

STEPHEN BREEN

FAT FREDDIE

**A GANGSTER'S LIFE –
THE BLOODY CAREER OF
FREDDIE THOMPSON**

THE NO. 1 BESTSELLER



Fat Freddie

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By the same author

The Cartel
(with Owen Conlon)

Fat Freddie

*A Gangster's Life – the Bloody Career
of Freddie Thompson*

STEPHEN BREEN



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For Chrissie and the boys

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Prologue

Daithi Douglas was enjoying being back at work.

Eight months earlier, the former IRA man and convicted drug dealer had cheated death when he had been shot three times by a gunman as he walked his dog close to his home in Cabra, north Dublin.

At the time of the attack, gardaí examined a number of theories to establish a motive for the shooting of a man who was no stranger to organized crime. Among the theories was that it might have been an assault orchestrated by the enemies of a veteran criminal, Gerry ‘The Monk’ Hutch, because of Douglas’s close connections to the infamous criminal. However, gardaí soon had their main line of inquiry, after receiving intelligence Douglas was targeted because he had been involved in a row at a pub weeks earlier, with a north Dublin man who was involved in organized crime.

By the summer of 2016, Douglas was on the mend and was spending his days working at his wife Yumei’s children’s toy and shoe shop, Shoestown, located in Bridgefoot Street, south inner-city Dublin. Though lucky to be alive following the attempt on his life, Daithi followed a regular routine which was not that of a man under any type of threat. As far as Douglas was concerned, the dispute which had led to him being targeted by an assassin on 8 November 2015 had been resolved.

Unbeknownst to him, however, he was in the sights of one of Ireland’s most dangerous gangland criminals – ‘Fat

Freddie' Thompson – and his associates in the Kinahan cartel, the international crime syndicate led by Christy 'Dapper Don' Kinahan and his two sons, Daniel and Christopher. Worth an estimated billion euros, the gang had originated in south inner-city Dublin before moving their operations to southern Spain. Once there, the cartel established contacts with drugs gangs across the world, including in Colombia, Holland and Morocco. Through their drugs shipments and connections to international criminals, the cartel made a fortune, snapping up properties in Brazil and Dubai as a way of laundering cash. Other business ventures included expanding into the food industry in China.

By June 2016, Thompson and his associates were in the middle of a brutal gangland feud with Gerry Hutch's gang, which resulted in eight lives being lost. Among those murdered was Thompson's first cousin and cartel lieutenant, the 34-year-old David Byrne. He was mown down in a hail of bullets as gunmen, posing as members of the gardai's Emergency Response Unit, stormed into the Regency Hotel, north Dublin, on 5 February 2016.

Within days of the incident, widely regarded as the most audacious attack in Irish gangland history, 'Fat Freddie' Thompson had been summoned to a council of war with his boss and friend, Daniel Kinahan. Apart from his role in sourcing guns and drugs, Thompson also acted as an enforcer for the cartel, regularly collecting debts from gangs who owed money and from desperate drug users. His remit was to instil fear and to use vicious intimidation against those who refused to pay up. It wasn't long before he had a fierce reputation for violence. By the end of the meeting Thompson, who had led the war against gangster Brian 'King

PROLOGUE

Ratt' Rattigan's gang in the Crumlin–Drimnagh feud, was promoted to Dublin leader of the cartel's feud.

As the body count continued to rise in the months following the attack at the Regency Hotel, Thompson was busy identifying targets – and Daithi Douglas's name was near the top of his hit list.

I. Young Guns

There's no doubt there was a steely determination there for him to become one of the main players in organized crime. There were times when he tried to be the joker, when he would hug gardaí or talk about incidents that had been reported in the media, but deep down the only thing that mattered to him was crime.

