

Sophie Toscan du Plantier: Key Witnesses

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Major Witnesses

These witnesses appear in many or all of the books, TV documentaries and the West Cork podcast. Two of them travelled to Paris for the French murder trial. Notable names absent from this list include Ian Bailey. As so much of the evidence was gathered by police with a specific intent to make a case against Bailey to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), their names appear throughout. This document is more interested in the other witnesses. These are people who criticise Ian Bailey for placing himself centre stage, yet each one of them crops up repeatedly in all of the recent opportunities for gaining the limelight. And there are many snippets of information, for context, which are not mentioned in any of the recent coverage. The purpose of this document is simply to look behind the recent TV documentaries at the lives of the several witnesses.

Jules Thomas

A former husband of Jules Thomas was found guilty of slashing another witness, Bill Fuller, with a knife in 1997. See the entry on Bill Fuller below.

Thomas's first husband was Christopher Thomas. In 2009, he was found guilty of making pornographic images of children and was sentenced to six years in prison. We have not yet been able to verify that Christopher Thomas was involved with other men, in a so-called "paedophile ring" but there are salacious rumours that there was such a ring and that it involved a police officer.

Marie Farrell

Farrell was a local shopkeeper who has made numerous contradictory statements under oath at various times since 1996. Farrell is the real name of "Fiona" who phoned police from a call box to tell them she had seen a man behaving oddly at 3am on (possibly) 23 December 1996, but the DPP report thinks this happened 24 hours earlier on the Saturday night, or 3am Sunday 22nd.

According to Michael Sheridan, Marie Farrell even lied about the amount she received for an interview she gave to his paper, the Star on Sunday. Sheridan had posted a cheque to her

for £1,500 yet she claimed in open court that it was only £150 and that she had donated it to a local football club.

Marie Farrell and her family left England suddenly one night after being found out for fraudulently claiming [tens of thousands of pounds from HMRC](#) (the UK tax office) which is how they ended up in West Cork.

Marie Farrell made eye-catching claims in 2005 that all of her previous statements had been made up or given under duress. She named Garda Kevin Kelleher, among others, as being involved in applying pressure on her as (she says) they tried to frame Ian Bailey for the murder. It should be pointed out that all of the Garda accused of corruption by Marie Farrell completely deny all of her claims.

Bernie Griffin rented various properties to the Farrells and complained of late payments and even difficulty getting them to leave at the end of their tenancies.

Chirs Farrell, husband of Marie. The police investigated a claim that he "beat up" a neighbour, Mr C, around 01:30 on 13 April 1997 because he had found Mr C in the street and believed he was responsible for taking underwear from the Farrells' washing line. No charges were brought, despite Mr C needing hospital treatment. [Michael Sheridan]

Chris Farrell has been involved with the police on various occasions along similar lines. He was found guilty of assaulting one [James McKenna in the infamous Spar supermarket car park in 2006](#). Farrell also made counter-allegations against McKenna.

Their son, [Michael Farrell had been stopped by police numerous times in January, October and December of 2004, and in March 2005 on various offences including driving without tax and insurance](#). It is claimed in various sources that similar offences were ignored after Marie Farrell cooperated with police.

Mr C, a man reported by Marie Farrell to be stealing underwear prior to his 13 April 1997 assault. The Garda tapes suggest that one or more police officers colluded with the Farrells in this case. In January 1997, Mr C was one of the men questioned in relation to his whereabouts on the night of the murder.

Bill (Billy) Fuller

A former friend of Bailey's who became suspicious and turned against him. There has been a beef between the two men ever since. Fuller is an utterly unreliable witness. The DPP report recounts an episode on 20 February 1997, when Bill, his wife Kerri and their young child were investigating the murder down near Kealfadda bridge. They see a man they suppose to be Ian Bailey and run from the scene, screaming in terror. The man later turned out to be a local farmer. This episode shows the suggestibility of the Fullers and also the hysteria present in the community in the weeks after the murder.

Bill Fuller states that he saw Jules Thomas in her Fiesta around Kealfadda Bridge around 11am on 23 December 1996. He also claims that on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1996, Ian Bailey made "third person" admissions that he had killed Sophie. This statement however was not made until "early 1997" (per Michael Sheridan), as the police tried to gather enough evidence to have Bailey charged. Nobody would have been in any doubt that Bailey was the prime suspect by the time he gave his statement. If he knew Bailey had "confessed" to the murder on 24 December, why did he wait so long to come forwards?

