



# Affairs of state aplenty for the century's greatest courtesan

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Lara Marlowe

**PAMELA** Churchill Harriman declined to give The Irish Times an interview. But after reading two biographies of the US ambassador to Paris, you can understand why. It must be awful to have one's face constantly rubbed in one's own dirty bed linen.

Some 20 years after their failed marriage, Ms Harriman's first husband, Randolph Churchill, called her a whore to her face. On the verge of marrying Pamela, now 76, her second husband, Leland Hayward, boasted that she was "the greatest courtesan of the 20th century".

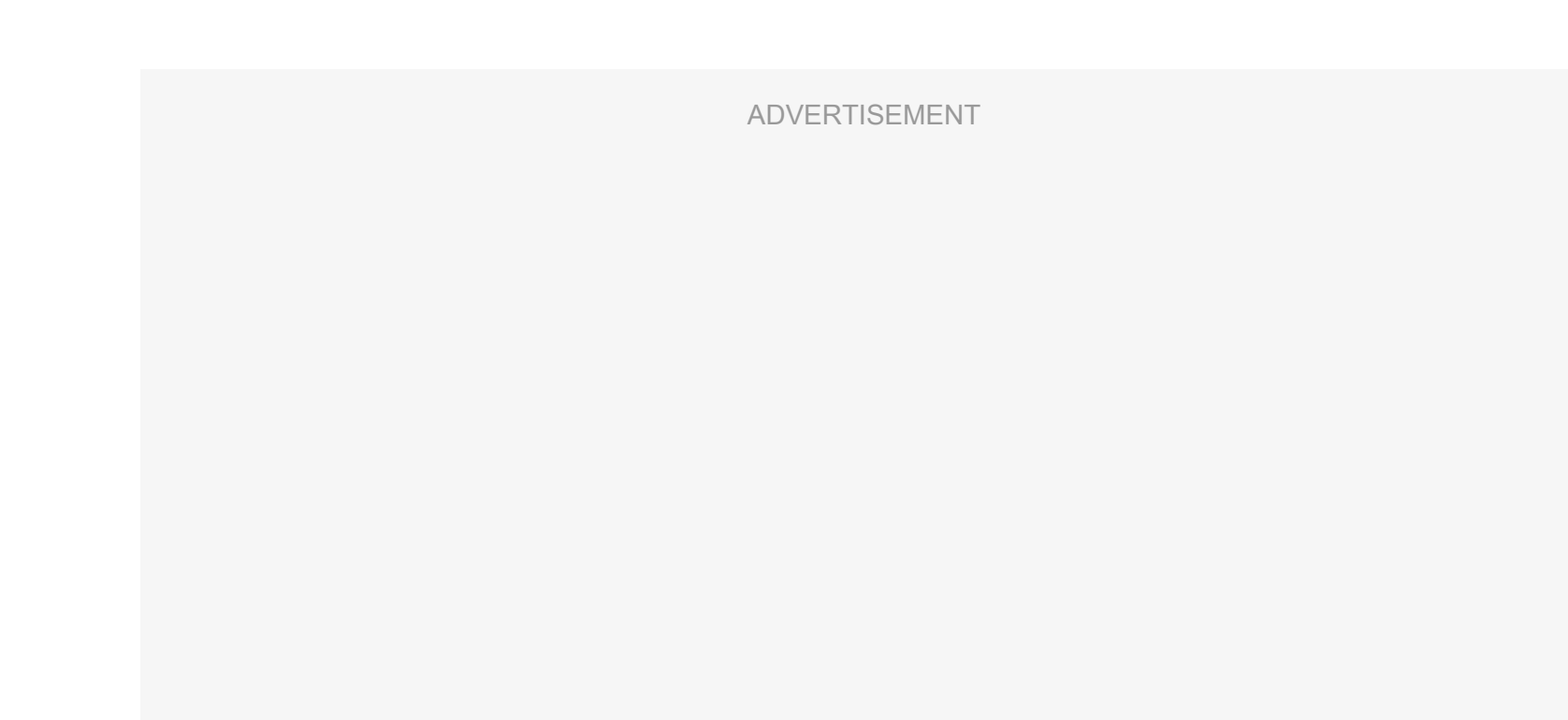
Her much neglected son, the British member of parliament Winston Churchill, said his mother was "too busy whoring around" for him to enjoy Christmas as a child, according to biographer Christopher Ogden.