Former Detective Superintendent Gabriel O'Gara

The two detectives listened intently as their eighteen-year-old prisoner started talking. Whether from naivety or for a more cynical reason, he appeared to break from the normal code of silence adopted by those immersed in the Irish criminal underworld, providing a rare insight into the origins of a feud that had been raging since the summer of 1997 between two warring factions of the same gang, with one side led by Declan 'Deco' Gavin and the other by Brian 'King Ratt' Rattigan. The two officers were left feeling somewhat sceptical when their suspect, Frederick Thompson, informed them that the previous two years of gun attacks and violent assaults had started because of a motorbike.

Thompson, from Loreto Road in the Maryland area of Dublin's south inner city and who, according to one former investigator, once had aspirations of becoming a garda, was no stranger to violence:

Many of us knew him and when he used to see the uniformed lads on the street he would often say: ‘When I grow up, I’m going to join the guards.’ The other kids used to laugh at him and, because he was bulky when he was younger, he wasn’t afraid to dish out a few beatings. He showed zero interest in school and was only interested in getting home to play outside with his friends or help his family on their stall. It’s been strange to see him grow from a young troublemaker who was involved in damaging phone boxes and the odd joyriding incident into one of the country’s most dangerous criminals.

The Thompson family were market traders, dealing on Meath Street in Dublin’s south inner city, and were well respected in the area. No criminals were involved in their stall and it was the family’s main source of income. Showing little interest in school, the young Freddie often worked in the family business. He also developed a passion for boxing but mainly did his training at home and wasn’t aligned to any gym. However, as his criminal career kicked off, he spent less and less time training and instead found himself roaming the streets with a gang of like-minded young men, engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Thompson’s childhood dreams of joining the gardaí soon evaporated when he earned his first conviction, aged sixteen. He was bound over to keep the peace for six months at Dublin’s Children’s Court on 22 April 1997, after he was convicted of a public-order offence for making ‘indictable general comments’ and ‘threatening behaviour’. The case related to him and other young thugs harassing residents around his neighbourhood in the south inner city and shouting abuse as families went about their daily business. Before this incident

he'd spent time selling newspapers and had started work as a butcher's apprentice, but he soon abandoned any plans to earn a living through legitimate means. His first conviction as a teenager would not be his last.

A few weeks later, on 8 May 1997, Freddie was bound over to keep the peace once more, and again on 5 August 1997 for a similar offence. Less than a year later, on 29 June 1998, he was convicted of threatening behaviour for the fourth time.

On 12 January 1999, the now eighteen-year-old received a six-month suspended sentence, again for threatening behaviour. Tried as an adult for the first time, Thompson received the suspended sentence at Dublin District Court for threatening Rattigan associates who were simply walking in the Cork Street area of Dublin's south inner city.

A former neighbour, who did not want to be named, said the people in the area weren't surprised to see the path that he had chosen:

He was always a bit of a bully boy as a child and was in trouble from when he was no age, but no one can answer why he would go on to become centrally involved in murder. He seemed to thrive on it as he got older and most definitely seemed addicted to it.

Less than two years after his first conviction, Thompson had been arrested by detectives from Crumlin Garda Station yet again. He was sitting in the interview room being interrogated about a gun attack on the home of a rival gangster and key Rattigan associate, Noel Roche, at Kilworth Road, Crumlin, on 13 March 1999. The eighteen-year-old was arrested twelve days after the drive-by shooting, in which two shots were fired through the front door of the property. Thompson, along with his best friend and mentor, 'Deco' Gavin, had

emerged as the chief suspects for the attack. Gavin and Freddie Thompson had grown up together and were best friends in their teenage years. Gavin introduced Thompson to crime and Freddie was one of his enforcers in the early days of his career. Despite being just a few months older than Thompson, Gavin was already one of the capital's most prominent drug dealers. After the shooting a resident had also heard Noel Roche shouting: 'If anyone's interested, it was Deco Gavin.'

It was the second time Roche had been targeted by Thompson as the up-and-coming gangster was keen to make a name for himself in the criminal underworld. He was also suspected of firing a shot through Roche's front window nine days earlier, at 11.55 p.m. on the night of 4 March.

