

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILE' TA 1913-21
No. **W.S.** 1,634

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 1634.

Witness

Alfred Burgess,
85, Seafield Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers; Brother of
Cathal Brugha, Member of the pre-1921
Dáil Éireann Cabinet.

Subject.

Record of witness's recollections of
Cathal Brugha, 1908-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No **S. 2950.**

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT OF MR. ALFRED BURGESS,
85 Seafield Road, Clontarf, Dublin.

I was born in 29, North Frederick Street, Dublin, in the year 1878. I am the thirteenth member of a family of fourteen - four boys and ten girls. I am a brother of the late Cathal Brugha, who was born in Richmond Avenue, Fairview, in July, 1874.

My father was a dealer in antique furniture, pictures and works of art, and had places of business at 23 Nassau Street, 29 North Frederick Street, 12, 13 & 14 Great Charles Street, 4 Great Strand Street and at 78 Newman Street, Oxford Street, London. In the year 1887, two of my brothers, Eamonn and Thomas, went to Australia, with works of art and other things, to the value of a large sum, and, for reasons which I do not know, my father did not get five thousand pounds out of it. This led to a bit of a downfall. My father went to Australia, and spent about twelve months there. He came back to Ireland then, but things, as far as business was concerned, began to go from bad to worse, and he died in the year, 1897, comparatively speaking, a poor man.

I would place the origin of my brother Cathal's Republican or Separatist outlook as springing from the family political background which was nationalistic. The Gaelic League would also have subsequently influenced the development of this outlook of his, in my opinion.

About 1908 or 1909, my brother, Cathal, joined the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League. Of course, he was then known as Charlie Burgess, and that was what he was called when he was at school in Belvedere College. One day, while he and I were on a cycling run, we met an old school companion of mine, a Mr. John Carrick, who was in the company of several members of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, and, arising out of that meeting, Cathal joined the Keating Branch and, for the first time, began to learn Irish. He afterwards became President of that Gaelic League Branch, and was President the day he died.

Cathal spoke to me on matters leading up to the Treaty. On one occasion, he said, "I learned more of the rottenness of human nature during the debate on the Treaty than I ever learned during the forty-six years of my life!"

When Collins and Griffith came back from England before the Treaty was signed, there was a rather stormy meeting of the Cabinet. (I think there is only one man alive who can say whether it is true or not.) Griffith said, "There is no chance of a settlement except by accepting the Crown". Cathal turned to Collins and said, "Is it your intention to sign, bringing us within the Crown?" Collins said, "I am sick of the whole thing! I would rather not go back at all!" Cathal said, "Well, don't go back!" De Valera turned to Cathal and put his hand on his shoulder, and said, "Wait, Cathal!"; and he addressed Griffith and said, "Are you prepared to refuse to sign anything that brings us within the Empire, until you

come back to the Cabinet?" To this, Griffith said, "Yes". As events turned out, they never came back, and they signed.

When the Treaty was signed and word came over here, I went to see Cathal, as I had not seen him for a long time. He always used address me in Irish. "I said, "What do you think of the settlement?" And he said to me, "What do you think of it?" I said, "Well, speaking truthfully, I am glad if all the trouble is over, but I don't look upon this as freedom". He looked at me, in his characteristic way, and said, "No! If I were to be a party to that, I would be ashamed to show my face to my youngest child!"

This contradicts all the statements one hears.

To return to myself and the earlier days, I had been in the Volunteers from their inception to the date of the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa. Some months prior to Easter Week of 1916, I met my brother, Cathal, and he asked me was I attending the parades of Company C., up in Parnell Square. (I cannot remember what battalion it was; Mr. McDunphy was in it; Dick Mulcahy and Major-General Price were in it.) I told Cathal, "No", and he asked me, "Why?" I told him that Thomas McDonagh, speaking at a parade, told the Company, of which he was O/C, that it was expected of every man who had a rifle to protect that rifle as he would the honour of his mother or his wife, and that this began to affect me conscientiously, with the result that I stopped going to the parades. Cathal

said, "Well, I never heard of that. I know I have a Mauser rifle, and nobody is going to take that off me! However, I will lend you a book which you can read". He got me the book, entitled, "Insurrection", by Father Kavanagh of, I think, Merchants' Quay, and, to my surprise, I found that Father Kavanagh agreed with my own views. It made no change in my attitude, and I did not go back to the Volunteers, although Eamonn Price approached me again on the subject. I had nothing more to do with the Volunteers. I was on the Howth gun-running, but that was before it.