The distinction between whore and courtesan is a fine one, which Harriman's biographers, Mr Ogden and Ms Sally Bedell Smith, graciously blur. After encouraging Ms Bedell Smith, a former New York Times reporter, followed in Mr Ogden's footsteps. Ms Harriman refused to talk to her but Ms Smith nonetheless ferreted out new details of the British born aristocrat's extraordinary life in her newly published book Reflected Glory.

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Nothing in the background of Pamela Beryl Digby (later Pamela Churchill Harriman) seemed to predestine her to sleep with many of the world's richest men save, perhaps, her fascination with a 19th century ancestor whose affairs so scandalised the family that her portrait was hung face to the wall at Minterne Magna, the Digby family's baronial estate where Pamela grew up in Dorset.

The Digbys lost their vast holdings in Ireland nearly 40,000 acres in the 1920s. When the Digbys Geashill Castle in Tullamore was burned down in 1922, Pamela's mother, Lady "Pansy" Digby, said she was glad she would never have to live there.



An unhappy marriage to British prime minister Winston Churchill's hard drinking, womanising, gambling son, Randolph, brought Pamela to No 10 Downing Street during the second World War. Old Winston was genuinely fond of his son's red headed 19 year old bride and the two often played cards together late into the night.

When the British army sent Randolph to Cairo, Pamela began a passionate affair with Averell Harriman, a New York millionaire 30 years her senior who had been sent by President Roosevelt to supervise American war aid to Britain.

Even during her two year affair with the married Harriman, Pamela had other lovers. There was another American millionaire, John Hay Whitney, and the US air force's Gen Frederick Anderson. While ordinary Britons put up with rationing during the war, her lovers kept her supplied with nylon stockings, perfume, lipstick, I and luxury food.

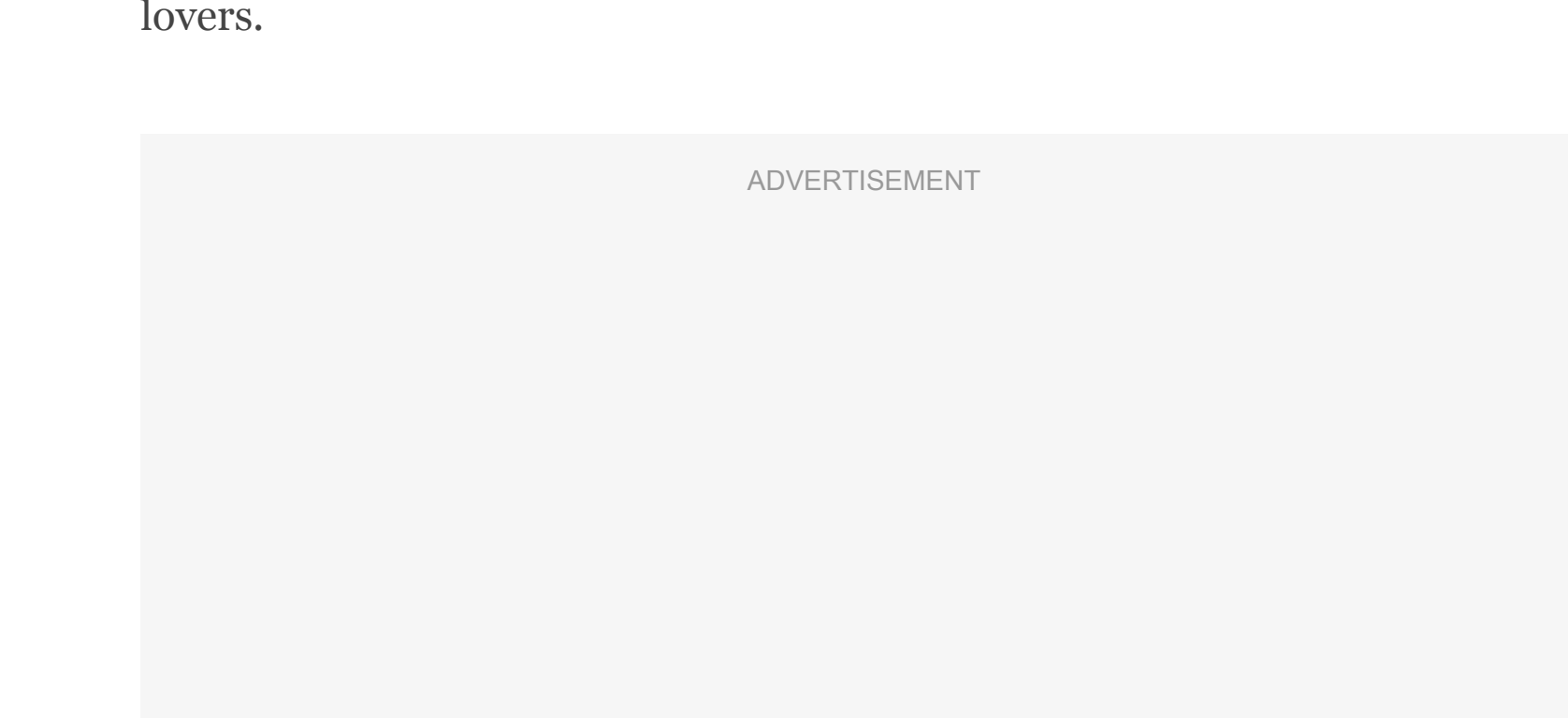
She added Edward Murrow, the CBS broadcaster, to her collection and was bitterly disappointed when he refused to leave his wife to marry her.