In a file compiled by gardaí, as part of their investigations into the growing tensions between the Gavin and Rattigan gangs and their associates, detectives said:

Most of the original members of both gangs grew up together in a small area of Drimnagh. Sometime in 1997 a dispute arose between various members over drugs and money, causing a split. Different members of both gangs were assaulted and a series of tit-for-tat assaults and criminal damage to cars belonging to them occurred. Friends, relatives and associates from other areas including Freddie Thompson, and Paddy Doyle, from the north inner city, were also brought into the dispute.

Paddy Doyle had already earned a fearsome reputation for violence. He was introduced to Thompson through a mutual friend, and the pair struck up a relationship after Doyle offered his services as an enforcer. Doyle was also someone who was trying to make a name for himself in the underworld and he soon informed Thompson he was prepared to kill.

As gardaí interrogated Thompson about the shooting at Noel Roche's house, 'Fat Freddie' outlined how the dispute had accelerated. According to the eighteen-year-old, it all began with Derek Lodge burning a motorbike belonging to Declan Gavin. In retaliation Gavin then attempted to petrol bomb Lodge's house. The detectives noted that it was one 'of the best accounts' of the origins of the feud.

Garda intelligence established that Derek Lodge was a small-time drug dealer from Dublin's south inner city who was involved in a row with 'Deco' Gavin over an unpaid drug debt. When Gavin didn't pay up, Lodge was accused of burning Gavin's motorbike. Lodge had friends in the Rattigan faction and was regarded as someone who wasn't afraid to use violence.

As well as being surprised at Thompson's admission, gardaí such as Detective Superintendent Gabriel O'Gara, now retired, were sceptical:

Here you had this cocky teenager who had grown up idolizing people like Martin Cahill being arrested for a very serious offence and telling detectives it was all to do with someone's motorbike being torched. It may have been a contributing factor to the ongoing tensions between the groups but at the heart of it was money, drugs and power. A number of veteran criminals were doing time around the 1999 and 2000 mark and he was determined to step into their shoes. If only we'd known then what he was capable of. It was all about ego for him. He was a very violent individual and it wasn't long before the people of the south inner city experienced this.

Another retired detective, Dessie Brennan, spent forty-one years working in the gardaí's 'A' District. Home to some

of Ireland's most violent criminals, 'A' District's territory covers swathes of Dublin's south inner city, including Thompson's home ground, Kilmainham and Inchicore. Its territory also extends to areas of Crumlin and Drimnagh which are covered by Sundrive Road and Crumlin Garda Stations. Brennan remembers Thompson as an 'arrogant teenager':

Freddie Thompson was just a cocky young man who was trying to make a name for himself. He was very nice to gardaí when he was stopped and questioned but beneath this façade there was a steely determination for him to become the main man. He was cute and streetwise and knew not to get too aggressive with gardaí. He was at the heart of serious crime in the 'A' District and this lasted for many, many years, with many people suffering.

When detectives interviewed Thompson over the Roche incident it was clear he was displaying a co-operative façade. He was questioned for a day before being released.

The gardaí's subsequent report contained Thompson's claim that the feud had 'escalated' after a car belonging to 'Deco' Gavin's mother, who had no involvement in crime, was 'burnt with acid'.

Completing their investigation into the shootings at Noel Roche's home, gardaí concluded: 'While both Declan Gavin and Freddie Thompson were arrested for these incidents no charges will be preferred due to insufficient evidence.'

Throughout the summer of 1999 the tit-for-tat attacks diminished, with both sides agreeing to a fragile peace. The two factions managed to work together on drugs shipment, using criminals on the payrolls of both sides as intermediaries. The arrangement did not last for long.