As far as the Rising of 1916 was concerned, I first learned about it at Fairynouse Races. Councillor Mahon told me about it. "There's a row up in Dublin!", he said, and I could not believe it. I was with three or four companions, on a side-car. When going home, we had to change our route, as the bridge on Cabra Road was blown up. I was living in Summerhill then, where I had a shop.

From 1916 on, after his recovery from wounds and release, I practically never saw Cathal, with the exception of a few occasions.

On one occasion, a man named O'Connor - he was a Commandant - said to me, "Would you know where to find Cathal?" At that particular time, I was not in the movement, and I would be suspicious of everybody. I said, "I would". He said, "I want to give you a note to give to him". I said, "Is this dangerous, if I am caught with this note?" As far as I can remember, his answer was, "Well, you had better not

be caught.'". I knew where Cathal was, but, to make certain that I was not being followed, I walked all around Dublin. I eventually found Cathal. He read the note, and he said, "Who gave you this?". I told him that it was a fellow named O'Connor, who was in the Corporation at the time. "I see", he said, and he tore it up into little bits and threw them into the fire. This was during the Black and Tan time.

The next occasion was when Cathal sent a messenger over to the Corporation (with which I then served) to me, saying he wanted to see me. I went over to Lalor's of Ormond Quay to see him. The two principal places where he used sleep were Lalor's of Ormond Quay, and the boilerman's house at Temple Street Children's Hospital, situated at the back of the premises.

When I saw Cathal in Lalor's, he asked me had I any objection to going up to the Kingsbridge railway station to meet his wife who was coming back from some part of the south. I said, "No". "Well", he said, "there's another thing! She will give you an attaché-case. Will you bring this to Madame O'Reilly of Dorset Street?". She had a shop there, about four or five doors up, on the left-hand side, from Blessington St. She is not there now. I asked him what did the attaché-case contain. He said, "There will be no explosives, but it will be dangerous for you if you are caught with it". I undertook to do the job anyway.

I took the attaché-case, and walked the whole way from Kingsbridge, on the south side of the Liffey.

I went over the Metal Bridge, and turned back from that into Capel Street. The first thing I met in Capel Street was a load of Auxiliaries. For a moment, I did not know what to do. Then I turned into a shop to buy a paper, and putting the attaché-case down by the side of the counter, I started to read the evening paper.

On one occasion I was looking at the Liffey Swim, from the south side of the Liffey, right opposite Lalor's. Down under Lalor's was a lorry load of Auxiliaries, and in one of the windows in Lalor's was Cathal, looking out of the window at the Liffey Swim also.

During the period of the Black and Tan war, my house in Russell Avenue was never raided. Perhaps this was due to the fact that I was known as Alfred Burgess, my brother using the Irish form which he adopted in 1910. The house next door and the house opposite were raided.

A man named Quinn lived right opposite me in Russell Avenue. When Cathal died, he came over to sympathise with me, and said he never knew until then that I was his brother.

This man named Burke, whom I have previously mentioned, told me of an incident that occurred on Bloody Sunday in connection with my brother, Cathal. Burke - I presume he is dead now - was a boilerman at Temple Street Hospital, and had premises at the back of the hospital. The military were around Gardiner's place, raiding. Burke went to his dinner, this Sunday. There was a gate leading out into the back where his house was, into Temple Street Hospital. When he opened the gate, Cathal was sitting at the table, with two revolvers.

Burke asked him did he know the place was surrounded. Cathal said he did, and he would advise him, if possible, to get the family away from the house. He appealed to Cathal to go into the house, but Cathal remained there, and passed the remark, "If those people come in, you will find my dead body there" - pointing to the place - "and don't be surprised to find six or seven of the bodies of our visitors!".

In conclusion, I would like to add that Cathal told me about a meeting in the Mansion House at which the Archbishop of Dublin presided, and Griffith, Collins, de Valera, Cathal and, I believe, the Lord Mayor (Larry O'Neill) were present. Cathal told me that, arising out of a discussion, de Valera said he would be prepared to abide by the decision of the people in an election, if the election was postponed until such time as a new register was made out. The register, of course, was absolutely antiquated. There were two or three such meetings held at that time.

Signed: Alfred R. Burgess

Date: 14 June 1957

Witness: Sumner Carthy
(Investigator)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAGE MILITA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 163A