Pamela had little knowledge of how most people lived. On holiday with her friend, Kathleen "Kick" Kennedy, in Ireland in 1947, she met the future US president, John F. Kennedy. One day she accompanied him to New Ross, from where the Kennedys had emigrated to the US.

They were given tea in a thatched cottage with pigs, ducks and chickens scurrying around. As they left the village, Pamela made a snide remark "Just like Tobacco Road," referring to a 1930s novel about rural poverty in the American south.

Kennedy was furious. "I felt like kicking her out of the car," he recalled decades later. "For me, the visit to that cottage was filled with magic sentiment."

Pamela divorced Randolph Churchill but kept his name and converted to Catholicism in the hope of persuading her Italian billionaire lover, Gianni Agnelli, to marry her. When Agnelli dumped her to wed an Italian princess, Pamela snared the French banker and wine grower Baron Elle de Rothschild. He supported her in grand style in 1950s Paris and turned a blind eye to her lovers.



But Pamela was cruelly snubbed when Queen Elizabeth made her first state visit to France in 1957. "I will not have that tart in this embassy," the British ambassador's wife sniffed.

In the late 1950s, Pamela realised that although European men kept their mistresses well, they rarely married them. She moved to the US and snatched Broadway! producer Leland Hayward from his wife. When Hayward died in 1971, Pamela was appalled to find he had left little money.

SHE pursued singer Frank Sinatra. Then, after a 30 year hiatus, she resumed affair with the newly widowed Averell Harriman, whom she married six months after Hayward's death. As wife of a former ambassador to Britain and the Soviet Union, and former governor of New York, Pamela at last had respectability as well as money. Long before Harriman's death in 1986, she became a US citizen and an ardent campaigner for the Democratic Party.

By the time President Bill Clinton was elected in 1992, Pamela Harriman had raised \$12 million for the Democrats. Clinton rewarded her with the Paris embassy. She speaks French fluently and has by all accounts been an excellent ambassador. The French merely chuckle at her much publicised past.

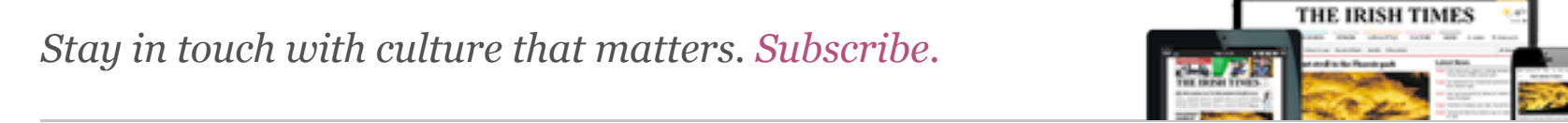
But her stay was marred by a lawsuit filed by her stepchildren, who accused her of squandering their trust fund. After a bruising legal battle, she paid them \$11 million last year.

