

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913:21

No. W.S. 563

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 563

**Witness**

Michael Cremen,  
138 Lower Kimmage Road,  
Dublin.

**Identity.**

Member of 'E' Company, 4th Battalion, Dublin Brigade  
1913 - ;  
Member of I.R.B. Dublin;  
Captain - O/C. No. 1 Company, Engineer Battalion,  
1919.

**Subject.**

- (a) National activities 1913-1921;
- (b) The Rising of 1916 - G.P.O. Dublin;
- (c) Civil Servants and the British Oath of Allegiance, 1918.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No. ....S.632.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF MR. MICHAEL CREMEN,

138 Lower Kimmage Road, Dublin.

I joined the Volunteers at the Rotunda meeting on the 25th November, 1913. At the time I was camping in the Dublin mountains. It was "E" Company of the 4th Battalion I joined, and I remained with it until after the Rising of 1916. P.H. Pearse was the Company Captain and I think Eamon Bulfin was a Lieutenant.

Company Arms Fund:

At the time an arms fund was established in the Company which, about the time of the Rising, had accumulated to approximately £200. I cannot say what became of these funds. They were lodged in the bank under the names of two trustees. When the split in the Volunteers took place, one of the trustees, named Horan, went Redmondite and the other, Frank Sheridan, remained with us. I was deputed to approach Horan with a view to obtaining his agreement to divide the funds on the basis of the relative strength of the Irish Volunteers and the National Volunteers in the Company. Horan, however, refused to come to any arrangement and, as far as I know, the funds were never recovered.

Escort for Pearse:

On the approach of the date of the Rising, strong rumours were current that the Castle authorities were going to arrest all Executive officers of the Volunteers. With a view to preventing the arrest of P.H. Pearse, it was a common occurrence for some of the Volunteers, usually the students of St. Enda's, to escort him from the tramway terminus to St. Enda's.

Training Camps, 1915:

In the summer of 1915 intensive training in the use of arms and field craft was the order of the day for all units of the Volunteers. With this object in view, three principal training camps or areas were established, one in Wicklow, one in the Galtee mountains and one in the West, known as the Shannon Camp. I joined the last mentioned. Colonel J.J. O'Connell was in charge of all three areas. The Shannon Camp started from Coosan, Athlone, and we marched to the vicinity of Galway city where exercises were staged with the local Volunteers. Some members with me in the Camp at the time, who were later to become prominent in public life, were Dick Mulcahy, Austin Stack, Terence MacSwiney and Pierce McCann of Tipperary. This camp or training centre lasted for a fortnight.

On completion of our fortnight's training, undergone during my holidays, I returned to my employment in the Post Office at Aldborough House. Throughout that summer training continued and route marches of long and short duration were frequent occurrences. I remember on one particular occasion we were out for the whole week-end. That was at Whitsun and we regarded it as an endurance test, hence only those who were fit physically were allowed to take part in it.

I.R.B. Meetings:

While I was a member of the Volunteer force, I was also a member of the I.R.B. Our meeting place was at Parnell Square. I cannot recall any matters of importance that were discussed at these I.R.B. meetings which I attended. I do remember, however, that coming on to Easter Week, 1916, instructions were issued that we were not to leave Dublin over the Easter week-end. While it was not made clear that a Rising was to take place, I was satisfied

that one was in the offing.

Preparations for the Rising:

I remember a few days before the Rising I was told to approach Frank Sheridan, who was in charge of Company funds, to procure as much food as possible for a long route march for the Company.

I must have been definitely aware of the Rising on Easter Saturday or probably earlier, because I was ordered to take possession of Aldborough House (Post Office Stores) in company with Seán Heuston on Easter Sunday.

On Saturday night I took my arms and equipment to 19, Upper Sherrard Street, near Aldborough House. Mrs. Ward ran the house. Her brother was a Volunteer, and a number of Volunteers lodged there.