According to the gardaí investigators' file, the feud reignited after Gavin was caught up in two major drugs seizures:

The fact that Declan Gavin was arrested on 11 August 1999 in a Garda National Drug Unit (GNDU) operation in which a large quantity of ecstasy tablets, worth €1.5 million, were seized, and again on 10 March 2000, when a large quantity of cocaine and ecstasy were seized, also impacted on the dispute.

After escaping justice on the first drugs capture, due to lack of evidence, investigators were convinced it was Gavin's involvement in the second seizure of 1.7 million euros' worth of cocaine and ecstasy at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Dublin's Pearse Street that sealed his fate. Two fellow gang members Phillip Griffiths and Graham Whelan had gone to two rooms they'd rented in the busy hotel to break up and bag two kilograms of cocaine and 49,000 ecstasy tablets. They had informed staff that they did not want to be disturbed, but the hotel became suspicious when the young men never left their rooms and refused to allow cleaners in.

The hotel contacted Pearse Street Garda Station and five officers were dispatched to the Holiday Inn. Led by Sergeant Seamus Boland, the officers forced their way into the room. They found the huge stash of drugs and caught Graham Whelan throwing a blue holdall bag out the window. The bag was later recovered and gardaí noted that it contained the cocaine the gang had spent two days cutting up and placing into bags for sale on the streets of Dublin. Weighing equipment and other drug-mixing paraphernalia were also discovered. Gavin, who was in another hotel, kept ringing Griffiths' phone and trying to get through to the room. Gardaí kept the line engaged and he stormed into the room thinking his cohorts were out of it. That's when he was arrested.

Questioned over a two-day period, Gavin was later released without charge. A file was prepared by gardaí for the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), and Gavin's two friends, Griffiths and Whelan, were later charged with possession of drugs with intent to supply. As news of the charges and Gavin's subsequent release spread to the south inner city, the young dealer was branded a 'rat' by Brian Rattigan and his associates.

Rattigan, who was suspected of contributing €35,000 to pay for the drugs shipment, demanded his money back. Gavin refused to hand over any cash, describing the seizure as an 'occupational hazard'. Rattigan vowed revenge and, despite Gavin's pleas of innocence, the gang fractured. According to detectives in one file on the dispute, 'each side was blaming the other for "ratting" to gardaí'.

On the one side was the faction led by Rattigan and his associates, who were convinced Gavin was a garda informer. On the other, Gavin had secured the support of Freddie Thompson and others, including Daniel and Christopher Kinahan, the sons of the drugs godfather Christy 'Dapper Don' Kinahan, and of Freddie's cousins, Liam Byrne, his brother David and Liam Roe.

As gardaí continued to keep a special eye on the feuding gangs, they pulled over a car in July 2000. Inside were Thompson, Declan Gavin and David Byrne, whose execution years later would lead to a bloodbath between the Kinahan cartel and Gerry 'The Monk' Hutch's gang. They had all clearly been in a fight. With the gangland battle lines drawn, it was only a matter of time before the hostilities escalated.

Gardaí were fully aware of Thompson's potential for violence. A few months earlier, on 12 February 2000, he'd attacked a man with a screwdriver outside the Garda Members' Club

on Harrington Street, in inner-city Dublin. On that occasion Thompson had been arguing with his partner when an innocent bystander asked him to calm down. 'Fat Freddie' then twice stabbed the man in the arm, before fleeing from the area. He was arrested and later charged with assault causing harm, but it would be almost three years before he appeared in court in connection with the offence.

Around the same time, Thompson was forging links with criminals in the north inner city, including young criminals such as Christopher 'Bouncer' Hutch, a nephew of Gerry Hutch. On one occasion, on 17 October 2000, Thompson was stopped in a car along with Christopher Hutch and Barry Finnegan, a member of the Hutch gang. According to gardaí: 'This crew were heading towards a house on Ballyfermot Road. Another associate was hanging around the area. Search was negative. All are active criminals.'

