

Overview

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Date	Information / Claim
20.12.1996 FRIDAY	Sophie Toscan du Plantier flies into Cork airport from France.
21.12.1996 SATURDAY	Sophie is seen in Schull.
22.12.1996 SUNDAY	Sophie visits friends and telephones people in France. She is murdered some time after midnight.
23.12.1996 MONDAY	Sophie's body discovered 10am by neighbour Shirley Foster. Ian Bailey is the first journalist on the scene.
24.12.1996 TUESDAY	The official Irish State Pathologist arrives to inspect and take custody of Sophie's body.
25.12.1996 WEDNESDAY	The Christmas Day swim at midday is attended by Ian Bailey, Jules Thomas, her girls and Arianna, plus (it seems from the home video) most of West Cork.
10.2.1997	Ian Bailey and Jules Thomas arrested and released without charge.
17.4.1997	West Cork coroner opens inquest.
27.1.1998	Ian Bailey arrested again on his 41st birthday. Released without charge.
2003 - 2004	Ian Bailey libel case. He loses the case.
2005	Marie Farrell retracts all her prior statements and alleges police intimidation.
2014 - 2015	Ian Bailey wrongful arrest case. He loses the case.
2019	Ian Bailey found guilty <i>in absentia</i> by a court in France and sentenced to 25 years.

In Depth

Date	Time	Information / Claim	Source	Date Made	Disputed?
20.12.1996 FRIDAY	13:00 - 14:25	Flight EI 521 touched down in Dublin at 1.00pm. Passengers travelling on to Cork remained on board and the flight took off again at 1.45pm, arriving at Cork Airport at 2.25pm.	Michael Sheridan		N
20.12.1996	14:30	Sophie collects the keys to a silver Ford Fiesta from Avis at Cork Airport after arriving alone on a flight from France. The difference between the mileage recorded and the mileage after Sophie's death roughly matched the few known journeys she made. No unexpected mileage. Fiesta registration number 96 C 14459. Cork is a small airport, without the complications and delays inevitable in larger international terminals, so by 2.40pm Sophie was driving the Fiesta out of the airport and turning onto the N71 – the Bandon–Clonakilty–Ballydehob road.	Michael Sheridan		N
20.12.1996	~ 14:00	Josephine Hellen enters Sophie's cottage to light fires. She leaves the lights off because it is still daylight. She has decorated the place for Christmas.	Josephine Hellen Michael Sheridan		N
20.12.1996	15:00 - 16:00 (before dusk)	Later that afternoon (before dark) a Ford Fiesta with a female blonde French driver and an "Irish or English" male passenger much taller than average pulls into Hurley's garage in Skibbereen and "fills up" the tank with exactly £10 of unleaded petrol. [Some details disputed: the car was missing hub caps and was described as blue or grey, not silver by Sean Murray who worked at the garage and filled the tank that day, or maybe another day...] Michael Sheridan claims there were two stops at petrol stations: one for fuel and one for briquettes.	Michael Sheridan		Y: why fill up a newly collected hire car that already had a full tank? Why stop twice? The male passenger was not present at the second stop. What happened to him?
20.12.1996	16:30	Sophie arrives home at Dunmanus West / Toormore. The gate is closed, as it should be, to keep the livestock in. Sophie opens the gate and drives up to her cottage.	Michael Sheridan		N
20.12.1996	16:45	Josephine Hellen rings Sophie to check she has arrived safely and all is in order. It is. Sophie has not yet decided whether to fly home on 23rd or 24th December and has tickets for both days. Later still, Sophie rings Josephine back but Josephine is out. Sophie tells	Josephine Hellen Michael Sheridan		N but nobody can prove there was a return tickets or what day it was for.