The Rising:

Before leaving the house on Sunday morning, I read the "Sunday Independent" and saw that the orders for the assembly of Volunteers that day had been cancelled by MacNeill. I thought this was a ruse on the part of the British and advised a number of the Volunteers, who were with me in the house, to that effect. One or other of the Volunteers who had been at Mass told me that the Pearse brothers were in the Jesuit Church, Gardiner Street. Having heard where they were positioned in the Church, I made my way to them, and I asked P.H. Pearse was the MacNeill order a bogus one or a British ruse. He said no, but that I would have further orders later on. A number of the Fianna, including Con Colbert, used to frequent Frank Fahy's place at the time in Conyngham Road, near the Park, and I went down there and stayed in Fahy's until some time next morning awaiting instructions. There was a constant flow of Volunteers coming in and going out of the house, amongst

*I think ml*  
whom were Heuston and Con Colbert. Up to 1 a.m., or possibly later, as no orders had reached me, I decided that I might as well go up to the camp at the Pine Forest.

Later that morning, on Easter Monday, I was mobilised by one of the Volunteers and went down to Rathfarnham. Outside the Church where the Volunteers were assembled, I remember Seán Lester, who was a factotum of MacNeill at the time, was trying to impress the Volunteers on the MacNeill order, to which they paid no attention. The Company were under orders to report to Liberty Hall. They had decided to go by tram as it was the quickest transport to the city at the time. On the way in, I cycled in front of the tram without arms, the understanding being that my actions would indicate whether there was any obstruction en route by way of military patrols, etc., in which event the Volunteers would *drive through at all costs ml* ~~have time to jump off the tram and deploy for attack.~~ We met with no opposition and the Company reached Liberty Hall without incident. On our arrival there, it was learned that Pearse and his officers had gone to the G.P.O. The Company then marched in a body to the G.P.O. When I got in there, I told Pearse that my arms and equipment were in Sherrard Street near my post at Aldborough House. As I was about to collect it, he warned me to be careful as there were reports that the British were closing in. Actually, I did meet the Lancers, partly in O'Connell Street and partly in Parnell Square, on my way to Sherrard Street. However, I reached my objective unmolested, and, when I had collected my arms, I decided to return to the Post Office by a different route via Gardiner Street and Corporation Street. Having noticed a group of people peering around the corner in the direction of Earl Street, I inquired of them if the British military were in that neighbourhood and I was told they were. This turned out to be incorrect but presumably my informants were mistaken, as shots could be heard. On

the way back, I ran into a bunch of Separation/<sup>Allowance</sup>women by whom I was booed. They also tried to make me a target for flower-pots and suchlike heavy missiles. I decided to go to Liberty Hall first of all, with a view to learning how things stood. There I met a party who had come from the G.P.O. to collect the last truckful of the grenades and equipment stored there. I returned with them to the G.P.O. The material collected consisted mostly of home-made grenades of a very crude type. A small tin can enclosed the explosives and shrapnel. A short length of fuse with a sulphur top or cap led into the grenade. The grenades were handed into the G.P.O. through one of the Prince's Street windows. Those on the outside placed them on a sill, from where they were collected by those inside the building. One of the grenades exploded - possibly through friction of the sulphur cap - in Liam Clarke's face. On that evening, I was sent to a position on the roof of the Post Office at the north-east corner facing Amiens Street. This was to be my post for the next couple of nights.

The following incident, which I clearly remember, illustrates the spirit of some of the citizens of Dublin during that week. One individual at this post did not appear to me to have had any military training, so I asked him if he was a member of the Volunteers or Citizen Army, and he replied in the negative. I then asked him how he got in there, and he said he was in O'Connell Street when James Connolly appealed for volunteers and he considered it his duty to come along. Incidentally, this man was obviously of very poor social standing.

Shortly after going to the post, it occurred to me that, if the British gained the Pillar and reached the top of it, they would command the roof of the Post Office. I mentioned this to P.H. Pearse, volunteering to take up a

position on the Pillar myself and so prevent the British from occupying it. Pearse had the situation examined by Slattery, an engineer, who taught at St. Enda's. His report was that any action on the part of the Volunteers was unnecessary.

I now recall an incident that took place the first time, I think, that I left the Post Office to go to Sherrard Street to collect my equipment. I saw Connolly and Pearse together in the street just as the Tricolour was being hoisted on the G.P.O. As Connolly shook hands with Pearse, I heard him say, "Thank God, Pearse, we (or I) have lived to see this day!"

