

**Frank Gaffney RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Errill Church**  
**Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

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*Frank Gaffney, Monamondra, Errill, Co. Laois. July 17<sup>th</sup> 2021. Peacefully at home in the presence of his family. Predeceased by his brothers Joe, Paddy, Tommy and John and his sisters Maura, Breda and Margaret, also remembering his parents. Deeply regretted by his heartbroken wife and best friend Brenda and his loving family Mairead and Marcella, sons-in-law Emmett and Eoin, grandchildren Ciara, Emily, Seán, Luke and Caoimhe, his sister Tess and brother Liam, brothers-in-law and sister-in-law, nephews, nieces, neighbours, relatives and a wide circle of friends.*

There is a catch-phrase which in the weeks leading up to last Sunday evening in Wembley was three most popular words certainly in England; BRING IT HOME. It was the rallying cry for the English Football team to bring the euro title home to the Home of Football! One day during the past week as I found myself traveling behind yet another trailer load of turf on the roads around Rathdowney and Errill, I began to think that catch-phrase 'Bring it Home' would fit very well during this season of saving and bringing home the turf. Yesterday I think it was you Mairead who mentioned that a few weeks ago as your dad witnessed the 'bringing home' of the turf to Monamondra it was a bitter sweet moment. Sweet because the turf had been saved but bitter because for the first time in his adult life Frank had not been able to be directly involved in the saving and the 'bringing it home' season. He had of course played a supervisory role which had involved various visits to the bog, without a doubt, his spiritual home.

I know there are probably people, particularly of a younger generation who may be fed up hearing me talk about the bog at every funeral here in Errill. But the reason I talk about the bog is that over the years when I have sat down and talked to families in this community when their

loved one has died with very rare exceptions the importance of the bog and the saving of turf comes up again and again. This is the third funeral in the Gaffney family that I have celebrated in a little over twelve months. So long before I sat down with Brenda, Mairead and Marcella yesterday I knew how incredibly important the Bog and the saving of turf was in the life of the man we honour with Christian burial today. The very last conversation I had with Frank himself last Tuesday was almost all about the Bog. But as I reflected on this over the last few days and particularly since Frank died, something struck me that perhaps I had not fully realised before. When I think of the bog I tend to think of it simply as the place which provides a valuable source of fuel which keeps us warm in the winter and powers many of the ovens and cookers of this community. What struck me this week is that the bog as a unique place, a unique landscape, quite apart from what it produces, is special to the people around here. Perhaps I can explain by reference to another kind of unique landscape which we do not have in Ireland, the desert. In our Christian spirituality the desert is a place where people went to get away from the madness and the busyness of life. It is a place where people go to reflect on the important things in their own life, a place to think, to make decisions, to meet their God. I have come to the belief that for many around here and certainly this was true for Frank Gaffney, the bog fulfils in many ways the same purpose that the desert does for those seeking solitude in other parts of the world. I came across a lovely line recently which said; 'Those who are at home in the desert are safe in the marketplace' I think I could paraphrase that line around here by saying that ; 'Those who are at home in the Bog are safe in the marketplace'. Frank Gaffney was certainly at home in the bog but we also know that he was safe and very successful in the marketplace of life.

Of all the words that have been used to describe Frank there was one message on RIP.ie that I felt summed up all those many words. It reads: *Frank was a great neighbour and friend, a genuine, thoughtful man, always willing to lend a hand, with a heart and a half. We are lucky to have known you Frank, a gentleman of the highest standards.*

If I add a few words like gentleness, patience, calming which were used by the three most important women in his life to describe their husband and dad then I think we have a fairly clear picture. And so many of those attributes used to describe Frank strike me as being very compatible with a man at home in the silence and the solitude of the bog.

