

W. S. 931

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRS MILITIA 1913-21
No. W.S. 931

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 931.....

Witness

Michael Grace,
Oldcastle,
Co. Meath.

Identity.

Close associate
of Arthur Griffith, 1899-1902.

Subject.

Birth of paper "Sinn Fein" in
Oldcastle, Co. Meath, 1899.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.22.40.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT by Mr. Michael Grace,

Oldcastle,

Co. Meath.

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Arthur Griffith returned from South Africa in 1899 and started publishing the "United Irishman". The Nationalist Party's access to the daily Press at that time for their propaganda could be measured in acres, while Arthur Griffith's could be measured in half inches. Very few people - only one here and there - bought or read the "United Irishman". A number of us who lived in Oldcastle and who were in sympathy with Arthur Griffith and his work were very worried about this and discussed it when we came together. Finally, we held a meeting in the hotel of this group. The group consisted of Mr. Bartley, Mr. Charles Fox, Mr. Liam Sheridan, Mr. Michael Galligan and myself. After a discussion, it was decided that the only solution to the problem was to publish our own paper. It was felt that the people would be interested in a local publication and would buy and read it as such. We got in touch with the Anglo-Celt and they agreed to do the printing for us and we collectively guaranteed the cost of this. When the first issue was due to go for printing, we had not yet decided on what was to be the name of the paper. I wrote the leading article which set out the objects of the paper and I headed it "Sinn Féin". I had this inspiration from the fact that we were a small band, a very small one, who were trying to do something alone. When Liam Sheridan saw the heading, he stated "That is the name for our paper", and thereafter it appeared under this name.

Our initial issue consisted mainly of articles clipped from the "United Irishman", "Gaelic American" and such publications together with small articles by different members of the group. Later, other people such as Seán McNamee, Navan,

and Liam Cronin, Navan, who was manager of Clayton's Woollen Mills, contributed some lovely articles. One very fine writer for our paper - a genius and a very potent writer - was a man named Crowley, who was an Excise Officer in Trim. Crowley, owing to his position in His/Her Majesty's Service, could not write under his own name, so he used the nom-de-plume of "Oscar". Crowley afterwards studied law and became a judge of the Dáil High Court and died only a few years ago.

The paper was published monthly and sold for one penny or one and sixpence per year by post in Ireland. We had a small local circulation and also sold some copies in the Navan, Mullingar and Granard areas. Of course, we lacked the circulation organisation which was enjoyed by other papers. It continued to be issued for about two years and then lapsed. However, we considered that it had to some extent served its purpose and, by then, people were becoming more enlightened and more were taking an interest in Arthur Griffith's works.

Our group had no real organisation or name, but the people soon learned who was behind the paper and we became known as the "Sinn Féiners". I had copies of the paper, but the Black and Tans seized them and, I suppose, destroyed them. My daughter, who is now living in Dublin, I know has one copy - probably the least important one of all. She lives at 95 Brookwood Avenue, Artane, Her married name is Clarke.

I have no recollection of Arthur Griffith writing to any of our group asking for permission to use the name Sinn Féin, but it could have happened and slipped my memory.

The late William Aherne was not really a member of our group, as he lived outside the town, but he was a sympathiser.

It is possible that the Anglo-Celt may have copies of the paper still, and also, there may be people around Oldcastle who have copies, but I do not know any of them. An advertisement in the local papers asking for copies might produce results.

Signed: *[Handwritten Signature]*

Date: 20 June 54

Witness: *[Handwritten Signature]*

Micheal O Grasaigh,
20 Marta, '54.

Matthew Barry, Comd't.

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