

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURD STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 588

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 588.....

Witness

Rev. Fr. J.M. Cronin,
St. Joseph's School,
Ferryhouse,
Clonmel,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Catholic priest at St. Etheldreda's,
London, 1916.

Subject.

His recollections of Casement's last days
in Pentonville Prison.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.1845.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY VERY REV. J.M. CRONIN

St. Joseph's School, Ferryhouse, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

Memories re Casement lodged in the Tower and his
last days at Pentonville.

As far as I can recollect after a period of well over thirty years, I set down some data in connection with Roger Casement's imprisonment and his last days in the condemned cell.

A Catholic convert friend, Mr. Guy Ellis, a lawyer who had rooms and offices in Grays Inn, and who was Treasurer for the Propagation of the Faith in England over a long period of years, called on me at my residence at the Presbytery, St. Ethelreda's, 14 Ely Place, London, E.C.4, and asked me to meet at his offices in Grays Inn a young Irish lawyer named Duffy, who wanted to meet an Irish priest on a most urgent matter. Mr. Duffy, he told me, was in London and was considering whether he would enter into partnership with him! - This to explain the presence of Mr. Duffy in his own office. He told me also that he had arranged for a lunch to be sent in and that Mr. Duffy and myself could talk over the matter privately in his own private room so as not to be disturbed. I duly met Mr. Duffy as arranged.

As Mr. Justice Gavan Duffy died recently, and as we failed in the last few years to meet one another at the rooms of his sisters in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, I am anxious, in case he made no notes of the incidents that I have to refer to now, to set them down as a matter at least of interest in Roger Casement's Life.

On meeting him, Mr. Gavan Duffy told me that he had just returned from the Tower where he had met Casement, who wished him to organise his legal defence. Casement had said to him, before he discussed his trial with him, there is one matter

which he wished him to bear well in mind if he was condemned to death. "I am a baptised Catholic. My mother, a Catholic, during a holiday in North Wales ^{Aberystwyth} (~~Llandudno~~) when I was very young, had me baptised by a Catholic priest. I wish to die in the religion of the majority of my fellow countrymen. I want you to see that some Irish priest will give me the necessary instructions and do all that is necessary to reconcile me to the Catholic Church if I should face the supreme penalty". Such at least, if not the very words, were the first sentiments expressed by Casement before they discussed the legal aspects of his position and defence.

v Mr. Duffy then sought my advice so as to be prepared when the emergency arose. Following the lines of procedure adopted in regard to prisoners charged with treason and other major charges, Brixton would be the prison where he would be detained during trial, and Pentonville in Holloway Parish, N. London, would be the place of execution.

I assured Mr. Duffy - he was desirous that perhaps I would undertake the instruction of Roger Casement - that the chaplain at Brixton was under the jurisdiction of Dr. Amigo, Bishop of Southwark, and that during his detention there, the Bishop could be relied upon to see that he had all facilities from the chaplain if he entered himself as an R.C. at that prison. My impression was that Casement wanted at the moment not to be disturbed by instructions, while his case was heard.

As regards Pentonville, it was in the parish of Holloway; two of the three priests were native Irishmen and the third was a priest who could be relied upon as thoroughly sympathetic - a Fr. McClements (McCarroll) - (I am at the moment not sure of the surname or of his nationality - Scotch? - but I shall verify the surname). I happened to know him fairly well. He visited me almost every week and would discuss the difficulties he had such as a young priest experienced in his spiritual work.

If I remember aright he was a particular friend of Fr. Jim Campbell, the son of the Town Clerk of Cobh, and at that time a curate at St. Anselm's and St. Cecilia's in Kingsway and at that time also actively used ^{ing off} his pen to promote the Sinn Fein Movement. So I made it clear that as far as the parochial clergy were concerned, Roger Casement's spiritual interests could be well safeguarded. I advised him not to look to me or to others, but that we both could watch and see that the prison chaplains in the prisons could be relied upon, and it would be sufficient to assure Casement that his wishes would have the closest attention.

