

The town they left behind

TEMPLEMORE is fighting for survival, with both hands tied behind its back, it seems. Not only has it got a recession to tackle, there's also the matter of a moratorium on public service recruitment. The Garda College — the town's lifeblood — hasn't welcomed a trainee since 2009. The last recruits left over a year ago, and there's no sign of them returning anytime soon.

"Before the embargo, the place was rocking," says Martin Fogarty, deputy mayor of Templemore and Garda College storekeeper. "There was a buzz. Sure, it was like an IT. Every night, you'd have hundreds at Polly's pub, just across the road. And every three months you had passing out parades, with thousands of people coming to town."

"You wouldn't get car parking space within two miles of the college during ceremonies," he says, smiling. "With family and friends in to celebrate, Templemore could see up to 3,000 extra people. That's more than double the population — four times a year. Even the towns around us would be delighted when there were graduations."

"That's all gone," he says. "And those big days won't ever return. But that's ok. Look, the town would be happy with any recruitment. Forget about the times when there were quarterly intakes of 200 to 250, and more. A hundred would do. Not knowing if that'll happen is the hardest part right now."

"We've been told the college is going to stay open. But we don't know in what capacity," he says, hopeful the facility will be used fully rather than on an ad-hoc basis. "There's in-service and pre-retirement training, and the likes, as well as courses for CEPOL, the European Police College. But it's not the same as having the place full of new recruits."

"If I could have the justice minister's ear, I'd tell him it was a no-brainer. The lack of gardai is going to leave communities unprotected, and that means more crime. And that'll cost more in the long run," he cautions.

It's over a year since the last garda recruits left Templemore. The town is struggling to cope without them, locals tell **David Young**

"The minister could give everyone a lift by telling us for certain when things will be coming down the line," says Mr Fogarty.



The near empty Facility Building at the Garda college — once a hive of activity.



Clockwise from top: Cllr Valerie Young, in the empty car parking area on the town's Main Street; 'for sale' signs around the town; a business is 'To Let'; Biddy O'Gorman in the Templemore Arms Hotel says: 'It's like the funeral that never happened.'



the gaps in An Garda Síochana."

What about the assurances? "We're told the place is full with courses between now and Christmas ... but what's coming after that? I want to see a commitment from the Government there'll be a return. Then we'd know the town could be vibrant again. I can tell you — if we had just that, we'd have people going around smiling."

"Templemore. It's like a funeral that never happened," says Biddy O'Gorman, bar manager. Having served customers at the town's only hotel — the Templemore Arms — for more than 28 years, she's witnessed the locale struggle.

"It's a different town today to

what it was a few years ago. Completely. Everything's been affected. Houses aren't being rented," she says. "Think about it. The graduations alone used to keep the hairdressers, suit hire and laundry on the go. Today, jeez, the stamp isn't even being bought at the post office."

"Sure, every time you'd go to the dentist or the corner shop, say, there'd be recruits in there. Now, the atmosphere is gone out of the town. It's just deflated. We're mourning something that passed away ... without there being a death," she says.

"The loss of income is huge. I know one woman who used to keep two recruits. Today she's got

none. And her husband is on a three-day week. They just can't afford to eat or drink out."

"There's a vacuum in Templemore. I don't even have to look left and right anymore crossing the square," she says.

"We saw a huge drop in numbers. We lost up to 30 sessions a week," says physiotherapist and owner of Premier Physiotherapy and Sports Medicine Clinic, Thérèse Ryan. "We would've had recruits coming back after weekends of sport at home — injured. And we'd get them right for riot training or whatever physical activity they'd have had at the college."

"That's all by the wayside now. And we can't count on it ever coming back like it was," says Thérèse. "We had to adapt our clinic and find new clients to keep the business going. And thankfully, we managed to do so."

"As for the Garda College, it's a purpose-built facility. It could possibly be put to some other uses in the meantime. There are conferences happening all over the country every week, surely it could be used to generate income. Imagine the spin-off for the town and the local economy."

It's the kind of initiative that could occupy Templemore ahead of the Government's next recruitment drive. Some have even suggested the college as ideal for political party-think-ins. Now there's one sure fire way to get the town "rocking" again.

Fringe play puts relationships centre stage

ARE singletons happy to be without a significant other, or are they desperately looking for a partner? These are just some of the questions explored in 'Singlehood,' a documentary-style theatre show that opens at Dublin's Project Arts Centre on Sept 17-22 as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival. This provocative show, exploring the single life, is directed by Una McKevitt in collaboration with TV writer, David Coffey (*Dam & Bees, Fade Street*).

Described as "a brutally honest yet heart-warming show about the roller coaster ride of singlehood," McKevitt has interviewed 50 singletons whose experiences will be related by ten performers, five men and five women. The performers also talk about their own relationship status in the show.

"In conceiving the show, I considered what it means to be single in a society where romantic relationships have such high status and defined rituals," says McKevitt. "Are single people just waiting for love to find them, or does being single offer its own, possibly richer rewards?"

McKevitt, 37, a lesbian, says she has been in a lot of relationships over the years. "For a long period of time I had never really been single at all. Coming out of my last relationship, I knew I needed to be on my own for a while and properly commit to it rather than just running into a new relationship. So that prompted me to start thinking about being single."

While McKevitt never had any problem meeting partners, she says she knows a lot of straight women in their 30s and 40s who really want to meet someone but can't. "These women are beautiful, clever and talented. I think they're actually being very fussy."