To return to the Post Office, when the warning came to evacuate, we left it by the Henry Street exit and crossed by Henry Place to Moore Street. I saw a group of Volunteers bunched at the turn of Henry Place and learned that they were under the impression that a building, which I believe was the Mineral Water Stores, was occupied by British forces (See point <sup>B mb</sup> A on sketch map). With a view to outflanking the British party commanding the line of our retreat, I first of all fired a shot into the lock of a door in the laneway (marked <sup>A mb</sup> B on sketch map) with the view to giving access to this building by the Volunteers. Since I did not succeed in forcing the lock by shooting, I broke the fanlight but, just as I was going to climb through, I discovered that the building, which was thought to be in enemy hands, was already occupied by our men and that they had a clear field of fire down the lane to a position occupied by the British (marked C. on sketch map). This lane where the cross-firing was taking place runs parallel to Moore Street and we rushed across the exposed space. Where the lane, along which we had come, joins Moore Street a number of Volunteers were stationed to



prevent our men from entering Moore Street, which was fire-swept, and we were directed into the nearest house in Moore Street (marked D. on sketch map).

I first went into the first-floor room facing Moore Street which was crowded. The Volunteers were all very fatigued and had thrown themselves down on the floor, preparing to sleep. Someone came from the ground-floor and asked for two volunteers to guard the windows. Hearing no response, I offered my services and posted myself at the left-hand corner. Another Volunteer, whom I did not know, took up a position at the other window. I pointed out to the person who gave us the direction that we would want relief pretty soon, as we were worn out. This relief was promised. My comrade at the other window soon complained that he could not stand the strain any longer and soon after this he collapsed, falling into a deep sleep from which several efforts on my part to arouse him were unsuccessful. I don't think I slept that night or, in fact, all that week except for a short time when on the roof of the G.P.O.

Later I was engaged breaking through the walls from house to house. As we broke through towards the last house, I discovered that a storehouse was situated to the rear of the last house and that the first floor of this storehouse was provided with a large bay-window (marked E. on sketch map), through which, presumably, hay and such material could be taken in. It was obvious to me that this was an ideal firing position. After getting back to the Moore Street houses again, I discovered that all Volunteers who had bayonets on their rifles were being mobilised with a view to rushing the British barricade at the Moore Street exit of Sackville Lane. On learning this, I reported to P.H. Pearse what seemed to me an ideal

covering position for such a party, and he got Willie Pearse and Eamon Bulfin to accompany me back to examine the position and they both agreed as to its suitability. I suggested to P.H. Pearse that, in view of the strenuous work which all of us had undergone conjoined with the fact that dusk or nightfall would be the best time for a surprise attack, everyone should take as much rest as possible until the time came to advance. As Pearse was a man who spoke little, I fell asleep with the impression that my suggestion was being agreed to. Seeing events in retrospect, it seems that Pearse's mind was then concerned with the surrender.

When I awoke I noticed the fellows were all round me wearing most woebegone expressions and showing signs of deep depression. I wondered what it was all about, and I asked Staines what had happened. It transpired that, while I was asleep, Seán MacDermott came around and gave the word that the surrender had been offered. We filed out into O'Connell Street and dumped our stuff. We marched on to the Rotunda Green. I fell asleep and, on awaking, the first thing I saw was Winnie Carney putting her coat over Seán MacDermott.

I also saw some disreputable conduct on the part of Lee-Wilson, who was subsequently shot in Gorey. He appeared to be in charge of the prisoners. I saw him bring out from the body of the prisoners a young fellow of possibly fifteen or sixteen years of age, who was a member of the Red Cross. He (Lee-Wilson) ordered four or five soldiers to cut out with their bayonets the Red Cross insignia from his coat.

Some time on Sunday morning we transferred from the Rotunda to Richmond Barracks and the prisoners included the Four Courts garrison. We were confined to a room. I was

questioned about twice by detectives but I did not know who they were. These detectives were going around from room to room. They wanted to identify me with some incident in Louth, as far as I could gather.

I spent, I think, only one night in the barracks, and the next evening we were marched to the North Wall and put on board a cattle boat en route for internment in England. Our destination was Stafford Gaol. The inhabitants were not very sympathetic as we marched in. Some of the 'Staffords' got badly knocked about at Clan ~~House~~<sup>WILLIAM</sup> House and missiles of vegetables, etc., were thrown at us. I was interned there until August, 1916, when I was released.