When Averell Harriman died, Pamela had an empty casket buried next to his first wife, Marie. She kept his body refrigerated for two months before having him buried in another plot, where she one day plans to be buried beside him.

"In life," biographer Christopher Ogden noted, "Pamela had always been forced to share her men. She was damn well not going to share Averell in death."



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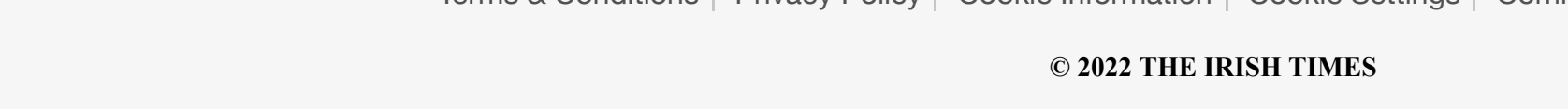
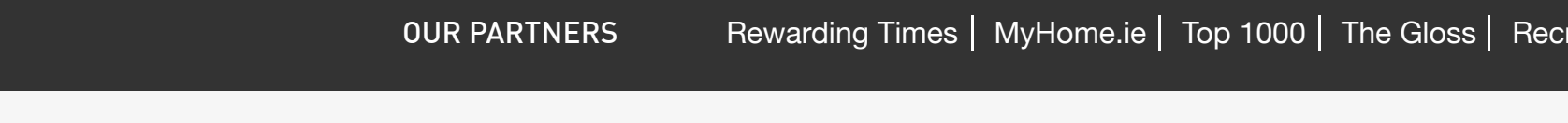
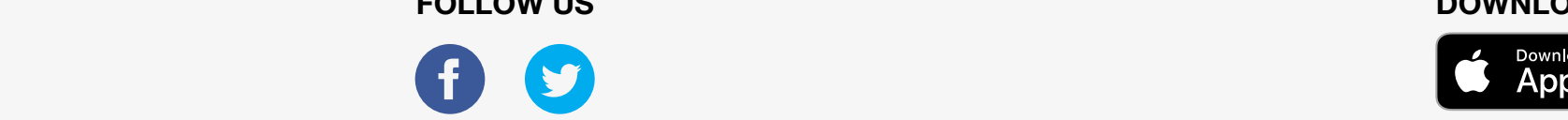
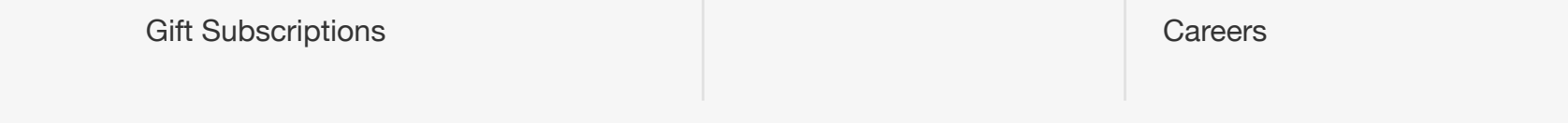
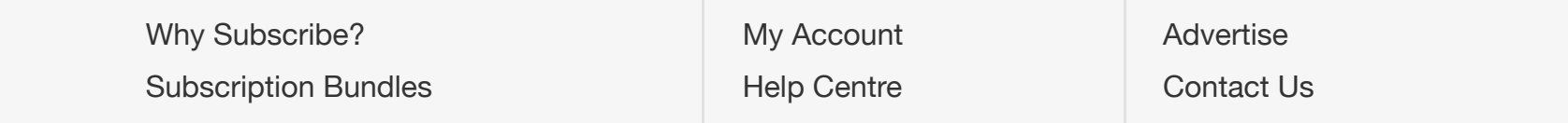
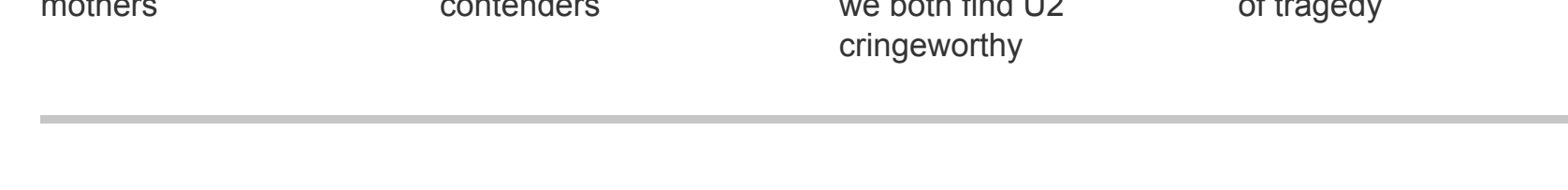
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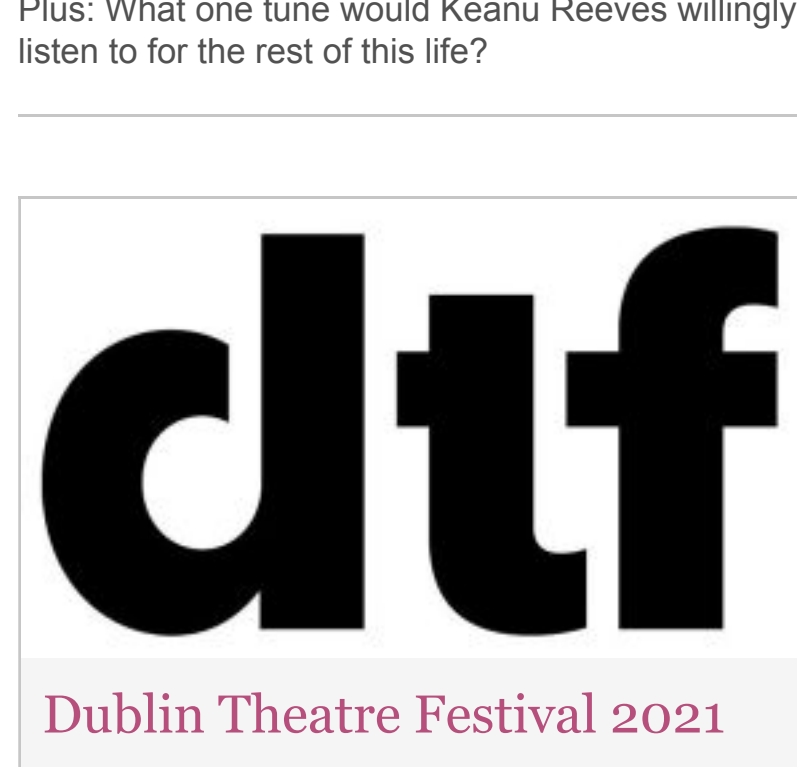
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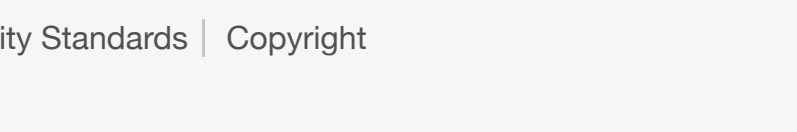