Mr. Duffy was satisfied with the advice I gave him, and though we met on a few occasions, we agreed to let matters take their course and not to interfere, and to have no contacts with one another. I just recall that the words used by Casement to Duffy were somewhat of this nature: "If things come to the worst, I am resolved to die in the religion of Kathleen O'Houlihan", and he stipulated that he wanted to be attended by a sympathetic Irish priest.

When Casement was committed to the condemned cell at Pentonville, the spiritual care of Casement fell into safe hands.

Briefly these points should be noted. One of the priests that attended him was Fr. McClements (McCarroll)? who is (until recently at least) the parish priest of a new parish in North London, Highbury, I think. An article appeared in a London Catholic paper several months ago threw light on his Casement connection. I have kept it and will send it on. He would best give an account of the points which I am about to make. Both he and Fr. Campbell (? I doubt if he is in England: and even if he is alive now: I think Fr. Campbell was in the diocese of Brentwood, when it was cut off and made a diocese which had Essex as its territory. I think too that he volunteered for service as a missionary in China. But having lost sight of him

since I left England over 20 years ago, I do not know if Father Campbell is alive now). Both Frs. McC^{anval} (P) and Campbell gave me any information I had of the story of Pentonville's prisoner, Casement, as far as I can recollect.

1. In the ordinary course, a convert form was filled in by the chaplain, and faculty sought from the Curia of Westminster Archdiocese to reconcile Casement. The queries on the form are routine and deal with all pertinent facts - age with name and address, nature and extent of instructions, former religion of the convert; station in life, etc. In Casement's case, he was, I understand, baptised at age of about five at his mother's request, but was not brought up a Catholic. Probably his mother died when he was young. It could be said that no one ever suspected that C. was a baptised Catholic.

2. The Westminster Curia wrote that the request for faculty to receive Casement would be granted provided that he would make a written apology "for any scandal he had given" (or some such words). The condition surprised both the clergy concerned and Casement, and after much discussion and hesitation, C. finally wrote the "apology", though in handing it to the priest he protested that he could not see the point for such a document, because he could have given no scandal in the Church to which no Catholic suspected he belonged. The suggested "scandal" was certainly most vague.

After a restless night he called for the "apology" and tore it up saying "that after much reflection, he could not leave such a document behind him"

Hence no faculty was granted by the Westminster Curia to receive him into the Church. In view of the difficulty, Dean Ring, the Kerry priest in charge of Commercial Road

Parish was also called into consultation and the clergy decided
 to ^{reconcile} ~~receive~~ him ~~into~~ the Church ~~on the~~ ^{SP.} ~~morning~~ ^{before} of his execution -
 just as in a case in articulo mortis. It was a very
 embarrassing situation for the clergy. I understand that the
 priests concerned subsequently placed the facts, through Mgr.
 O'Riordan, Rector of the Irish College, Rome, before the Roman
 authorities as an incident without precedent in such cases.
 Years ^a after, when living in the U.S.A., I read a book by an
 Irish-American in which it was stated that when Casement was
 in Africa he was called upon in native courts to take down the
 confessions of prisoners who had committed unnatural crimes.
 Being in the first person as narrative and in the handwriting
 of Casement, photostat pages of such depositions were used to
 influence people in a system of what I should describe as
 "constructive discredit" of Casement. It occurred to my mind
 that the Catholic authorities may have been 'got at' in this
 way and that they in consequence, deceived by this systematic
 discredit, felt obliged in the circumstances to ask for such
 a document as requested by them. This is only my surmise, to
 explain the demand of the Westminster Curia.

I wish, however, here to say that all the foregoing facts
 about these two Pentonville paragraphs above are only hearsay
 and, as far as I can remember, such impression was produced
 in my mind by what was related by a group of young Irish priests
 in London who had close contacts with their brother clergy at
 Holloway Road. The facts need to be well sifted.

The present Parish Priest at Highbury would be a first hand
 source about Pentonville. It would be interesting too if the
 present Chancellor (or rather Vic. ^S ~~Gen.~~ ^{SP}) of Westminster, Mgr.
 Morrough Bernard, a Mallow man, (now that all the leading
 persons then in Curia are gone to their reward: H.E. Cardinal
 Bourne, Mgr. ^{SURMONT} German, V.G., Mgr. Evans, Dioc. Sec., and others,)
might give the story from the Curia point of view from

documents which may have been preserved about Casement.

