

Tributes paid to a man of probity, integrity and absolute honour

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William Geary as a private in the US army in 1942

By **NORMA PRENDIVILLE**

WILLIAM Geary, the 105-year-old former Garda superintendent who died in New York last Thursday, was a man of probity, integrity and absolute honour says former Labour TD, Frank Prendergast.

And he paid tribute to the Ballyragan man who had spent over 70 years campaigning to clear his name after he was accused of taking a bribe from the IRA and dismissed from the Garda in 1928.

Mr Prendergast, whose research on his behalf boosted Mr Geary's campaign hugely, said: "It is a saga without parallel in any democracy. If there

were a play written it should be called The Lamentations of William Geary. He suffered hugely from the indignity of having his name sullied and the ignominy of being dismissed from the force."

But, he said, Mr Geary harboured no bitterness towards anyone. This was all the more extraordinary, according to Mr Prendergast, given that when the official files were finally disclosed, "there was nothing in them" to incriminate Mr Geary.

Instead, Mr Prendergast said, Mr Geary was proud of having served in the Garda and proud of being from Limerick.

"He never lost his lovely West Limerick accent and he was very devotional," he said.

Mr Geary, who was born on February 29, 1899, died in a Long Island hospital last Thursday, October 14 after a very short illness. He had received visitors at his Bayside, Queens apartment on Wednesday, Mark Markett, his daughter Helen's partner said, explaining the last hours of William Geary.

William, he said, had had a cold for a few days but hadn't complained. On Thursday morning, he rang his daughter Helen who brought him to a doctor and he was immediately brought to hospital.

"We had a lot of hope," Mr Markett said.

But later that day Mr Geary was anointed and given Communion by a Limerick-born priest. About 6pm, Mr Geary died.

"He went very quickly and it was a complete shock," Mr Markett said.

Mr Geary was buried in Calvary, Queens on Saturday alongside his late wife, Margaret Shrivane, a Roscommon woman.

"He wanted an extremely simple, quiet ceremony," Mr Markett said.

A memorial service is to be organised in New York in November, Mr Geary's daughter Anne Wallace said from her Washington DC home.

And one of Mr Geary's four grand-daughters, Carina Markett, who lives in Dublin, said she hopes to organise a memorial service in Limerick, also next month.

Ms Markett was due to celebrate her birthday with her granddad but instead found herself flying to his funeral.

Mr Geary emigrated to New York in 1929 after his dismissal from the force and worked for many years with Consolidated Edison. He served in the US Army Air Corps during World War 2. He also served as President and longtime historian/archivist and parade contingent marshal of the Limerick Men's Benevolent and Social Association.

But he never forgot the slur on his name and in a campaign stretching over 70 years, Mr Geary wrote to various Ministers for Justice and various Taoisigh. He undertook lie-detector tests and waived all rights to com-

pensation in a bid to convince people of his innocence.

But it was 1999 before the then Minister for Justice John O'Donoghue publicly declared that the only evidence produced against William Geary was "certain intercepted IRA correspondence" and that he was not convinced the procedures followed in 1928 were satisfactory.

"The Government considers it reasonable that Mr Geary should have the impediments to the future enjoyment of his good name and reputation lifted," the Minister said. Mr Geary accepted a pension but refused to have it paid retrospectively.

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