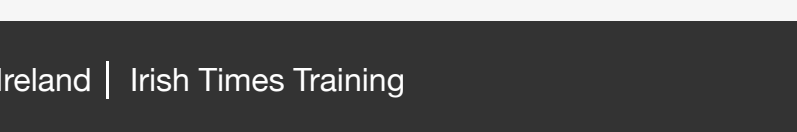
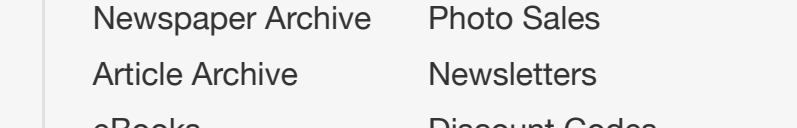
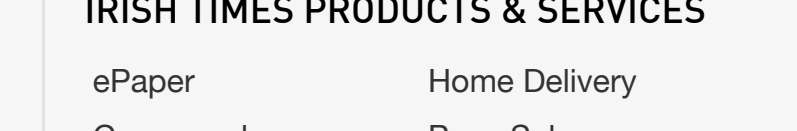
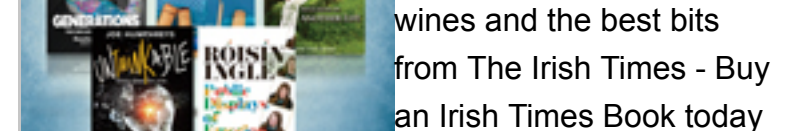
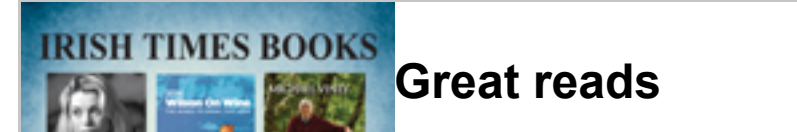
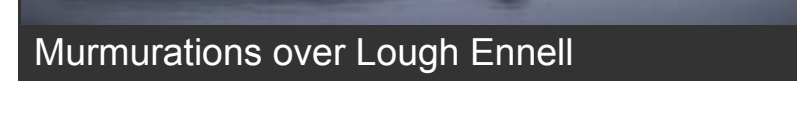
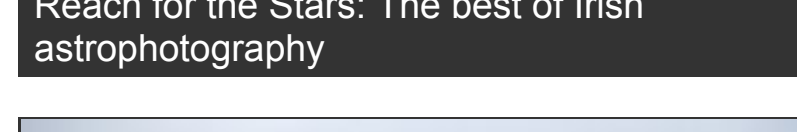
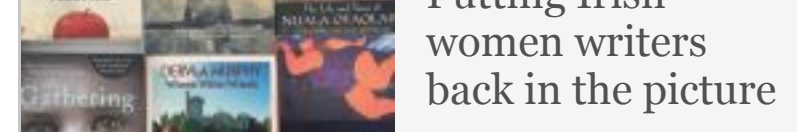
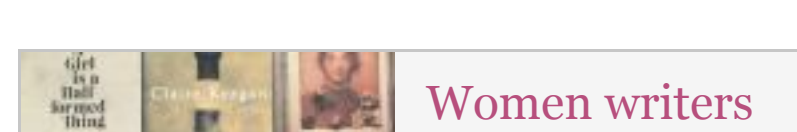
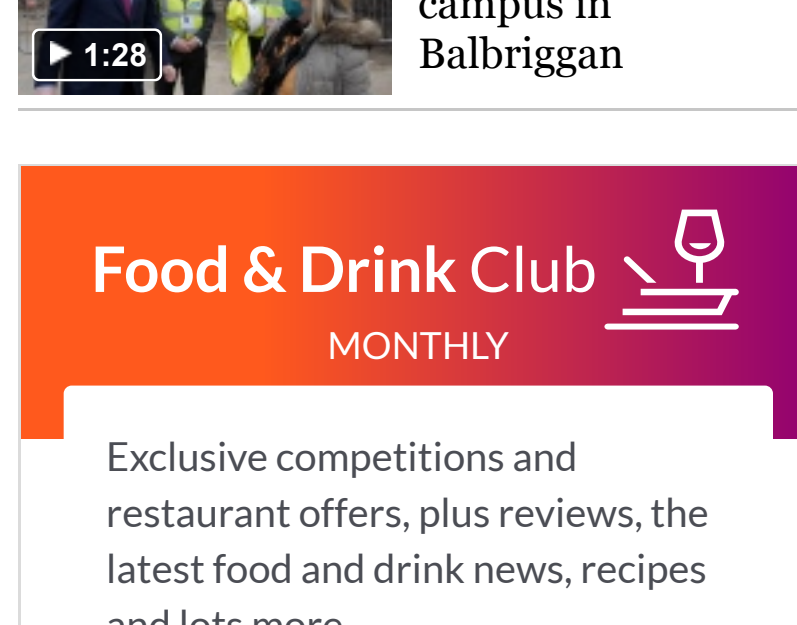


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