

NEWS IN BRIEF

Baby on the way for dance king Flatley

MICHAEL FLATLEY is about to become a father.

The Lord of the Dance star's beautiful new bride Niamh O'Brien is pregnant according to recent reports and the couple allegedly revealed the good news to a small party of family and close friends in Michael's estate in Castlehyde in Co. Cork.

They were married on October 14 in a suitably lavish ceremony attended by about 250 invited guests.

Among those in attendance were Flatley's promoter Peter Aiken, former Taoiseach Albert Reynolds and his wife, Kathleen, racing tycoon JP McManus, UTV presenter Gerry Kelly and Minister for Health Mary Harney.

The marriage took place in St Patrick's Church in Fermoy — a town two miles from Flatley's stately pile in Castlehyde.

Flatley's parents Michael snr and Elizabeth jetted in from Chicago along with other members of their family for their son's big day.

The former Riverdance star was previously engaged for four years to Lisa Murphy — who is now reportedly dating high-profile Irish solicitor Gerald Kean — and was married to Pole Beata Dziaba for 11 years until 1997 when they filed for divorce in California claiming "irreconcilable differences."

Michael and Niamh had a grand wedding reception at Castlehyde where, for a man worth a reputed \$600million, no expense was spared.

One tier of the wedding cake was reserved for the patients at St Patrick's Hospital in Fermoy.

PIGSBACK IN THE UK

PIGSBACK.COM, an Irish loyalty and reward web portal, is to make its British debut, backed by a £6million launch budget.

Pigsback has operated for five years in Ireland, where its partners include Kelloggs and Coca-Cola.

It provides exclusive offers, competitions and product details to members, who have to supply personal information to join.

The company has already signed up Virgin Wines and Blockbuster as partners for its British roll-out this month.

Most of the launch budget will be spent on promotional activity, including a 2million toy pig giveaway at railway stations in the South-East.

Michael Dwyer, chief executive of parent company Empathy Marketing, said: "It is important for us to get the balance right, so we do not take lots of data from members without giving anything back."

As well as benefiting from special deals, members receive Piggy Points, which give further discounts.

The service, which has more than 200,000 active members in Ireland, will compete against ipoints, which offers a similar scheme.

# Mobile mast protester who will not be silenced

They've changed the way we live and work — but is there a hidden danger from mobile phones? A growing body of opinion believes their widespread use could be contributing to increased outbreaks of cancer. Brendan Farrell talks to **EILEEN O'CONNOR** whose battle against a mast near her home in the Midlands has become an inspiration to campaigners across the globe

RIGHT now there are over 50million mobile phones in use in this country — that's coming close to one per head in our 59million population.

Over the years our love affair with this new technology has ensured that the mobile phone manufacturers release ever more sophisticated models every couple of months.

At first there was the brick phone with a non-colour screen which literally weighed the same as a house brick.

Nowadays they come with vivid screens, cameras, music players and radios.

They're a way of life. But then again so was smoking not so long ago.

And like cigarettes there's an increasing number of people who are pin-pointing mobile phones as a health hazard.

It's not just the phone itself — but the masts that are needed to carry the signals.

Mobile phones at present have short transmission ranges — so in order to ensure a signal, masts have to be erected at fairly frequent locations.

Today there are 35,000 of these masts across Britain and the number is growing.

But increasing numbers of individuals and groups are doing battle with both the government and mobile phone operators over the siting of new masts and the possible radiation damage being emitted from them.

The quiet community of Wishaw in Sutton Coldfield in the West Midlands just near the Warwickshire border may at first seem an unlikely setting for what was a long-term battle with one mobile phone giant — but it was here that one woman's campaign against the industry was won with the help of some Irish courage.

It is not just in this country or Ireland that the name of Eileen O'Connor is now well-known in the campaign. Her ongoing objections to the siting of these masts have encour-

aged other protests across the globe.

The story starts at Eileen's home in Wishaw when a 74-foot high T-Mobile mast was erected 12 years ago on a patch of land some 300 yards at the rear of the house she shares with husband Paul and their teenage children George and Grace.

But a few years later Eileen began to feel unwell with constant headaches, loss of sleep and unexplained rashes all over her body.

Also of concern to her was the fact that George began to have unexplained nose bleeds and Grace suffered nightmares.

Friends and neighbours in and around Wishaw also began to notice

health problems. The house too seemed full of electrostatic which could be felt in the bedroom when touching the metal bed frames.

