

ORIGINAL

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Statement by

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On

SOME ACTIVITIES OF THE I. R. B.

In

IRELAND AND ENGLAND

1895 to 1915

File S. 29.

ORIGINAL

In 1895 I was initiated into the I.R.B. in London by Dr. Mark Ryan, 15A Gower Street.

Just prior to that year the G.A.A. in London which had been formed by the I.R.B., was affiliated with the parent body in Dublin. The I.R.B. controlled it and other Irish organisations in England, and the principal officers elected were always I.R.B. nominees. Rooms were taken at 55/56 Chancery Lane, and these eventually became the centre of Irish National life in London. Cumann-na-Gael was formed there, the Amnesty Association, the Hibernian G.A.A. Club, and later the '98 Centenary Association. Practically all these had the same officers, and all were I.R.B. men.

Dr. Mark Ryan was President, either Dr. Anthony McBride or Dr. David Barry was Treasurer, and Michael McWhite was Honorary Secretary till about 1905. It was from London that the activities of the I.R.B. in England were directed.

During the Boer War the I.R.B. got circulars printed urging Irishmen in the British Army not to Volunteer for service against the Boers. There were many Irishmen in the British Territorials. These circulars were handed out to soldiers at the different shipping centres on the South Coast by young I.R.B. men who were sent down from Chancery Lane on Saturdays and Sundays, and they were the cause of some Regiments refusing to Volunteer for foreign service.

Frank Hugh O'Donnell was in touch with the Boers, and there was a proposal for I.R.B. Volunteers to fight with the Boers. Many volunteered but owing to limited finances only a few were able to travel to Africa. These eventually linked up with Major John McBride.

During the years 1895-1905 men came periodically from Dublin to lecture on Irish subjects. Those lecturers included William Rooney, Arthur Griffith, Pat Daly, O'Leary-Curtis and Pat Devlin (Celt.) The G.A.A. had meanwhile developed into a powerful organisation, the officers of which were all I.R.B. men.

I came to Dublin in 1905 and was transferred to the circle of which Pat Devlin was Centre. Tom Cuffe and Willie Rooney's brother, Jack, were in the same circle. The first aggressive action taken by the I.R.B. in Dublin was on St. Patrick's Day, 1905, when they removed D.P. Moran, Editor of the "Leader" and his carriage from the Gaelic League procession. I assisted in this. He had been derisively calling the advanced Nationalists "Tin Pike Men" in his paper.

At that time there were about ten circles in Dublin and District. The Centres paid regular visits to all the circles, so that they were well known. The Wolfe Tone Memorial Committee was the public body under cover of which the I.R.B. operated. The circles had Wolfe Tone clubs under various names such as the '98 Club, the William Orr Club, etc. The public proceedings of these clubs were reported.

From about 1908 on, Tom Clarke was President, Seamus Stritch Treasurer, and Sean Ó Húadhaidh Secretary. The latter should know a lot about the I.R.B. in Dublin. I was Chairman of the Wolfe Tone Club. A house was purchased in Parnell Square, and sub-let to various National organisations. This was ~~my~~ Crowe's idea. He was from Limerick, was in the G.S. Railway, and was very enthusiastic.

About 1908 or 1909, the Dublin circles were re-organised; the circles were reconstituted on the basis of the trades or

employment in which the men were engaged. The organisation was strong amongst the drapers, grocers and vintners assistants, and in the Civil Service. Each of these had their own circles. I organised and was centre of the drapers' circle until I went to Newcastle-on-Tyne.

About 1908 I visited Cork with Mick Crowe and Pat Daly on I.R.B. work. We met Seán O'Hegarty, Cork, Austin Stack, Tralee and Liam Barrett, Glanworth, at the Cork Athletic Grounds after a match. Barrett had a circle in Glanworth, but there was nothing in Fermoy. About this time I organised a circle in Monasterevan. The Dublin men were organising the towns around Dublin that could be reached on a Saturday or Sunday. *also opened a circle in Lucan Tom Barry chemist - Centre*

was the case with circles outside

In 1908 in Dublin the men were being asked in Confession if they belonged to the I.R.B. This was causing a certain amount of embarrassment and Reverend Father Sheedy visited all the circles and spoke to the men. After that in 1909 or 1910 a general meeting of the Dublin men was held at Clontarf Town Hall. Either Tom Clarke or Jack O'Hanlon was in the chair and the meeting was addressed by Father Denis O'Sullivan. I was engaged in the organisation of that meeting and I can remember only ^{one} such meeting. It was about this time that Tom Clarke got Pearse to address a meeting of the Wolfe Tone Memorial Committee at the Rotunda. That was the first time Pearse came before the public and he was brought out by Tom Clarke and the I.R.B.

About 1910 I went to work in Newcastle-on-Tyne and while there was visited by Fred Allen. I re-organised the I.R.B. along the Tyneside and got it going again. Amongst the younger men who came in then was Denis McNeilus of Donegal who was later prominent in Volunteer circles in Cork. Another man who did great work in England was Jim Barrett of Manchester. He was still active down to 1921.

During 1910 at the request of the Dublin I.R.B. I visited London then I met Michael Collins who was on the staff of the Dublin I.R.B. - such as James Connolly, Jack Barry - with Seamus

were very active in that period

In 1911 I came to Cork and shortly afterwards I had a visit from Tom Clarke. The Cork Young Ireland Society, which organised the annual Manchester Martyrs demonstration, was being held together by the remnants of the older I.R.B. Group in the City. P.N. Fitzgerald was the old centre and the activities of this group had dwindled to the holding of the Manchester Martyrs procession each year. Seán O'Hegarty had a circle of active younger men. On the instructions of Tom Clarke Seán O'Sullivan, Paddy Corkery and I went into the Young Ireland Society and I was elected President. This was the normal method by which the I.R.B. influenced the policy and controlled the activities of all National organisations. Our principal job in the Young Ireland Society was to ensure that the speaker at the Annual Manchester Martyrs demonstration was an I.R.B. man. From that time on the speaker each year was a prominent I.R.B. man. They included Bulmer Hobson, Major John McBride, Seán MacDiarmada and J.J. Walsh. It was at the 1915 demonstration that Seán MacDiarmada spoke and a meeting of Volunteer Commandants was held at my house on the night of the demonstration. Tom Kent and Dathi Barry were there.

Seán MacDiarmada asked me if he would take Terence MacSweeney into the organisation, and I believe he did take him in.

In 1914 or 1915 a meeting of the Cork circles was held in a field near the Shanakiel Hospital in connection with the Volunteers. Seán O'Hegarty and Diarmuid Lynch were there.

Micéal Cowley was a centre in Dublin in my time there. He is now in the Bank of Ireland, College Green.

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Thomas Barry
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