

Irish Examiner Tomorrow



Swinging back home
Roisin Murphy on where she's at
Arts

Creating a living room for a community
Why libraries can be quite noisy these days
Features



Searching for the summit
Liverpool bid to leapfrog Chelsea and top the Premier League
Sport



TWIN BEAKS: Jess Fitzgerald holds a photograph of two puffins on the Skelligs, Co Kerry, at the English Market, Cork, during an exhibition of wildlife photography by Sheena Jolley, which continues at the Market Gallery in the English Market until Thursday.

Picture: Denis Minihaue

1kg of truffle sells for a tasty €160k

ITALY: Defying the economic downturn, an Italian white truffle weighing a little more than 1kg sold at an international auction on Saturday for \$200,000 (€160,000).

The prized tuber went for the second year running to Hong Kong-born casino mogul Stanley Ho after an auction held simultaneously in Rome, London, Abu Dhabi and Macau, auction organisers said.

Last December, Ho bought a 1.5kg specimen — one of the biggest truffles unearthed in half a century — for a record \$330,000 (€260,000).

The 1.08-kg truffle — the biggest found in Italy this year — was flown first class to Macau, with an Italian chef accompanying it, for Saturday's auction after it was picked on November 21 in the central Molise region.

Truffles can vary considerably in size and are prized in Italian cooking for their flavour and aroma.

Output of white truffles has fallen in Italy over the past few years, largely because climate change has brought a damaging mix of drought and torrential rains.

Scarce supply has pushed prices for normal-sized truffles above €4,000 for 1kg and Italian restaurants have kept purchases to a minimum, although demand from foreign restaurants has remained stable, truffle associations say.

USA: The New York City Transit division says it gives passengers the notes so they can prove they're not lying about being delayed while riding the subway.

Passengers request the delay verification letters over the phone. NYC Transit verifies the date and time of the delay and sends an official note in the mail in one or two weeks. It mails 34,000 notes a year.

Each letter shows the subway line taken, the duration of the trip and the delay.

NYC Transit is working on an online system so it can accept internet requests and email the excuse letters.

CHINA: The country has executed the leader of a bogus scheme for breeding ants to



worldapart

make aphrodisiacs that conned investors out of 3 billion yuan (€345 million), the official Xinhua news agency said on Thursday.

Wang Zhendong was executed on Wednesday in the north-eastern province of Liaoning, Xinhua cited an unnamed local official as saying.

The fictitious ant-breeding project that Wang fronted features prominently in posters and other government educational materials warning of the risks of pyramid schemes and other investment schemes that sound too good to be true.

Wang promised investors in the fictitious project returns of 35 to 60%, Xinhua said.

The ants were to be used for making liquor, herbal remedies and aphrodisiacs.

One investor committed suicide after realising he had been duped, said Xinhua.

USA: A Wisconsin family found it hard to be thankful after a thief made off with their turkey dinner.

Lillian Moore says she sent a cooler stuffed with Thanksgiving food to her daughter Cindy, only to have it stolen from her porch.

Ms Moore packed the cooler with half a turkey, potatoes and salad. She left it on her daughter's porch on Wednesday evening because her daughter's refrigerator was too small to hold the food.

When Cindy Moore went to get the turkey Thanksgiving morning, the cooler was gone.

Ms Moore says she had to buy turkey using money she sets aside for bills. The disabled single mother didn't bother reporting the theft to police.

Lillian Moore says it's "just awful" to steal from people who don't have much.

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Writer's absence filled with hide and seek

AFTER a three-month absence, I am back in the garret, my beloved office located at the top of a winding staircase in the eaves of my wife's family home.

I first moved in here last year, setting up my computer on an old table amidst the ephemera that accrues when a family has lived in the same spot for a couple of centuries: piles of old pictures, curious books about weaponry and clothes so ancient they have crossed the border from the land of formal wear to the realm of fancy dress. It is so cold now that I have to have an oil-filled radiator under the table, with a tablecloth to keep the heat in, and wear fingerless gloves, a woolly hat and my Canada Goose arctic explorer jacket to keep the top half sentient.

The best thing about the garret is that it has a bed. More people should have beds at work. More and more often I find the best thing I can do for my career is roll over and go back to sleep, especially after a wakeful night with the children. I can't screw anything up when I'm in REM and when I do wake, I might just be able to make a sensible decision before it's time to call it a day.

The second best thing about the garret is that I share it with my brother-in-law, the noted historian Turtle Bunbury, who's got solid name recognition now as his latest novel, *The Irish Pub*, has just hit the bookstores in time for Christmas.

Well, I say it's the second best thing, but that's just me trying to be tough. The truth is that the absence of Turtle — he's been out on the road simultaneously promoting *The Irish Pub* and researching his next project — is the reason I haven't been here for the past three months.

Although I had always subscribed to the cliché that writing is a lonely business, best carried out in splendid isolation, when Turtle and I started to share the garret last year I soon came to value having some company. I'd like to say that Turtle and I sat around discussing



Tom Sykes

The Last Word

high-brow matters of lexicography and narrative theory, but that would be an embellishment. While we might have bounced the odd idea off each other, the truth is that our conversations were much like those of any other two people who share an office: often fragmented, frequently desultory, and usually involving the phrase "cup of coffee".

I tried to work here for a few days after Turtle had headed off, but it wasn't the same. Reluctantly I moved from the garret and into our own house. I saw the kids more but work suffered because I am pathologically incapable of resisting any opportunity to play hide and seek.

Then, last week, Turtle gave me a call. He was moving back to the garret. Did I fancy re-relocating? I moved my big screen up the next day, and here I am again.

The only problem is that now Turtle's gone up to Dublin for a couple of days — and that's why I'm going home for a game of hide and seek.

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