Larkin's marriage?'

'Yes, I do,' said Major Dawkins. 'Mr Larkin was still in the army when he got married. He got married in London, in November 1945. His wife's name was Violet Mary Smith. She was seventeen years old and she worked in a hotel in London.'

Hanley thanked Major Dawkins again and said goodbye to him. Then he waited for the pathologist to phone again.

'So, Violet Smith married a man who was more than twice her age,' Bill Hanley said to himself. 'When Violet disappeared in 1963, she was thirty-five years old and Herbert Larkin was fifty-two.'

The phone rang. 'Hanley, I've found out how the woman died,' said the pathologist. 'She was murdered. Someone hit on her the head and then strangled her.'

Hanley wrote down the information. 'Thank you,' he said. 'Can you tell me when she died now?'

'The body had been in the house for more than thirty years,' said the pathologist. 'The woman died between 1940

and 1945.'

'But the Larkins did not move to 38 Mayo Road until 1954,' said Hanley.

'I'm telling you what I have found out, Hanley,' replied the pathologist.

'And how old was the woman when she died?' asked Hanley.

'She was more than fifty years old,' said the pathologist.

Chief Superintendent Hanley put down the phone. Then he spoke to the sergeant who had talked to Mrs Moran.

'Sergeant, who was the man who lived at 38 Mayo Road before the Larkins?' Hanley asked.

'I couldn't find out his name, sir,' answered the sergeant. 'But I know that the man lived alone. His wife was dead.'

'Yes,' said Hanley. 'It was his wife's body in the house! Let Mr Larkin go, sergeant. Let him go to his new apartment. Tell the social workers at the City Council that the old man is free. Tell them that Mr Larkin isn't a murderer. The City Council must take care of him now!'

That afternoon, Mr Larkin moved into his new apartment. But a few days later, he wanted to visit Mayo Road.

The old man walked to Mayo Road. His house was no longer there. The council workmen had knocked down all the walls and they had covered the ground with concrete. When Mr Larkin arrived, the foreman was walking round the building site. He was looking at the new concrete. He was finding out if the concrete had become hard.

'What's this?' he called to one of his men. He pointed to a piece of concrete which was a different colour. 'This piece of concrete is old.'

Mr Larkin watched the two men carefully.

'There was a chicken shed in the back garden of Number 38,' said the workman. 'This concrete was the floor of the chicken shed. The old concrete is very hard and strong, so we put new concrete around it.'

'OK,' said the foreman. He called to the driver of a bull-dozer. 'Cover all this concrete with tarmac!' he shouted.

The bulldozer pushed soft, hot tarmac over the concrete. Mr Larkin watched the black tarmac covering the floor of his chicken shed. Then the old man smiled and he started to walk back to his new home.

- THE END -

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