

**John Murray RIP**  
**Funeral Service**  
**Rathdowney Church**  
**Good Friday April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021**

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John Murray, Daly Terrace, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. March 31st 2021. Peacefully at his daughter's residence in his 95th year. Predeceased by his wife Lil. Sadly missed by his daughter Catherine, grandson Simon and his partner Amy and granddaughter Laura, son-in-law Stephen, great-grandson Tiernan, neighbours, relatives and friends.

As I explained at the beginning of John's funeral today because this is Good Friday we cannot celebrate Mass. This is in fact the only day in the entire year when Mass cannot be celebrated. So we call this funeral a Service. As I reflected on John's life story over the last few days it dawned on me that it is entirely appropriate that John Murray's funeral should take place on the one day in the year when we talk about Service rather than Mass. I say that because the idea of service has been at the heart of so much of John's life. From his very earliest days out in Errill John Murray was giving service to this community.

John's very first job was in the family business of serving petrol. It might not have been called a Service Station exactly but still that is what it was, a vital service. Later when John moved into Rathdowney initially to work in Perry's Brewery for a short time but then when he began his career in Laois County Council he began a career which provided a unique set of services in this community. That Service in Laois County Council was in three separate phases. Initially it was maintaining the road network, later John became the caretaker at the Waterworks out in Gloscha and finally he worked in the local Fire Service where he was to become Station Chief. The Man who helped to keep the roads safe, the water flowing and extinguishing the fires was certainly a man providing essential service to this community. In this pandemic time we are very conscious of and very grateful to those who provide essential service. But on this Good Friday we also thank God for a man who over many decades quietly and behind the scenes served this community in a very essential way.

Of course it was not just in his working life that John provided service to this community. While John ended up living most of his life here in the town of Rathdowney He was very definitely an Errill man tried and

true. Together with his brother Jimmy, John proudly served and represented Errill on the hurling pitches of Laois. The high point of his hurling career was winning the 1952 Laois Senior hurling final with Errill and John was the last surviving member of that illustrious team. That also means that John Murray was the last Errill man to win a Laois senior hurling medal in the Errill Colours. I can see that being a question in a table quiz some day. John of course was also immensely proud of the achievements of his brother Jimmy who hurled for Laois in the last team that represented our County in a Senior Hurling All Ireland Final in 1949. When one speaks of dual players in the GAA it normally means someone who plays both hurling and football. John Murray was a dual player in another sense altogether! It seems that back in the early 1950's Lisduff quarry attracted quite a few Tipperary men to its work force. Among them were a few hurling talent scouts. They got to hear of John Murray's hurling brilliance and managed to coax him into playing for Thurles Sarsfields. I think they even won a county final with John aboard but the whole event caused such controversy on both sides of the Lisduff Bridge that John was unable to claim his medal for the win. There is a TV series currently on Virgin Media One called, Eating with the enemy, there was a famous film a few years called Sleeping with the enemy. Well, back in the early Fifties John Murray starred in a feature called hurling with the enemy. The memory of Tipperary's trouncing of Laois in that 1949 Hurling All Ireland did not help matters. Speaking of Films, controversy and John Murray in the one sentence also brings to mind another colourful episode in the life of the man we honour with Christian burial on this Good Friday. As I previously mentioned John served the community in Errill in many different ways. Perhaps his most unique service to the community was as the projectionist in the local cinema in the village. John's exceptional talent for all things electrical and electronic qualified him to be the Projectionist. It seems that each week a new film was delivered into John's hands from Dublin via the train which stopped in Lisduff Station. Everything worked very smoothly until one week the film delivered in Lisduff to John the Projectionist was one which was intended for a very different kind of audience down in Cork. Not having had a chance to 'preview' the film beforehand John proceeded to 'roll it there Colette' for

the packed house of Errill cinema buffs. Well as things progressed this clearly was not the type of film which the locals were used to. Steam could be seen coming out the windows of the little village hall. Some walked out in protest, some pretended to be upset and others I'm sure thought all their birthdays had come together. Which or whether, John the projectionist was blamed for lowering the tone.

Now I'm wondering when John meets St. Peter today which will Peter be more upset about, that John played hurling for a Tipperary Club or that film which got unintentionally dropped off at Lisduff Station. If the man with the keys is getting awkward John might be tempted to remind him that He Peter did not exactly cover himself in glory on that First Good Friday when he ran off after denying Jesus three times.

Yes John Murray has led an interesting life. It is a life which all 95 years have been lived in this parish community of Errill and Rathdowney. As we gather here on this Good Friday to commend his soul to the mercy of God we also celebrate a rich and wonderful life.

A few weeks ago after he came home from hospital to Catherine's I went out to visit him. The very first thing he did was to point out the front window to the large cross in Bealady Cemetery which he could see clearly from his bed. He started to say something along the lines of 'That's where I'm heading to next' but he didn't finish the sentence. It was almost as if he was already on his final journey from Daly Terrace and he had just stopped off on the way at the home of his only daughter and his beloved grandchildren Laura and Simon, and indeed his great grandson Tiernan. These last few weeks have allowed him to spend precious time with the small circle of family who were at the centre of his life. He was also aware that as he prepared to leave this world a new member of the family was getting ready to arrive. Endings and new beginnings is in so many ways the story of our lives. No time of the year is this more obvious than in these days of Holy Week. Good Friday is the day when in a sense death takes centre stage. That Cross in Bealady which loomed so large in John's vision during the last few weeks is certainly a reminder of the death and the fragility of our lives. But John's faith which he practiced and nourished all his life would also have allowed him to know that the cross is not the end of the story or the end

of the journey, Good Friday is not the end of his journey, Bealady is not the end of his journey. There is Easter Sunday and heaven to come. With St. Paul, John can say today the time of my departure has come, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

As we take our leave of John today I want to finish with a prayer, the sentiment of which if not these exact words, I'm sure John and his Firefighting colleagues prayed many times.

Dear Lord please hear this prayer of mine  
As I leave home to take my station  
My gift has been to heed the call  
Of my town and parish and nation

I wish to save the injured  
And the victims from the fire  
But I pray to you for that day  
When the needs are not so dire

Please grant me strength to battle  
The dangers I must endure  
Surround me with your angels  
And keep my footsteps pure

So, as I leave my family  
And wait for the next alarm  
I pray that you'll go with me  
And keep us all from harm

John, in a sense the final alarm has been sounded. You leave us now to take your station. May God go with you and may he also welcome you this day. May your soul rest in peace. Amen