Thompson also had other issues on his mind when his then girlfriend, Vicky Dempsey, gave birth to the couple's only son, Bradley, on 7 November 2000. However, the nineteen-year-old was still heavily involved in tit-for-tat attacks during the feud and seemed to place more emphasis on this than on becoming a father. Thompson was repeatedly caught driving with no insurance, and he was stopped on other occasions in 2000 and in 2001 with known criminals, including David Byrne and another young criminal, who later emigrated to Australia.

Tension mounted as both sides continued to issue threats and brand each other as 'rats' when they crossed paths in their rival territories. Thompson in particular was running a campaign of intimidation which former Detective Superintendent O'Gara said made it hard for the garda forces to put an end to the cycle of violence:

The problem for gardaí at the time was that people were afraid to come forward because of what might happen to them or their families. From 2001 onwards, Freddie Thompson was behind what can only be described as a reign of terror, but things would get even worse once he came under the control of the Kinahan Organized Crime Group, who were beginning to flex their muscles at home and abroad. I've also no doubt that if the resources available to gardaí now in the fight against organized crime were available as Thompson was beginning his career things could have been a lot different for him.

The Rattigan gang made the next move in the ongoing war. On 5 June 2001, the home of a key Thompson associate, Darren Geoghegan, on Galtymore Road in Drimnagh, was targeted in a drive-by shooting. For Gavin and Thompson the attack was a declaration of war as Geoghegan was regarded as a senior member of their gang. Geoghegan was also responsible for laundering cash for criminal gangs across the capital and had been linked to a drive-by shooting in west Dublin a few months earlier. During the gun attack an elderly relative narrowly escaped injury and, vowing revenge, Geoghegan, Thompson and Gavin placed Rattigan at the top of their hit list.

Three months after the drive-by shooting, gardaí stopped Thompson as he was driving his car. While nothing was found during the search, gardaí noted the tax disc had a different registration to the vehicle itself and Thompson was 'obnoxious and aggressive'. Surveillance operations on the two factions by garda intelligence at the time revealed the Rattigan faction had 28 gang members and 53 associates, compared to 27 trusted foot soldiers in the Gavin and Thompson faction, along with 52 associates. However, according to gardaí, it was

the Gavin and Thompson faction's links to forty associates of a veteran criminal, Martin 'The Viper' Foley, including James 'Jaws' Byrne, the father of Thompson's cousins and future Kinahan cartel lieutenants Liam and David Byrne, that gave their side 'a slight advantage'. An aspiring hitman for hire, Eric 'Lucky' Wilson, had also offered his services to Thompson and his allies.

Wilson was a young criminal from the Ballyfermot area who was also earning a reputation for violence. Martin 'The General' Cahill was a relative. He, like Paddy Doyle, had made it clear he was willing to kill in return for cash.

Both sides had sought help from outside the capital, with the Rattigan faction joining forces with the Keane/Collopy gang in Limerick, while the Gavin and Thompson side forged an alliance with the McCarthy/Dundon gang, the Keane/Collopy's arch rivals, also Limerick based. Just as in Dublin, the Limerick gangs had once worked together before greed and paranoia swept through their ranks, leading to bloodshed.

During their investigations into the capital's warring factions, gardaí noted:

All were associates of main gang members at one stage or another and inevitably there could be crossovers. A worrying link has now emerged with the differing sides in the Drimnagh feud aligning themselves with feuding gangs in Limerick. These associations are believed to have originated from their associations while in prison.

While gardaí classified the Gavin and Thompson faction as the stronger of the two opposing drugs gangs, both sides continued to issue threats. It was Rattigan's actions on 25 August 2001, however, that led to a declaration of gangland war and to the loss of sixteen lives over a fifteen-year period

in what would become one of Ireland's deadliest gangland disputes – the Crumlin–Drimnagh feud.

On the evening of 24 August, Brian Rattigan and his associates had gathered to celebrate the eighteenth birthday of his brother Joey. The gangster and his friends enjoyed a marathon cocaine and booze session into the early hours of 25 August. 'King Ratt' then decided he wanted some food so he ordered his associate John Roche, Noel Roche's brother, to get some extra supplies at the Abrakebabra fast-food outlet in Crumlin.