		her daughter, Catherine, that she will phone the next day.			
20.12.1996	23:25 - 23:45	Agnes Thomas phones Sophie from France.	Agnes Thomas Michael Sheridan		N
21.12.1996 SATURDAY	12:00 - 13:00	Finbar Hellen and son Jon walked over to Toormore and saw Sophie's car at the cottage. Finbar almost walked up to greet Sophie but did not. However he anticipated she would come out to talk to them and did not, which he registered as unusual to the extent that he told this detail to the police.	Finbar Hellen		N
21.12.1996	14:30	Finbar and John pass by Sophie's house once again. Again Sophie does not come out. Finbar saw Sophie's shadow in the house.	Finbar Hellen		Time likely out slightly as Sophie was probably on her way to Schull by 14:30.
21.12.1996	~ 15:00	Sophie drives to Schull, leaves her car in the car park opposite the East End Hotel and walks up the street, stopping at Brosnan's Spar supermarket where she bought some food and household items. It was just after 3.00pm. Sophie withdraws £200 from an ATM in Schull and visits Tara Fashions, a shop run by Marie Farrell. Receipts in Sophie's purse confirm that she paid for groceries in Schull at this time and used the ATM shortly afterwards.	Michael Sheridan		N
21.12.1996	15:25	Sophie called into the Courtyard Bar, where she had a quick cup of tea, and then browsed for a while in Marie Farrell's Tara Fashions. Farrell sees a "weird-looking" man with sallow skin loitering outside the shop wearing a beret, who follows Sophie along the street at a distance. At 3.25pm Sophie walked across to the bank opposite the shop and withdrew IR£200 from the ATM. Then she made her way back down to the car park and drove home.	Marie Farrell Michael Sheridan		Partly: the identity and appearance of the 'weird' man is disputed.
21.12.1996	16:15	Sophie's car was seen parked outside her house at 4.15pm and, as far as can be ascertained, she did not leave the house for the rest of the evening.	Michael Sheridan		N
21.12.1996	Saturday Night	Ian Bailey out on the town with friends. It is a big session and he spends the night with those friends, the Murphys.	Ian Bailey and friends		N
22.12.1996 SUNDAY	~ 07:00	Marie Farrell is driving to Cork. At Airhill she sees the same "weird-looking" man on the road, trying to thumb a lift. Michael Sheridan claims this location is just 100m from the Murphy's house where Bailey stated he spent the night of Saturday 21st December. Tony Doran, also	Marie Farrell Michael Sheridan		Identity of man is disputed

		resident at the Murphy's that night, thinks someone left the house around 07:30 which would tie up with Marie Farrell's sighting.			
22.12.1996	Prior to 14:00	Sophie walks to Three Castle Head on the Atlantic coast.	Yvonne Ungerer		N
22.12.1996	14:00 - 16:00	After her solitary walk, Sophie visits her American friend, Yvonne Ungerer and Sophie tells Yvonne of a ghostly experience, an anxious experience, at the lake. Yvonne's statement to the police on 24.12.1996 suggests Sophie left at 17:45, and she found Sophie in her house talking to her husband Tomi at 15:00.	Yvonne Ungerer Michael Sheridan Murder at the Cottage from police statement		Ghostly experience not mentioned in DPP report. Times vary.
22.12.1996	14:00	Ian Bailey arrives home after a big night on the town. He had stayed with friends. At home, he cuts the top off a 20ft high tree to decorate for Christmas and kills 3 turkeys, of which one is sold to a local butcher. The tree and turkeys are the reason stated for minor scratches or 'welts' on his hands, and a light scratch on his forehead. Jules Thomas describes the hand/arm scratches as "like a comb" had been scratched across the skin, so very light parallel scratches. Another witness elsewhere has described "parallel" lines on his arms.	Ian Bailey, Jules Thomas and her daughters RTÉ Documentary		Only the cause of the scratches is disputed. If Bailey was wearing his infamous long coat, with long sleeves, on the night of 22.12 how did his arms get scratched?
22.12.1996	16:45 or 17:45?	Sophie arrives in Crookhaven and orders tea and scones at O'Sullivan's pub where she was well-known to Billy O'Sullivan.	Billy O'Sullivan		N
22.12.1996	~17:00 or 18:00?	Sophie leaves Crookhaven and drives home.	Michael Sheridan		N
22.12.1996	17:30	Sophie phones Agnes Thomas but Agnes is out so Sophie leaves an answerphone message.	Agnes Thomas Michael Sheridan		N
22.12.1996	18:00	Postman Thomas Hodnett delivers letters to Alfie Lyons's postbox and sees lights on in the first floor and ground floor windows of Sophie's cottage. This claim in Michael Sheridan might not be accurate. There is a police officer, John Hodnett who saw lights in Sophie's cottage at this time.	Thomas Hodnett Michael Sheridan		Q: Would the post really get delivered on a Sunday? It's not regular. [This is probably John Hodnett.]
22.12.1996	19:10	Sophie calls her housekeeper, Josephine Hellen, on the phone.	Josephine Hellen Michael Sheridan		N
22.12.1996	19:30	Sophie phones Pat Hegarty, who has done maintenance work on her	Pat Hegarty		N