In 1998, Bill Fuller was slashed with a knife by a man called Michael Oliver. [Oliver was charged and pleaded guilty](#). However the attack occurred on 27 August 1997. Incredibly, Oliver was a former husband of none other than Jules Thomas.

During Ian Bailey's libel trial in 2003-4, Bailey made a complaint against Fuller and Peter Julian Bielecki which the judge took seriously. He accused Fuller and Bielecki of making threatening gestures and comments, and the judge asked both men to leave the courtroom.

In 2005, [Fuller was in court again](#) charged with making threats to Ian Bailey at Schull farmers' market. Fuller denied (and was cleared) of the charge of threatening or abusive behaviour, but he did admit to "insulting" hand gestures during the case.

In 2019, [Bill Fuller was one of only two witnesses](#) who travelled from Ireland to Paris for the French murder trial of Ian Bailey to testify against him.

Shirley Foster & Alfie Lyons

Shirley Foster was a near neighbour of Sophie's and found her body around 10am, 23 December 1996. **Alfie Lyons** (now deceased) lived with Shirley Foster and called the police to notify them of the murder. His land was being used by **Leo Bolger** for growing cannabis.

[The Sunday Times](#) (UK, paywall) covered the story as did the [Irish Examiner](#). There are suggestions this was a relatively sophisticated drugs operation that was busted in 2010 and Alfie Lyons was implicated in allowing the cannabis to be grown on his land.

Leo Bolger was a handyman who had done work on Sophie's house. Conveniently, it was Bolger who witnessed Ian Bailey being introduced to Sophie by Alfie Lyons in the spring of 1995. Bolger was also able to corroborate a story that Ian Bailey had tried to get a manuscript to Sophie for her to read. A key point of interest is that Bolger's allegations about Ian Bailey were made around the same time he was given a suspended sentence for his sophisticated drugs operation. Many sources have linked these two events, suggesting that Bolger agreed to make a fabricated statement to avoid prison.

Alfie Lyons's own relationship with Sophie was not straightforward. After she bought the cottage, she found out that he owned an outbuilding close to her cottage. Her estate agent had led her to think it was her outbuilding. Two years before the murder, water had been seeping from Alfie's property onto Sophie's. Even more incredibly, Sophie once returned to the cottage to find the bath dirty. It seems she had until then not bothered to lock the cottage up, in common with many other local residents. The finger of suspicion about the dirty bath was cast in the direction of Alfie Lyons. These three items: the outbuilding, the leak and the bath, are all from Michael Sheridan. Although Josephine Hellen believed these disputes to have been settled before the murder, they are not mentioned in any of the documentaries. Alfie Lyons is made out to be a model citizen whose only involvement in this saga was to call the police on the morning of 23rd December 1996.

The Hellens

Josephine Hellen Lived local to Sophie and was her housekeeper. She therefore had a close personal and business relationship with Sophie. She has made no statement about ever seeing Sophie with Ian Bailey, she has not seen Ian Bailey visit Sophie's cottage, and does not mention Ian Bailey at all in her statements, as far as we could ascertain.

Finbar Hellen Josephine's husband assisted Josephine and knew Sophie well. He also has never seen Sophie with Ian Bailey at any time in the three years Sophie visited West Cork.

Peter Julian Bielecki

Bielecki is a local sculptor and former friend of Ian Bailey. He looked after Jules and the girls when Jules was assaulted by Bailey in May 1996. He is still visibly upset when talking about those events. However, his name mysteriously changes. He appears as Julian in Murder at the Cottage and Peter on the Netflix documentary. Bielecki did not make his police statement about the assault on Jules Thomas until 25 May 2000, after his partner Ceri Williams had made a similar statement on 17 May 2000. These statements were therefore not made until 3 1/2 years after the murder.

Ceri Williams, then partner of Bielecki, who confirmed a statement Bielecki made to police about Ian Bailey trying to strangle his former wife in England. She also states she saw Sophie shopping in Schull on the afternoon of 21 December, and she also saw Ian Bailey opposite Sophie at this time. There is no suggestion that Bailey and Sophie were together in the town when Williams saw them. This statement was also made in May 2000, therefore it seems likely that her memories of 21 December 1996 have faded or mutated in the interim.

