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Wednesday, February 18, 2004

No evidence of foul play

The Garda Verdict: In one succinct sentence, Supt. John O'Driscoll summarised the lifestyle that Agnes and Mary Ellen Lyons had chose to adopt. They 'lived in a world apart', he said, cut off from the outside world and even from the world of their brother, Michael, who lived in the same house as them. It was a bizarre and tragic lifestyle and one that many people would find difficult to comprehend. "It would appear that the lifestyle lived by the two sisters was one they choose for themselves, purposely cutting themselves off from those outside the house and ensuring only the minimum contact with the brother with whom they shared a house. Thus, when neighbours enquired of Michael Lyons about the health of his two sisters, they did not realise how limited was his interaction with them, despite the fact that he shared a dwelling with them." Supt. O'Driscoll explained to the inquest that his role in the investigation was primarily to establish the cause and date of Agnes Lyons' death. He also wanted to ascertain the cause of injuries to the face and legs of Mary Ellen Lyons and if the elderly women had been held against their will in their isolated cottage in Aghamore. "In so far as the cause of Agnes Lyons' death is concerned, the evidence gathered indicates that she was in poor health for a considerable period of time, and died in a bed that she had not left for a long time. Her death took place in a room that was unheated, damp and where the most squalid of conditions prevailed. "There is no evidence that would suggest that Agnes or Mary Ellen were purposely deprived of medical treatment or care. In fact, the evidence disclosed indicates that the sisters did everything within their power to avoid any medical intervention in treating either of them for whatever medical problems they were experiencing." Supt. O'Driscoll revealed that the Gardaí had uncovered a series of letters and notes, which Agnes Lyons had written prior to her death. Among the

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items seized by Gardaí from the bedroom in which the body was found were pages from writing pads, bearing handwriting, as well as pieces of cardboard from tea and tissue boxes.

The Supt. also told the inquest that Agnes and Mary Ellen Lyons were in regular communication with the Holy Rosary Convent in Cavan and sometimes gave small donations to the Missionary Sisters of Our lady, who run the convent.

Supt. O'Driscoll said the two sisters had been inseparable and Agnes, in particular, was terrified that they would be separated. An envelope addressed to Mrs. Delia Gallagher, Carrownedan, Aghamore, was found in the bedroom accompanied by a letter, which contained the line: 'Don't let us ever have to separate.'

The Supt. said the two sisters had cut themselves off from everyone - including their brother. There was no evidence to suggest that Michael Lyons knew of the extraordinary tragedy that was unfolding in the house in which he lived.

"The evidence uncovered indicates that Michael Lyons did not know that his sister, Agnes, had lain dead for approximately one year...The evidence found suggests that when speaking to her brother, Mary Ellen purposely created an impression that Agnes was still alive, and there was no reason for him to have concerns about her own state of health."

Supt. O'Driscoll said the 'grim discovery' in Carrownedan, Aghamore, raised a number of issues but he believed the use of criminal law was not appropriate in this case.

"It is very difficult to accept that any person, in full health, body and mind, would endure what Mary Ellen clearly lived through in the period of time from the death of her sister, Agnes, until she was taken from the house on August 4th, 2003... The evidence disclosed indicates that Mary Ellen's health had deteriorated to such an extent on the morning of August 4th, 2003, that she had not got full control of her senses, and as a consequence her brother was alerted to her condition. Had that not happened, it is probable that Mary Ellen would, not long after, have died in the same room as her sister.

"It is most probable that Mary Ellen's poor state of health contributed to a situation whereby she failed to deal with her sister's death in the appropriate manner, and in accordance with law. No prosecution will be instituted in this regard, however."

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