That phrase 'Bring it home' strikes me as being appropriate when talking about Frank in a few other respects as well. 'Home' in its different aspects was very important to Frank. Frank had lived in a few different locations in this parish, from Clonmeen where he was born, to Rathdowney to, Cappalinnan, to Village View but I suspect Monamondra was Frank's perfect idea of home. The house he built with his own gifted hands on a site with plenty of open space, open space to develop a beautiful garden to grow spuds and so many other things, open space to accommodate a shed where he could indulge his love of taking apart and putting back together, an open space where there was plenty of room for the animals, the horses, the hens and of course the dog. Frank and Brenda had great neighbours everywhere they lived but I suspect the Monamondra neighbours were very special to him. But whatever about beautiful houses with, as good old Hyacinth Bouquet might say, room for a pony, the thing that makes a home a home is not a thing at all. It is the people who share that with you and the memories you create together.

Brenda, 'The Little woman' or 'The Old Doll' depending on who he was talking to! Wasn't Frank Gaffney the lucky man that you decided to come home from England in 1972 and even luckier when he met you at the Errill Muintir Na Tire Dinner Dance in the Pathe Hotel in Roscrea. that February. Next month ye would have been 45 years married here in this church in Errill on a very warm summer's day very similar to this one. I observed in the death notice that in addition to being named as Frank's wife you were also described as his best friend. Husband and wife and best friends after 45 years says it all. On that very hot 21<sup>st</sup> of August in 1976 as you both stood here before this altar, Fr. Joe Langton asked you both a very important question; *'Frank and Brenda, are you willing to accept with love the children God may send you'*? You answered YES . The full answer to that question came in two parts, Mairead and

Marcella . They in their turn, with Eoin and Emmett have given you five very much loved grandchildren Ciara, Emily, Seán, Luke and Caoimhe Through his skill as a builder, Frank Gaffney has left his mark on so many homes and buildings in this community but his greatest legacy is the mark and influence he has had in the lives of those sitting in the front seats of this church today. Your greatest tribute to him is how you take all of what was best in his character and make it part of your own.

My final thought today brings me back to that phrase again 'Bring it Home' In the last few months of Frank's life today's date, the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, has featured very prominently in the minds of many Irish people. The reason for that of course because today is the first date in well over a year that we can leave our shores freely and begin to travel to other countries. I'm not sure what significance if any that Frank would have attached to this date and the freedoms it would bring. So perhaps it is ironic that this day, the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, would be the date of Frank's final journey. It is a journey which in another sense 'brings him home', not to Monamondra or Clonmeen but home to Heaven where he will be reunited with his parents, with his brothers Joe, Paddy, Tommy and John and his sisters Maura, Breda and Margaret, with so many friends and neighbours who have gone before him. Frank's final journey comes at the conclusion of a relatively short life of almost 67 years. But in those 67 years as echoed by that beautiful first reading from Ecclesiastes, there has been a time and a season for so many things. Four years ago I can recall visiting Frank in Portlaoise hospital after he had gotten his cancer diagnosis. The news was not good and he made it clear to me that he believed his time was very short, a lot shorter than the four years he was to have. I'm sure there have been many times in this last few years, perhaps at the bog in the silence of his own company, when he reflected on the blessings of his life, on the journey he had travelled and how much time might actually be left to him. Those words of St. Paul in today's second reading are words he spoke to his friend Timothy at the end of his life, a few years younger than Frank. AS Frank's earthly life comes to an end he can certainly borrow those words of St. Paul.

*the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.*

Frank as you leave us today we send you on your way with the words of an ancient Irish Blessing:

May the blessing of light be on you - light without and light within.

May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire,  
so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it.

And may light shine out of the two eyes of you,  
like a candle set in the window of a house,  
bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.

And may the blessing of the rain be on you,  
may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean,  
and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines,  
and sometimes a star.

And may the blessing of the earth be on you,  
soft under your feet as you pass along the roads,  
soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day;  
and may it rest easy over you when, at last today, you lie out under it.

May the soil of this parish of your birth rest so lightly over you that your  
soul may be out from under it quickly; up and off and on its way to God.  
And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly. Amen.