#### 4th Battalion Re-organised:

Following the general release of prisoners, the 4th Battalion was again reorganised and I found myself back in my own Company. I think Liam Clarke was then Company O/C. I was at this time reinstated in the Post Office.

Up to the summer of 1918, I cannot recollect anything of importance except having to identify a representative of the Birmingham Small Arms Company in relation to a claim for the purchase of arms from them by us, which purchase I think preceded the Rising of 1916. Michael Murphy of 60 Lansdowne Road should be in a position to give detailed information concerning this purchase.

#### German Submarine Rumour:

In the summer of 1918, Collins asked me to see him in a house in Harcourt Street. 76, I think, was the number. When I reached there, he asked me to investigate a rumour to the effect that a German submarine had put in somewhere in the vicinity of Courtown, Co. Wexford. I told Collins that, in my opinion, there was no river in

that area of sufficient depth to permit a submarine to submerge. Collins' directions were that I was to contact Seamus Rafter in Courtown. I cycled to Gorey where I stayed overnight and then proceeded to Courtown, and I did not meet Rafter until the next day. Initially, Rafter agreed with me that there was no place suitable for a submarine to put in around that coast. We examined all the waterways that could possibly shelter or provide anchorage or depth for a submarine and, after a thorough search, were convinced that there could be nothing in the rumour that a submarine had put in there. I reported the result of my investigations to Collins and that ended the matter. Later, it occurred to me that my mission had something to do with the German plot.

Membership of Volunteer Executive:

During the conscription crisis, when Cathal Brugha went on his mission to London, I was appointed a member of the Volunteer Executive in his place, on his nomination. I attended one meeting in John O'Mahoney's place at 32 Gardiner's Place. On this occasion, there was a raid alarm and we left the building in two's and continued the meeting in the Columcille Hall in the North King Street vicinity. I cannot remember who was at that meeting or who presided. All I do remember is that I left with Dermot O'Hegarty. Neither can I recall the nature of the business discussed on that occasion. I believe, however, it related to the conscription crisis. When Cathal Brugha returned from England, I did not attend any other meetings.

The Oath of Allegiance:

The oath of allegiance was imposed by the British on Civil Servants here. There were amongst the Civil Servants a number who were determined not to take the oath.

There was a Committee formed in Dublin to deal with the matter, of which I was Chairman or President. I recollect that there was voluminous correspondence with other organised groups of Civil Servants throughout the country who my committee knew would not take the oath. So far as I can recollect, the bulk of the correspondence was from members of the Sorters and Telegraphist class, employed in various Post Offices throughout the country. Dermot O'Hegarty and I were a deputation of two from the Dublin Committee to the Mansion House Anti-Conscription Committee. We argued that the Civil Servants would be the machinery by which the British would try to impose conscription and that they, as an anti-conscription body, should give a direction to refuse the oath of allegiance. We got no direction, with the result that individual members had to take their own initiative on what action they would take. Personally, I inquired if Sinn Féin would give a direction but I found them lacking also. I do not know whether, at this stage, I had heard that a group of unestablished Civil Servants employed in Haulbowline Dockyard would refuse to take the oath but, anyway, I remember going to the Dublin Trades Council at a meeting in Capel Street with a view to getting them to organise the "white collar" Civil Servants into a Trade Union. My efforts were not successful.

I refused to take the oath of allegiance and, as a result, was dismissed from my post. Quite a number refused to take the oath but only those who were not members of an organised Trade Union were penalised, at least to the extent of dismissal. Following my dismissal and later in that year, I was sent up to Fermanagh and Down in connection with the election work there and, in addition, I directed my activities towards the recruitment of men for building up the Volunteer organisation in those areas.

Engineer Battalion Formed:

I think it was in 1919 that an Engineer Battalion was formed in the Dublin Brigade. I was transferred from the 4th Battalion to it and became Captain of No. 1 Company. I understand that the purpose of the formation of the Engineer Battalion was to have a body of men trained and perfected in demolition work. There was extensive training in the tracing of telephone communications and their destruction and in the most effective methods of derauling trains, both by means of explosives and manually. There were numerous lectures on the possibilities of various kinds of explosives, some of which were home-made, and the comparative strength of each explosive handled and lectured on was compared with that of gun cotton or gelignite. In addition to lectures, practical work was carried out during week-ends in the Dublin mountains.