Irun / Irene Amanda Reed

Amandar Reed is the mother of Malachi Reed, who claims Ian Bailey confessed during a car ride given by Bailey, a common generosity the locals gave to each other in an area with poor public transport links. Her name also varies between her appearances in the various sources. Tellingly, Malachi does not appear in any of the documentaries, and his mother continues to speak on his behalf. Furthermore, the documentaries make no mention that Malachi's statement against Ian Bailey was only made after Garda Kevin Kelleher visited his school looking for information very specifically about Ian Bailey, in February 1997, a few days before Ian Bailey was arrested. This information is in the DPP report. Kelleher's name crops up repeatedly in the various sources. It was Kelleher whom Marie Farrell accused of being involved in putting pressure on her to make statements about Ian Bailey.

Malachi is now in his thirties and would have been perfectly able to speak for himself in the recent documentaries, but he did not travel to Paris to speak against Bailey, again leaving this to his mother.

Martin Graham

Graham (now deceased), a former member of the British Army who had fallen on hard times by 1996/7. He approached the police after encountering Ian Bailey, shortly after Ian Bailey was released following his arrest in 1997. Graham agreed to help the police entrap Bailey and became embroiled in a terrifying mini-drama all of his own that eventually led to him hiding in England as a result of his own paranoia. Some of the infamous Bandon tapes lend credibility to some of Graham's claims, which might otherwise be seen as fantasy. There appears to be more than a grain of truth to many of his claims, including that the police supplied him with money and drugs to persuade him to befriend Ian Bailey in the hope of securing a confession.

Eddie Cassidy

Cassidy was the West Cork correspondent for the Irish Examiner (called simply The Examiner at that time) and he has made various changing statements about what he knew and when on 23 December 1996. It is not disputed that he was the one to inform Ian Bailey of a death in Toormore because he phoned Bailey at 13:40 to request his help, knowing that Bailey could be on the scene quicker than Cassidy, who was over in Cork itself. In a 2015 article he wrote for his paper, the Irish Examiner, Cassidy writes: "It had been suggested I had advised Mr Bailey the body had been that of a French woman. I honestly can't say now if I said that or not but have long believed I did not." This might look innocuous, but every recent TV documentary and book has confidently claimed Cassidy absolutely did not mention the victim's nationality. It seems the only man who is not sure what he said on that fateful phone call is Eddie Cassidy.

Minor Witnesses

James Camier, a Goleen shopkeeper who is said to have learned of the murder directly from Jules Thomas around 11am on 23rd December. Jules Thomas denies leaving her house that morning, and believes she saw Camier on 24th December.

Richard Leftwick gave the statement about the "garlic" which some sources say was drugs. Leftwick was a gardener and he had an appointment with Ian Bailey 23 December 1996. Richard puts this call at between 12 midday and 14:00 but Caroline, his wife, said it was between 11:30 and 12:30.

Caroline Leftwick spoke to an excited Ian Bailey on 23 December 1996 and he told her about the murder. He cancelled an appointment he had with her before 2pm.

Bill Hogan, a US-born cheesemaker and one of the few in west Cork who knew Sophie well. He has recently, in summer 2021, made statements to the police that Jules Thomas once confessed that she had helped Ian Bailey was blood out of his clothes shortly after the murder. He alleges that Jules Thomas told him this in 2001, yet he sat on the information until 2021.

Denis O'Callaghan, Lowertown Creamery, sold bleach to Ian Bailey on Christmas Eve 1996. However this bleach was bought with a number of other items, contrary to the perception given in some sources. Bailey also bought (per Michael Sheridan) a saw blade, chicken food, two bales of briquettes, and the (equally innocuous) litre of bleach.

Caroline Mangez recorded an interview with Ian Bailey around 14 February 1997. There was a second recording made 5 months later. The DPP report suggests that Caroline Mangez's statement to police contradicts the easy tone of these recordings.

Sources

Book: ***Murder at Roaringwater*** by Nick Foster, 2021.

Book: ***A Dream of Death*** by Ralph Riegel, 2020.

Book: ***The Murder of Sophie*** (Two Volumes), Michael Sheridan, 2020.

(Partially based on the earlier book "Death in December" written around 2004.)

TV: ***Murder at the Cottage***, Jim Sheridan, Sky Original Documentary, 2021

TV: ***Sophie: A Murder in West Cork***, Netflix Original Documentary, 2021

TV: ***RTÉ Special***, July 2017.

Podcast: ***West Cork***, an Audible Original, 14 episodes, 2018.

Various press articles as linked in the text above.