Arriving at the restaurant, Roche noticed Rattigan's one-time friend and now bitter enemy – Declan Gavin. He immediately launched into a tirade of abuse, calling Gavin 'a rat'. Gavin protested his innocence and retaliated by saying that Roche was a garda informant. As other clientele looked on, Gavin then claimed that he would soon be charged over the Holiday Inn drugs seizure and would also be going to prison. Roche dismissed these claims and continued to hurl abuse at 'Deco'.

Roche's friends dragged him away from the restaurant and they all returned to the party. When they told Brian Rattigan about the heated exchange with his former friend, the gangster was raging. He armed himself with a knife, got a balaclava and ordered his associates to drive him to the restaurant.

Arriving back at Abrakebabra around 3.30 a.m., Rattigan and his friends saw Gavin and started shouting 'rats' from the car. Brian Rattigan pulled on his balaclava and ran towards his former friend. As a group of young people who had just returned to the area after a night out ran for cover, Rattigan plunged a knife into Gavin's chest. Seriously injured, Gavin stumbled into Abrakebabra in a desperate attempt to flee from his attacker, his one-time friend and ally. A security

guard acted quickly and locked the door, blocking Rattigan from following 'Deco' into the restaurant to finish the job. The rival gang then fled the scene as Gavin's close associates, Darren Geoghegan and Paddy Doyle, arrived.

A number of people in the restaurant tried to help Gavin before he was transferred to St James's Hospital at around 4 a.m. He was immediately rushed to the operating theatre, having suffered a single stab wound to the heart. Despite their best efforts to save him, Thompson's best friend was pronounced dead shortly afterwards.

It wasn't long before news of Declan Gavin's death and the identity of his murderer reached the Thompson faction. The confirmation that Brian Rattigan was responsible for the killing spread throughout the south inner city. According to security sources, Freddie Thompson vowed revenge and put plans in motion to target members of the Rattigan faction.

In the meantime, Gavin's family were in the sights of Rattigan's gang. Gardaí received intelligence that Rattigan had instructed his enforcers to bomb the home belonging to Gavin's mother, Pauline. Declan's older brother Aidan, who distanced himself from Thompson after the killing, later stated that he'd been told he had a €50,000 price on his head and that there had been attempts on his life. He claimed a detective from the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) had advised him to arm himself with some type of weapon for protection. Aidan Gavin also said he was living a life under threat and had been forced to sleep in different safe houses across Dublin to avoid being killed.

Following Gavin's killing, more of Thompson's associates distanced themselves from the gang, often at the request of their families. Liam Greenhalgh, ex-captain of the Irish under-16 football team, and a close friend of Declan Gavin, fled to

Australia a year after the killing, making a new life for himself. Just a year before Gavin's killing, he had received a four-year suspended sentence for pointing a gun at gardaí during a motorcycle chase on 18 July 1998. Along with Thompson's first cousin Liam Byrne, Greenhalgh had pleaded guilty to possessing a weapon with intent and to robbery of a shop in the Liberties area. Unlike many of his friends, a former neighbour explained, Greenhalgh was one of the lucky ones:

Liam was an intelligent young man and had simply got caught up with the wrong people. Once his friend Gavin was killed, he knew he had to leave otherwise he would end up dead or in prison. He made the decision to leave his family behind and create a good life for himself. The only time he comes back to Ireland is for funerals. He's not involved in anything now and has put his associations with Byrne and Thompson firmly in the past.

Immediately following Gavin's death, a major murder investigation was launched by detectives from Sundrive Road Garda Station in Crumlin, south Dublin. Gardaí received a crucial piece of evidence early on, when a palm print was taken from the window of the restaurant. It was later established that the palm print matched Rattigan's left palm. An analysis of blood found next to Rattigan's palm print was also discovered to match Gavin's DNA. The gardaí had their number one suspect – as did Freddie Thompson, who was now the gang's leader.