On one occasion, there was a big demonstration staged for G.H.Q. officers at Kilmashogue. Information regarding this must have leaked out, as the Black and Tans appeared unexpectedly on the scene and tried to surround the party, none of whom was armed. It was on this occasion that Seán Doyle, son of Peadar Doyle, was killed. He was fired on by the Tans. This was the only casualty. I do not know how far the demonstration had progressed when the Tans arrived, as I was with my Company a few miles away in the Pine Forest and the first intimation I had of the affair was when one of the Volunteers came across from Kilmashogue and informed me of it.

As the Engineer Battalion was trained for specialised work, it was understood that its members would not take part in any activities or ambushes such as those carried out by infantry battalions. For a period, however, this policy was departed from and my Company had a couple of attempted

ambushes, one in Berkeley Road and one in Ormond Quay, and one actual one in North Frederick Street where a student member of my Company, named Dwyer, was killed, one seriously wounded and I think three or four received minor wounds. My Company of Volunteers included a number of students from the College of Science and some from the Agricultural College.

One of the principal operations of the Engineer Battalion was the cutting of communications on the day that the Custom House was destroyed. In fact, this operation could not have been carried out without a holocaust of lives but for the part played by the Engineers. About twelve men of the Battalion were selected for the cutting of telephonic communications. In short, we were to ensure that the Custom House was completely cut off from the outside. My particular job was to earth a wire that ran across from the Custom House to a telephone pole in Store Street and my orders were to carry out the operation at twelve noon. I fitted myself with the normal equipment of a telephone linesman and earthed the wire as instructed. The work simply consisted of climbing the pole and connecting a piece of copper wire to the telephone line or wire issuing from the Custom House and connecting it with other wires joined to the Telegraph Office. While I was earthing the wire, a Police Inspector and two policemen were standing outside the Station but they took no notice of me. They may have thought I was an official linesman. My work completed, I cycled to Drumcondra where I dumped my equipment and gun. Before leaving these, however, I observed that the Custom House was burning well.

#### Raid on College of Science:

Before the burning of the Custom House, we carried out a raid on the College of Science and confiscated about

£200 in cash, which we handed over to the Officer Commanding the Battalion. How this came about was that University students, whose courses of study had been interrupted by the Great War, were, when the war was over, provided with funds by the British Government to continue their studies. This money was paid out weekly in cash to the students. Members of the College of Science, who were in the Battalion Engineers with me, put us wise as to how the money could be taken. We knew that on a certain day the students would queue up at a pay table, so two of us took our place in the queue and, immediately we got inside the door, we made it secure in order to prevent anyone entering. While we were doing this, two more of our comrades cut the telephone wires outside. Without raising any fuss, I walked up to the counter and ordered the staff to put their hands up and get back to the wall. I instructed Lieutenant D'Arcy, who was with me, to keep the staff covered while I collected the cash, as I knew precisely where it should be. They (the staff) accepted the position without comment and we got safely away.

Proposed Raid on Albert College:

We required transport for our Battalion, so one of the Agricultural students of the Albert College told us that there was a car in their college at Glasnevin that could easily be commandeered. One evening six of us proceeded to the College grounds and waited the arrival of the car, which we knew should be due. While we were so waiting, a lorry-load of Auxiliaries came up the back entrance to the College. At this time, we were simply walking around the field and, a short time later, the Auxiliaries returned again on to the main road. At first, we were under the impression that they had got wind of our proposed raid but it transpired later that they had merely lost their way. However, we waited for the arrival of



the car which we intended to commandeer but, as it did not turn up, we withdrew. At the outset of this proposed raid, two of us went into the field and the remainder of the party remained on the road.