		cottage.	Michael Sheridan		
22.12.1996	21:00	Sophie calls Josephine again but she is out.	Josephine's Daughter?		
22.12.1996	21:20	Shirly Foster is closing her curtains and sees the outside light on Sophie's cottage is on.	Shirley Foster Michael Sheridan		N
22.12.1996	21:00 - 01:30	For most of this evening, starting at around 9pm, Jules Thomas and Ian Bailey are out in one of the Schull pubs, The Galley bar. According to them, they arrive home at around 01:30.	Jules Thomas Ian Bailey Various sources		N
22.12.1996	22:00	Josephine calls Sophie back. In this call Sophie says that she will return to France on 24th December, Christmas Eve, to link up with her husband. Josephine agrees to come to the cottage around midday, Monday 23rd.	Josephine Hellen		N
22.12.1996	23:00 - 00:00	Sophie is on the phone to her husband Daniel who is in southern France. The call ends around midnight, perhaps. Sometime after midnight but long before 10am the next morning, Sophie is attacked in the lane below her cottage and murdered. Her back door, the door leading down through the field to the laneway gate, is locked with the keys inside. This is confirmed by Michael Sheridan, by a Garda technical specialist, and is in the Netflix series.	Daniel du Plantier		N
23.12.1996 MONDAY	02:30	Ginny Thomas said Mr Bailey had killed three turkeys for Christmas on Sunday, December 22nd, 1996. She said he had then climbed up a tree to cut off the top to use as a Christmas tree and she noticed scratches on his hands when he came back down. She said she went out socialising in Schull that night. She was dropped home by a friend shortly before 2.30am on Monday, December 23rd, and went to bed. "I don't know if Ian was at home or if he was at my grandmother's (the studio house 250m away that was formerly owned by Beryl Thomas). I didn't speak to anyone and I went straight to bed after returning home," she said.	Irish Times 30 May 2019		N
23.12.1996	03:00	Marie Farrell is driving her car when she sees a man on the Kealfadda Road, around 1.6 miles or a 25 minute walk from Sophie's cottage, wearing a long black coat. In RTÉ, Bailey states that 'Maria' Farrell was new to the Schull area at this time. His mistake with her name suggests he had never heard of her. DPP thinks this was 24 hours earlier. Farrell cannot now recall whether	Marie Farrell RTÉ Documentary		DPP disagrees