Now single for a year, McKevitt

Are single people just waiting for love to find them, or are they happy to enjoy the freedom, asks **Colette Sheridan**

says she is enjoying life. "I feel more empowered now. The single experience is all about being comfortable in your own skin." She says that everyone she spoke to for the show mentioned the necessity of compromising and losing a certain amount of freedom in relationships.

But Conor Behan, 25, a gay DJ, who performs in the show, knows nothing about relinquishing his freedom as he has never been in a relationship. "It just hasn't happened. I'd love to experience a relationship because I'd say it's really great but at the same time I don't want to obsess over it. It will happen or it won't happen but it's not ruling my life."

Behan says that "being single is



Conor Behan, 25, who performs in the show, knows nothing about relinquishing his freedom — he has never been in a relationship. Picture: Nick Bradshaw

something to be celebrated just like being in a relationship should be celebrated. You need to know yourself fully to give yourself to somebody else. You need to be happy with who you are."

Originally from Carlow, Behan says he loves going to "gay spaces and gay bars. But I don't just go to gay places. Gay people of my age and younger gravitate towards mixed spaces. That probably wouldn't have happened five or ten years ago. It's quite vibrant and healthy."

Another performer in the show is actor Dee Roycroft, 40, a straight single mother of a seven-year-old boy. She says she would never close the door on the possibility of a relationship. "But I'm not seeking to meet someone. Is that a choice? To me, it just feels like the way things are."

Roycroft was in "a very long relationship for all of my 20s and into my 30s. I was married for the last few years of it. I guess I was incredibly lucky because it sort of came to an end quite naturally. It was spent. And we both knew it so, while of course it was sad, it felt right to separate."

Asked if she feels free to ask men out, Croft says she would "have to feel pretty sure I wouldn't get shot down. I've only done it a couple of times. It's good to take a risk. I never regretted it."

Being a single mother has never been an issue when it comes to

Dee's romantic life. "I wouldn't be interested in the first place in someone who wasn't up for that aspect of my life. Being a mother is such an important part of me. Also, my son is so close to his dad that there's nothing to be taken on. I have never felt (being a single mother) at a disadvantage."

In the show, comedian Eric Lalor, 41, talks about having been engaged for 15 years during which he and his fiancé's four children were born. The couple married in 2009. Marriage didn't seem important. Lalor says regardless of whether or not he has a piece of paper stating that he's married, he is in the relationship "for the long haul."

Fascinated by the revelations in the show, he says it reminds him of when he was young and single. "I had thoughts that I thought nobody else had. It's refreshing to see that I wasn't alone in my insanity when I was 19 or 20. I hadn't had a long relationship at that stage and I used to wonder if I was a freak. I was genuinely concerned that I'd be left on the shelf and would never marry."

Lalor met his life partner in the workplace where they both operated forklifts.

"We were friends for years. It was only when she told me she was leaving the job that I made my play for her with the help of alcohol."

"Thankfully, she reciprocated, and the rest is history."



You don't have to be out of step on flamenco floor

UNO dos tres — ready? Venga! Let's go. Ju estart with the left. Jes, left. No, other left. Si. Bueno. Uno dos tres—WAIT! Estart again. Left foot. Left, left, left. Right. Ready?

Whether it's a midlife crisis or misguided desire to prove that old dogs can learn new tricks, signing up for a beginners flamenco class might seem like a good idea back in the summer when it's still months away, as unreal as an Andalusian dream. And then you find yourself in a huge room with a mirrored wall, several other fortysomethings who also think they are still 25, and a baby-faced Joaquin Cortes lookalike with stamper flamenco boots, flowing hair and flashing dark eyes. You are, of course, old enough to be his mother — if you were a beautiful Spanish gypsy lady and not a pasty-faced Celt.

Bueno! And again! Left stamp and cross. Uno dos tres. Right stamp and cross. Arms! Arms! Seduction! Passion! Okay ESTOP. Remember jur right and left. Forget seduction for now.

Imagine a line of arthritic gnus being led to a watering hole by a leaping gazelle. It still doesn't come close to what is being reflected in the mirrored wall — readers of a nervous disposition might wish to stop creating mental images now. The teacher, facing his pupils, is not even hiding his laughter at the unco-ordinated clumping going on in front of him. You wonder why he is doing this, until you remember the cheque you wrote him earlier. See? That's how old you are. You

still write cheques.

Until coming into this class, you may have thought yourself reasonably fit for purpose. Yes, you may be — ahem — mature, and yes, you are no longer svelte, lithe, or even the right side of hefty, but this is all about awakening your inner gitana, right? Gitana is not a brand of cigarettes by the way, it's Spanish for gypsy. The ones who invented flamenco. You've been in the back-street bars of Sevilla and Granada at three in the morning and seen it danced, clapped, stamped, all drama and sinew — nothing on earth coming close to its beauty, its passion, its intensity.

And nothing on earth is going to make you dance like an Andalus gitana, mostly because you are a deluded Irish woman desperately trying to co-ordinate feet, arms and hands without falling over. Never mind looking seductive. It's all you can do to keep upright.

But still. The great thing about middle age is that the worse you look, the less you care. By the end of the 90 minutes, red faced and sweating, you are helpless with laughter and have learned a whole load of new Spanish swear words.

You take comfort in your fellow gnus being just as rubbish as yourself. Everyone is awful, apart from the teacher, who is godlike.

Bravo! he says, clapping at the end. You can tell he doesn't really mean it.