SIGNED:

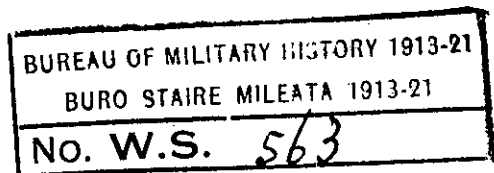
M. B. Seman

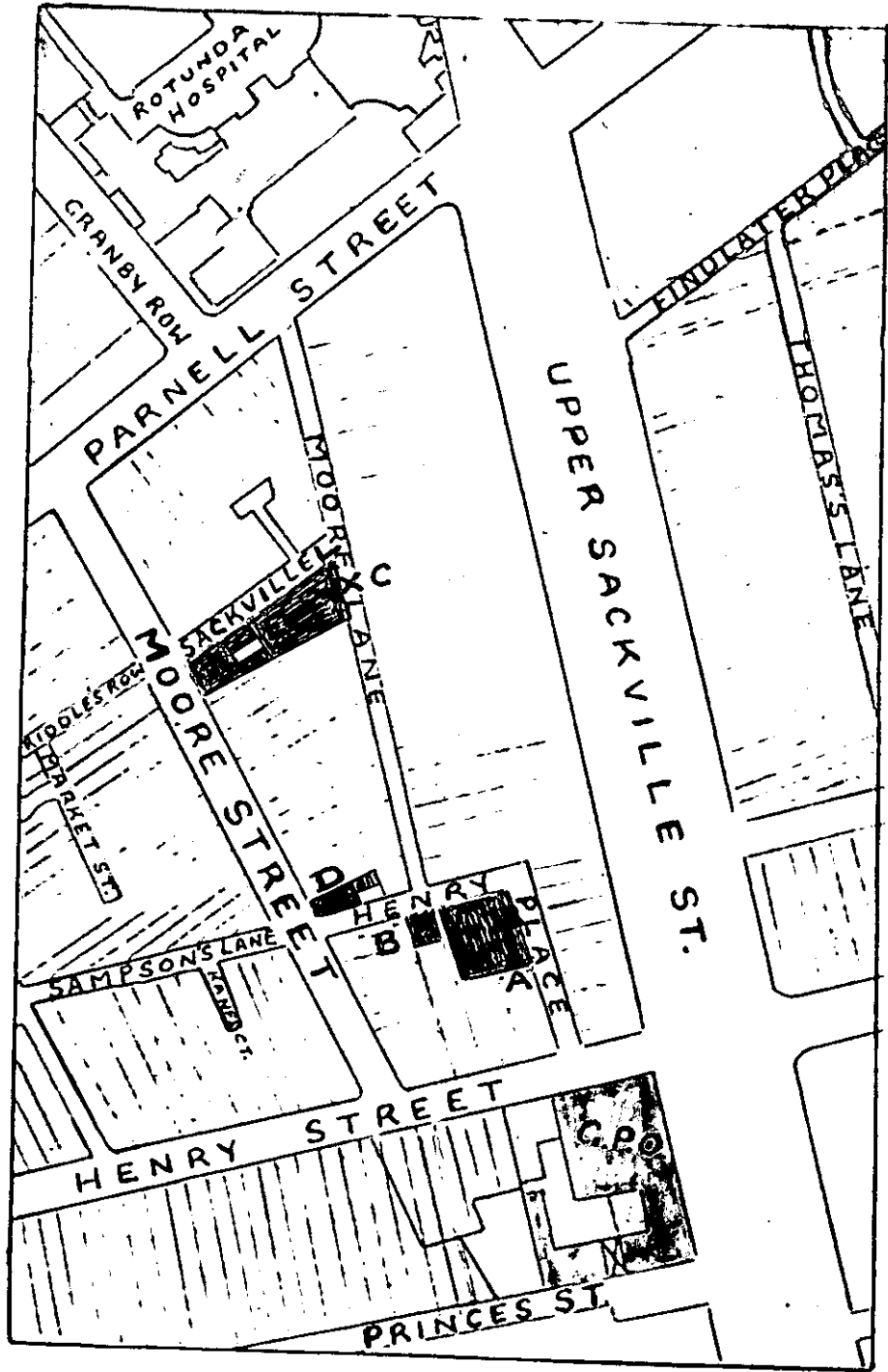
DATE:

1<sup>st</sup> August 1951

WITNESS:

William Ivory Bonds





ROTUNDA HOSPITAL

GRANBY ROW

PARNELL STREET

FINLAYWATER PLACE

THOMAS'S LANE

UPPER SACKVILLE ST.

MOORE LANE

SACKVILLE STREET

MIDDLE'S ROW

SAMPSON'S LANE

HENRY PLACE

HENRY STREET

PRINCES ST.

A

B

C