		this was Bailey or another man, and in 2021 claimed it was a Frenchman she recognised in a photo on the internet.			
23.12.1996	08:20	Shirley Foster wakes up, lights fires and starts preparing breakfast.	Murder at the Cottage		N
23.12.1996	08:35	Sunrise at this time of year.	Murder at the Cottage		N
23.12.1996	10:00	Shirley Foster drives from her house next to Sophie's to take the rubbish to the dump. She notices Sophie's car parked outside Sophie's as it normally would be. Shirley drives down the lane towards the large gate, which is normally closed. The gate is open. There is a body wearing nightclothes and brown boots lying at the side of the road, covered in blood. Some of the clothes are caught in the barbed wire fence and pulled tight. Shirley is horrified and sounds the car horn. She runs in a panic back to the home she shares with Alfie Lyons. Alfie runs down, thinks it might be Sophie. He runs to Sophie's house and knocks on the door. No answer. Alfie calls the police.	Michael Sheridan Murder at the Cottage		N
23.12.1996	10:00 - 10:30	Did Richard Curran, Ian's editor for the story he was working on at this time, speak to Bailey on the phone at the Prairie at this time? Ian Bailey claims that Curran extended the deadline for the article 24 hours to the Tuesday during this call.	Ian Bailey Michael Sheridan		Cannot corroborate
23.12.1996	10:15	Police in a patrol car receive the report of a body and drive off to the scene.	Nick Foster		N
23.12.1996	10:38	Police arrive on the scene and commence shutting it off to preserve evidence. This is not difficult as the cottage is in a remote area.	Nick Foster		N
23.12.1996	~ 11:00	Larry O'Connor, a doctor, arrives and pronounces Sophie dead at an unspecified time. RTÉ states Sophie's bed had been slept in. Beside the bed was a wallet full of cash (believed to be from the ATM in Schull from 21.12) that had not been touched, suggesting that there was burglary. Most sources believe Sophie had gone to bed shortly after midnight because Daniel states that he thinks she was phoning from bed. Other sources suggest the telephone itself was found beside the bed. Sophie was not in her usual 'raised' bed that night, from where she could see the Fastnet lighthouse. She was sleeping in another room. One source suggests this was for warmth as her boiler was believed to be out of action and the normal bedroom was too cold.	Michael Sheridan RTÉ Special		N N

23.12.1996	Various	<p>Jules Thomas is seen by two different witnesses driving around in her white Ford Fiesta. These are Bill Fuller and James Camier. Where is Ian Bailey, her partner? Has she dropped him off at the crime scene? If so, how did he learn of the murder? His official account makes his first appearance at Sophie's cottage at 14:20. Jules's youngest daughter said Jules and Bailey left her home for a couple of hours on this morning. Jules and Bailey stick to their story that they did not leave home until shortly after 14:00.</p> <p>Nobody disputes that Jules and Bailey were at home around 9am.</p>	Jules Thomas Ian Bailey James Camier		Hotly contested
23.12.1996	11:30	Father Cashman arrives to administer the last rites. He leaves at 12 midday and arrives home at 12:15. Eddie Cassidy of the Irish Examiner calls Father Cashman to get directions to the scene. Father Cashman declines.	Father Cashman Eddie Cassidy		Eddie Cassidy's story has been changed more than once (per DPP)
23.12.1996	14:20	<p>Ian Bailey arrives on the scene, the first journalist to arrive subsequent to the police arrival earlier that morning. This time is confirmed by police logs.</p> <p>Apparently Ian Bailey left the scene quite soon after arrival, partly because the road was taped off and the Garda were not saying anything. He went down to the village to make enquiries.</p> <p>In RTÉ Bailey recalls visiting the local post office where someone told him the victim's name was BOUNOIL (sic).</p>	Garda logs Ian Bailey RTÉ Documentary		N
	16:00	<p>At 4pm, Eddie Cassidy has arrived at the scene and he spoke to Ian Bailey, who by this time had returned. Cassidy made this arrangement on Bailey's landline, so it is clear that Bailey had returned home prior to 4pm.</p> <p>Cassidy: "It had been suggested I had advised Mr Bailey the body had been that of a French woman. <i>I honestly can't say now if I said that or not but have long believed I did not.</i>"</p>	Eddie Cassidy Irish Examiner 31 Mar 2015		<p>N</p> <p>Note: virtually everyone now believes that Cassidy did not state the nationality of the victim, however Cassidy's own article states clearly that he cannot remember.</p>
	23:00	<p>Eugene Gilligan of the Garda Technical Bureau arrives on the scene from Dublin. Crime scene photographs are taken in the darkness. Gilligan wants to move the body because there is little to be gained from leaving he body in situ for another day. He is overruled via phone to the local Garda.</p> <p>The body is guarded by two policemen all night and nobody is permitted near to the scene. Father Cashman was critical of this decision, and many</p>	Murder at the Cottage		N