In 2001 Eileen discovered a lump in one of her breasts. A visit to her GP resulted in an assurance that the lump was only a small cyst.

But a few weeks later the lump had doubled in size and was soon diagnosed as cancer. There followed six months of both chemo and radiotherapy before a major operation.

Today Eileen is still receiving treatment although the prognosis is that for the moment the cancer is in remission.

But Eileen is convinced the cause of her illness as well as the unexplained medical conditions suffered by her family and neighbours related to the siting of the mobile phone mast.

She began to research all the known facts relating to mobile phone mast radiation transmissions — and despite all the assurances issued by the mobile phone operators and government Eileen was still convinced the mast was to blame.

With the help and support of her friend and neighbour Lynn Insley Eileen began to document the various illnesses in and around Wishaw. Among those living in 18 houses within a 500 yard radius of the mast there were 20 cases of serious illness including cancers of the breast, prostate, bladder and lung.

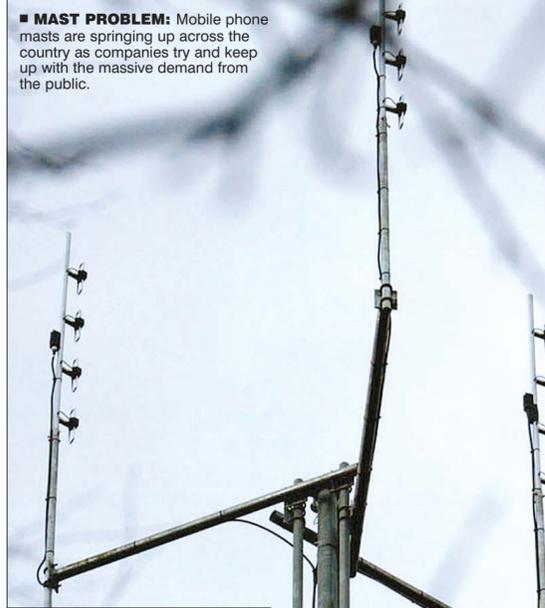
One man had Motor Neurone disease and many of the people affected were only in their 30s and 40s.

With so many of her neighbours attending hospital for treatment at the same time as she was Eileen decided to set up SCRAM — Sutton Coldfield Residents Against Masts.

Calls to T-Mobile resulted in Eileen being told emissions from the mast were well below government guidelines.

But their answer failed to convince the campaigners — who enlisted national media and lobbied MPs Mike O'Brien, Patricia Hewitt, David Davies and John Ryan to take up their case.

The move worked. In November 2003 something or somebody pulled the mast from its base and left it lying on its side.



■ **MAST PROBLEM:** Mobile phone masts are springing up across the country as companies try and keep up with the massive demand from the public.

Think you can spot a mobile phone mast? Think again.

SOME operators are going to extraordinary lengths to conceal the masts that form their networks. Already they are being disguised as chimneys, clocks, windows or drainpipes in an effort to meet the demands of planning departments. Masts used to be about 30 metres high but as technology improves they shrink. Now some are as small as 8 metres high.

The street sign for Northumberland Avenue in Westminster is also a plastic sign hiding a few antennas.

And dotted around Britain are fake chimney pots, fake flagpoles, fake drainpipes and fake signs all made of glass-reinforced plastic and concealing mobile antennas. Possibly the most complicated concealment job was done on the Town Hall clock in Hungerford in Berkshire.

Antennas are mounted at the centre of each of the four faces of the clock next to the hands. In effect mobile phones masts come in several sizes. The most common are the ones we usually see — macrocell masts which tower over the neighbourhood. But there are others often hard to spot which can be sited in any main street and look more like a



■ **HIDDEN:** A phone mast disguised as a pine tree in Berkhamstead. Getty Images



■ **THE WAY WE WERE:** Anti-mobile phone mast campaigner Eileen O'Connor finds a traditional phone box to make her calls from.

Eileen said: "When I went to see what had happened I cried with delight."

"Even to this day nobody in Wishaw seems to know how the mast came down."

Naturally the phone company wanted their broken mast back — but they hadn't bargained with the Siege of Wishaw.

Residents surrounded the downed mast with a posse of volunteers and camped on the site 24 hours a day determined there would be no mast replacement.

