



**Gardaí comb a site in Chapelizod in west Dublin in search of the body of Trevor Deely, a 22-year-old bank worker who disappeared from the Baggot Street area in December 2000** Collins

# CLOSER TO CLOSURE?

After nearly 17 years without a breakthrough, a gangland informant has shed new light on the disappearance of Trevor Deely, writes **Francesca Comyn**

A ten-foot wall surrounds the overgrown lands at Chapelizod near Dublin's Phoenix Park, where gardaí are searching for the body of Trevor Deely, the 22-year-old Bank of Ireland worker who vanished on his way home from a staff Christmas party on December 8, 2000. From the periphery, there is little to see of the painstaking Garda operation at the sealed-off three-acre site, which began eight days ago. Gardaí have blacked out the high gated entrance facing onto the R112 Lucan slip road and drones have been banned from flying overhead. Technical details of the excavation are being kept under wraps. Already, a gun has been found. It will take several

weeks before forensic tests can establish whether the weapon is linked to the missing man. "In my book, it's 50-50 at the moment," said retired garda Toshi Lavery about the tip-off from a gangland source which led to the excavation. Lavery was involved in the original hunt for Deely. Separately, he recalls the unsuccessful search in the nearby Strawberry Beds for the murder weapon used to shoot journalist Veronica Guerin in 1996. "We moved a slab of a grave. There were nine guns, all new, none related to Veronica Guerin," he said. Policing brings plenty of false dawns. However, the discovery last Tuesday of a firearm at Chapelizod suggests at the very least that the land being scoured has been used as a dumping ground by criminals.

On the day the gun was found, two residents at the neighbouring Glenaulin estate pondered on how a body could be hidden in a spot so inaccessible by car. "It would take local knowledge," said one. Once a nursery garden for a hospital, the area is currently under the control of South Dublin County Council. The site, opposite the West County Hotel, is nine kilometres from where Trevor Deely was last captured on CCTV footage on Baggot Street Bridge at 4.14am on the morning of his disappearance. His movements before he went missing are well known. Trevor attended a staff Christmas party on Thursday, December 7, 2000. The night took him and his colleagues to the Copper Face Jacks, the Hilton hotel on Charlemont Place and then Buck Whaleys nightclub

on Leeson Street. Having left the club, Trevor walked back to his offices at Bank of Ireland Asset Management by Leeson Street bridge, where he worked in IT. He picked up a navy golf umbrella with an ACC logo, checked his emails and had a cup of tea with a co-worker on the night shift. Outside, it was wet and stormy and there was a taxi strike. At around 4am, he phoned an old friend, Glen Cullen, and left a voice message to the effect that he was on his way home. From Naas in Co Kildare originally, his home in Dublin was a flat on Serpentine Avenue in Sandymount. Earlier, he had withdrawn £60 from an ATM machine. The route took him past the CCTV camera on the old Bank of Ireland building which shows him side-stepping a

puddle as he walked down Haddington Road with his umbrella up. A man is seen walking behind him. Because of the staff party the night before, the 22-year-old was given a pass by his bosses when he failed to show up for work in the bank on Friday. It was Monday before the alarm was raised. For years, despite the largest missing persons hunt ever seen in Dublin, that last sighting of him by Baggot Street bridge was where the trail went cold. And there was nothing to suggest from the CCTV that anything sinister had taken place. Gardaí took in excess of 140 witness statements and followed more than 320 different lines of inquiry without getting any closer to solving the mystery of his disappearance. There were extensive searches in the Grand Canal

by the Garda sub-aqua unit. The umbrella and his phone were never recovered. As the investigation continued, Trevor's image was pasted on lamp posts across the city and his face was even carried on milk cartons. The Deely family always held onto the hope that someone, somewhere must have knowledge of what happened to Trevor. At a public appeal earlier this year, his sister Michelle Deely urged anyone with information to come forward and "put an end to this relentless nightmare". "As a family we have never believed that people can disappear into thin air," she said. Cold case Ultimately, it took a cold case investigation by the Serious Crime Review Team to inch the probe forward. Witnesses were inter-

viewed again. Then, last April, gardaí released forensically enhanced CCTV footage from outside Trevor's workplace. It shows the 22-year-old briefly talking to a man acting suspiciously as he entered the office building at around 3.30am. The man had been lurking outside the bank building for about half an hour before Trevor's arrival. Not long after their brief conversation, he crosses the road. He has never come forward to gardaí. Retired detective Alan Bailey worked in the cold case unit and on the Deely case. He believes the footage, which remains extremely grainy, has been a key development. "It's what it leads on to. You say you have enhanced images and within weeks of that you have someone ringing up and saying I know what happened. It's an investigative tool at best."

And after nearly 17 years without a breakthrough, the recent tip-off from a gangland connection that the young man was shot by a criminal from Crumlin and dumped in west Dublin has been the only credible fresh lead. The fact the source turned down a €100,000 reward is potentially testament to his bona fides, though what prompted this person to come forward with information after so many years is unclear. Last year, there were 9,819 reports of missing persons, an average of 27 every day. All but a fraction were solved. That is what makes cases like Trevor Deely's so exceptional. The criminal now alleged to have killed the 22-year-old had links to prostitution. The Baggot Street and canal area was a well-known area for soliciting. While gardaí have always kept an open mind as to what happened to the bank employee, there is an incongruity in a normal, popular young man meeting his end so violently while walking home. How did he cross paths with criminals? The dig at Chapelizod is likely to continue for weeks. Bailey says the typical approach is to first send in cadaver dogs with handlers to see if a body can be uncovered quickly. After that, an expert search team will comb the land, using radar to seek out anomalies. The area will be mapped and placed in a grid to ensure every area is methodically covered. It is a delicate operation involving ballistics experts and forensic archaeologists to ensure anything of relevance is found and correctly preserved. "It's a very painstaking process, but it is a very effective process," said Bailey.



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