		people expressed sadness that Sophie was outside for so long.			
24.12.1996 TUESDAY	~ Noon	Ian Bailey purchases a 1L bottle of Happy Shopper bleach at Lowertown Creamery. In addition, Bailey buys a saw blade, chicken food and two bales of briquettes.	Nick Foster/Garda file Michael Sheridan		N
	~14:00	Professor Harbison, State Pathologist, arrives on the scene after a long drive from Dublin in the early afternoon. The delay of over 24 hours in his arrival would later cause anger in France but was not unknown in Ireland at the time.	Ralph Riegel		N
25.12.1996 WEDNESDAY	12:12	<p>Ian Bailey and many local residents are recorded on amateur video at the annual Christmas Day swim. He is wearing a long dark coat and a hat, and reads one of his poems for the person holding the camera. The camerawoman was interviewed and thinks Bailey had scratches on his hands. The existence of scratches on this day is not disputed, but the cause and nature of these is contested.</p> <p>A timestamp on this home video shows people in trunks and ready to swim (with dry hair) at 12:12pm on 25th December 1996. The group leaps into the water to begin the swim at 12:13. The creator of the video is not named but she gives a statement to the police. The date of the statement and identity of the woman is withheld on Murder at the Cottage. The woman notices scratches on Ian Bailey's hands.</p> <p>There is no suggestion of blood on Ian's clothes, and they clearly have not yet been burned in the bonfire. The video was made by local student Florence Newman. She saw nothing odd in Bailey's behaviour at the time but suddenly 'remembered' some scratches on his hands in 2009. Garda Kevin Kelleher was present to observe any odd behaviour and he arranged for a copy of this tape to be entered into evidence.</p>	Murder at the Cottage shows the home movie and part of the statement made by its creator. She is not named but she is Florence Newman and she appeared as a witness in court.		N
26.12.1996 THURSDAY		The following day, Boxing Day, known as St. Stephen's Day in Ireland, members of Sophie's close family arrive in Cork to identify the body and answer police questions.	Various		N
26.12.1996		<p>Ian Bailey might a fire outside the studio house. The remains of the fire, described as 'fresh' are found and analysed by Garda technical experts. They found mattress springs, buttons, shoe eyelets... nothing conclusive. Thomas and Bailey state the fire happened almost a month earlier and was just a clearing out of old junk.</p> <p>Brian's police statement mentions only a fire "on or about Christmas time" and does not specify Boxing Day.</p>	Brian Jackson Ursula Jackson Murder at the Cottage	<p>04.02.1997 Police Statement by Ursula</p> <p>17.02.1997 Police Statement</p>	<p>Date of fire contested, but remains of a fire were definitely photographed at the Studio house.</p> <p>Brian stated he was aware of Ursula's statement when he made</p>

				by Brian	his own.
31.12.1996 NEW YEAR		Ian Bailey makes a statement to the police describing his movements after midnight on 22.12.1996. He describes the drive back over Hunt's Hill from the creamery. He explains how he received the scratches on his hands and the single scratch on his forehead. Jules Thomas believes this is when Ian started to think he was a suspect rather than just a local person being routinely interviewed. Ian Bailey continued to write stories for the newspapers about the case despite this fear. The scratches were not enough to arrest Bailey for the murder.	Murder at the Cottage		Bailey subsequently changed his police statement to add that he did get out of bed on 22.12.1996.
11.1.1997 JANUARY		"Fiona" calls the police with reports of a man in a long black coat around 03:00am on 22.12.1996 at Kealfadda Bridge walking west towards Goleen, away from Toormore. Fiona is later identified to be Marie Farrell. This statement is taken long after Ian Bailey has become the prime suspect. Note: the "Fiona" phone calls never identify Ian Bailey. The name of the man is added sometime later after Fiona has been identified. 28.01.1997 Marie Farrell makes a police statement about this sighting. "I now know this man to be Ian Bailey from Schull." This sworn statement is around 2 weeks after the first call from Fiona.	Murder at the Cottage		Y: Marie Farrell repeatedly changed her statement about this night.
10.02.1997 FEBRUARY		Ian Bailey's first arrest. Jules Thomas is also arrested this day.			N

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.

(Volume 1 is mainly 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.