Detective Sergeant Joe O'Hara and a number of other gardaí called to Rattigan's family home to arrest him on 28 August, but he was not there, as he was staying at a safe house. They knew he was due in court on 4 September 2001, but he fled when they approached. He was later arrested that day in a pub

on James's Street. However, he was released soon afterwards due to lack of evidence. He was also arrested on suspicion of possessing firearms, but again was later released without charge. The investigating team had no choice but to allow Rattigan back on the streets as files were prepared for the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Thompson's number one priority was to avenge the death of his best friend, but he was biding his time until the huge garda response to the feud died down. He was also attending to the organization of more drug deals. The tensions between the two rival factions had led to increased garda activity, but they still managed to carry on business as usual. Both Rattigan and Thompson had their own customers and suppliers and they flooded the south inner city with batches of heroin and cocaine.

As Thompson and his allies regrouped over the coming weeks and months, it was the Rattigan faction who launched another attack. On 15 November 2001 they fired shots for a second time at Darren Geoghegan's home in Galtymore Road, Drimnagh. No one was hurt in the attack but Thompson was coming under pressure from his gang to hit back. In a preemptive strike, gardaí from the Kevin Street and Sundrive Road Stations swamped the south inner city over December 2001 and into 2002. They knew the threat of violence from both sides remained at a very high level and they were preparing for the worst.

Former Detective Superintendent O'Gara, who was a detective inspector at Kevin Street Garda Station between 2001 and 2007, recalled:

It was an extremely difficult period for gardaí in the weeks and months after the killing of Declan Gavin. Gavin was a

serious player and it was clear there would be no end in sight to the violence because both factions were intent on causing as much damage as possible. The gardaí did everything they could to keep a lid on the violence because it was always simmering in the background; the targeting was continuing on a daily basis. Thompson and Gavin were like brothers and Thompson was determined to strike back after his killing. Thompson had filled the void left by Gavin's death and he was clearly out for blood. Thankfully no one lost their lives for the remainder of 2001, but we knew that wouldn't last.

This is also a view shared by former Detective Garda Brennan:

It was a very tense time for gardaí trying to keep a lid on things and resources were certainly stretched. Everyone knew what we were dealing with and there was this underlying fear that things would only get worse because of the calibre of criminal we were dealing with. They were both vying for the top position in the world of organized crime in the south inner city. The killing of Declan Gavin made it personal to Thompson and I thought the feud would only end with either of them being arrested or killed. I had absolutely no idea this thing would go on for as long as it has.

In the early months of 2002, gardaí braced themselves for more violence. On 15 February 2002, Rattigan embarked on another mission to murder his rivals. His gang had received information on Thompson's possible location, but the shooter was unable to locate him. It was a lucky escape for the 21-year-old.

Around midnight on St Patrick's Day 2002, Rattigan decided

to make another move. He received information that senior members of the Thompson faction were socializing at Judge Darley's pub in the Parkgate Street area of the city centre. Arming himself with a handgun, Rattigan travelled to the bar with an accomplice and fired a number of shots. The garda report stated: 'Brian Rattigan did a drive-by shooting at this pub as a number of the opposite gang were drinking there. This happened at 1 a.m. in the morning. Rattigan was later arrested but there wasn't enough evidence for a charge.' Unbeknownst to Rattigan, his enemies had been meeting to discuss the execution of 'Deco' Gavin's killer and they wasted no time in putting their plan into action.

Just three hours after the shots were fired at the city centre pub, Thompson and Paddy Doyle, along with two other gang members, made the trip to Rattigan's family home in Cooley Road, Drimnagh. Brian Rattigan was still living there, along with other innocent members of his family, who were not involved in crime. As they approached the house, Rattigan's younger brother Joey spotted the two gunmen. Unable to wake his older brother, who was in a drunken stupor, he warned Brian's then girlfriend, Natasha McEnroe, to 'get up quick' as there were 'fellas outside with ballys and guns'. Joey then ran out to the back garden and hid until it was all over.