The stand-off lasted for almost 18 months until finally the mast owners admitted defeat.

But with victory secured Eileen and her friends refused to let the matter rest.

Today Eileen's time is spent dealing with similar worldwide protests.

Her most recent involvement was when she was invited to speak at the Health Protection Agency in London where she presented her case for the health issues surrounding mobile phone masts.

Most pressing to her is trying to stop the siting of the masts near schools.

She said: "We will not stop the huge increase in mobile phone use but what we are all about is where these masts are sited. They should not be near schools."

Wales has taken the lead with a recent vote at the National Assembly to the principle of full planning consent for mobile masts.

"This leaves England very much isolated as the only part of Britain where full planning consent for phone masts is not required."

Eileen is also turning her attention to Ireland — one of the heaviest users of mobile phones.

There Dubliner Con Colbert is waging his own battle over mobile phone masts — claiming he is suffering ill-health from transmissions from a transmitter on top of a garda station.

Mr Colbert also claims other people are suffering from a wide range of symptoms including burning of the skin and sleep disorders.

He is just one of an increasing number of people now lobbying the Dail for more data on mobile phone mast emissions.

In Ballygawley in Co. Tyrone villagers still talk about the 150-foot high phone mast which was cut down some years back.

It was thought that the death of a local man in his early 50s from cancer precipitated the revolt against the mast.

At the time local SDLP councillor Anthony McGonnell was quoted as saying: "There have been a number of other people in that area who have cancer and obviously local people are very concerned that this epidemic is being caused by the presence of the mast."

For Eileen this is an international issue — and she points to research in Germany and Russia which has backed her case. But she believes the



■ **PROTEST LEADER:** Eileen O'Connor who is at the forefront of the campaign against siting mobile phone masts near schools.

amount of money the British Government receives from the mobile industry in taxes and levies means there is a reluctance to tackle the issue.

She said: "Right now the British Government receives some £10billion a year in revenue from the mobile phone industry."

"Emergency government funds should be released — starting with at least £50million in order to deal with translation of German and Russian research, an education programme, media campaign and funding to independent scientists to carry out further research."

Despite all the statistics on safety handed out by the government and mobile phone operators Eileen still remains convinced long term exposure to phone mast emissions can cause serious health issues — and so the campaign will go on.

Eileen said: "There's an election coming up and if politicians do not take note then the campaign we have had here in Wishaw will be a drop in the ocean compared with what we will plan."

And does Eileen really know who pulled the mast down in Wishaw?

"Do you believe in Leprechauns?" she smiles.

Eileen's health tips for using a mobile phone:

- Try to keep the phone away from your head and ears — use a hands free.
- Keep conversations short and to the point.
- Use text messages — the phone only transmits when the message is sent.
- Bear in mind that if you carry the phone switched on in your pocket or handbag it is still sending signals to the nearest mast every 10 minutes.

Ireland's history on DVD is a big hit

ARE you sick of searching in vain for Irish DVDs in Britain?

Well your struggles may be over thanks to an internet site run by an Irish filmmaker. John Thompson has been making Irish History DVDs for the last 20 years.

Through his website at www.thompsontrading.co.uk he now sells a vast catalogue of Irish DVDs that the company has produced. These range from documentaries about the Famine to the history of Irish farming.

John decided to create the business after realising making films was something he wanted to pursue.

He said: "I was made redundant from a job and I was always interested in film."

"When videos became popular I took a course in media studies and a part of that course was to make a film, which I made on fishing."

"I took the finished product to a Northern Irish enterprise company and they gave me a grant to help me to start up my own business. We struggled for a lot of years until we made a production called Farming Down The Years which came about almost by accident."

"That was a massive success and the following year we made a documentary about the linen industry in Northern Ireland. In 1993 we made a documentary about the Famine called Days Of Hunger and the sales of that firmly established us in the marketplace. That video is probably in every school in Northern and Southern Ireland."

A number of John's videos have raked up huge sales. Farming Down The Years — which tells the story of how farming has had to adapt to changing times — sold 28,000 copies and his acclaimed production about the Famine sold 20,000.

John believes he is catering for a section of the community that are being ignored. He said: "People tell me that there is really nothing on television that they want to watch, certainly nothing about the kind of Irish history we feature on our DVDs."

"That's the feedback I get and I suppose that's why they buy the productions we put out. Older people especially are alienated by the kind of programmes on television nowadays."

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