According to a subsequent garda file on the attack:

Following the incident at Judge Darley's pub, Freddie Thompson and Patrick Doyle organized a gang to go to Rattigan's house at 4 a.m. in the morning. They shot their way into the house, discharging a number of bullets. At least four people were involved. Brian Rattigan was shot in the stomach by Freddie Thompson.

McEnroe ran to an en suite bathroom, where she watched one of the gunmen shoot her sleeping boyfriend. He was later rushed to hospital and, although left with serious injuries, managed to survive.

Fleeing from the property, the two gunmen went straight past McEnroe as she yelled: 'Come back here you dirty bastards.' One of the men pulled up his mask and smiled as Rattigan was left lying in a pool of blood. Natasha told gardaí that the man under the mask was 'Fat Freddie' Thompson.

Thompson and Doyle were arrested at the beginning of August but were later released without charge and a file was forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions. When told that he had been identified as one of the gunmen, Thompson warned gardaí: 'Mark my words, she won't go to court with that.'

Having escaped justice for the gun attack on the Roche family home, Thompson had luck on his side once again when the DPP subsequently ruled there would be no prosecution.

With Rattigan lucky to be alive and recovering from his injuries, Thompson's gang had the upper hand. The gardaí continued to keep up the pressure, however, and Thompson found himself before a court the following day. He had been arrested on suspicion of dangerous driving and received a fine.

The violence was unceasing, and two months later another young man linked to the feud was killed. On 22 May 2002, Derek Lodge, one of Thompson's former associates and the man accused of starting the feud by burning Declan Gavin's motorbike, was shot dead outside a portable cabin on the Kenilworth Road in Rathgar, south Dublin. While he may have been involved in the origins of the feud, gardaí believed Lodge was targeted by a hitman, Shay Wildes from Tallaght, because he had threatened another man. Lodge would have

known all the main players in the feud and often socialized in the same pubs as Freddie Thompson, who was a suspect, but gardaí further said that:

It's not known if Lodge was involved with the Roche and Rattigan gang but someone had put his name up for burning Gavin's motorbike. In any event Lodge moved well away from this gang shortly afterwards and was not associating with them at the time of his murder.

As tensions continued to mount on the streets of Dublin's south inner city, an innocent man had a lucky escape when he was targeted by the Thompson faction on 28 May 2002. The resident, who wasn't involved in crime or linked to any of the feuding factions, was targeted at his Crumlin Road home after Thompson's enforcers wrongly linked him to their enemies. Detectives reported:

This man answered a knock to his front door at 3 a.m. A gunman discharged a .38 round through the front door hitting the man in the chin. He refused to co-operate and didn't make a complaint. Information was that the man saw Declan Gavin at Abrakebabra and then made contact with Brian Rattigan who went down and killed him. There was no link ever made to this in the Gavin killing. No arrests were made in the shooting but it's believed to be part of the Freddie Thompson gang.

Gardaí braced themselves for more violence and knew they wouldn't have to wait long for further retaliations, as former Detective Superintendent O'Gara described:

With Freddie Thompson leading one gang and Brian Rattigan the other, the potential for violence was huge. We were

dealing with two young men who were extremely violent and volatile. We were trying to disrupt the activities of two of the most violent criminals this country has ever seen. They didn't care that the actions of their associates were destroying the communities they called home. Gardaí were out there every night putting their lives on the line trying to protect communities from criminals who were hell-bent on death and destruction. Paranoia was rife within the gangs and they were under serious pressure. If gardaí had access to the type of anti-gangland legislation used by the courts today, then things might have turned out differently.

The required legislation would not be enacted for another seven years. In the meantime, a killing spree orchestrated and masterminded by Thompson would soon be under way.