I simply give "the story" as current at the time in clerical circles about the difficulty that arose, and of "the feeling" in Irish clerical circles in London at the denial of faculty to receive Casement.

Fr. McClement (I am not sure of the name at the moment I write - McCarroll, I now think is his name !!) would also give full details of what occurred the morning of the execution in the cell and on the way to and at the scaffold. I saw Father McC. - he came into the city to see me - that evening or the following one. He told of -

- (1) the voluntary penance that Casement imposed upon himself of taking off his shoes and socks and walking across his cell and kneeling and kissing the priest's (confessor's) feet,
- (2) Casement's sympathy for young Fr. McC. to witness the gruesome act of his execution. He gave him a "viaticum" to go away for a change for a day or two after it, showing his thoughtfulness,
- (3) his conduct on the way to the scaffold, so utterly different from the lurid description in the Press reports that evening and next morning,
- (4) the regard of the Pentonville Governor for the person of Casement; his shame at hearing the howling mob outside the prison gates who "cheered" the execution. The remark of the Governor was, if I remember rightly, on hearing this seemed to say that he "was almost ashamed of being an Englishman".

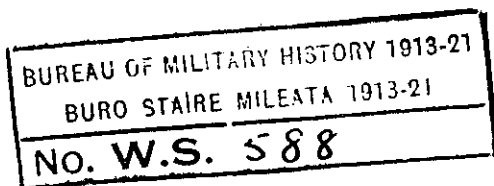
MP As all the foregoing about Pentonville is purely hearsay and a memory of over 30 years ago, it can only serve to pursue a line of inquiry to get the true facts of the case.

MP The priest referred to in the foregoing is Fr. James McCarroll, now Rector of St. Joan of Arc Church, Kelcross Road, Highbury, London N.5. He heard Roger Casement's confession in his cell.

Signed: John H. Cronin

Date: 7th September, 1951.

Witness: Sean Brennan. leomdt.



No. W.S. 588

St. Joseph's School,
Ferryhouse,
Clonmel,
Co. Tipp.

15. ix. 51.

Dear Sir,

I am sorry to delay in returning the enclosed. I have just taken up residence here after two years' absence in Italy. The operation "Moving" has held up my correspondence and gave me an opportunity to trace that newspaper cutting referred to in your letter of the 6th Sept.

I have carefully read through the Casement statement and have made a few emendations duly initialled. And in view of my expressed doubts about the correct surname, I have introduced the correct name of the Pentonville Chaplain. I do hope that the late Justice Gavan Duffy has left further details about this incident and of the Pentonville Gaol reconciliation of Roger Casement.

I named Brixton as the probable place of detention during the trial. All the spy and treason trials at that time took place at Old Bailey, in my old parish, and through the courtesy of Chief Inspector of Police resident at Snow Hill Police Station, Chief Inspector Jones, a Catholic and married to an Irishwoman, maiden name Molony. I was present at several of these "war trials". I did not go to Casement's trial as a precautionary measure, so as not to attract suspicion of my interest. As it was, there was enough to convince me and others that the Secret Service were interested in us young Irish priests. Brixton was the usual place of detention of prisoners at these State Trials. Hence my surmise!

I wish to stress again that the portion of my statement of what took place during the last days of Casement must be taken with great reserve. The attitude of the Westminster Curia in the matter was at the time unexplainable and we did know that "Dean" Ring, as he was then called - later Canon Ring - was very interested in the matter. I am in no position to say what was the actual authenticity of the so-called "Casement Diary" and the use made of it at the time, to prejudice influential people and public opinion against Casement. We had a feeling that propaganda of the type was being used, and my many contacts with offices in Fleet St. (which was in my parish) convinced me that there was something very active in influencing the Press.

My good friend, Professor Gwynn had a column in the Cork Examiner, 7th Sept. on the very morning I received your letter of the 6th. Under the heading, Roger Casement's Trial, he refers to the Diary and its use: and as I was due to see him, before leaving Upton, on another subject, I saw him in Cork last Monday. Until then I did not realise that he was a member of your Bureau Committee, or that he was the author of a "Life" of Casement that ran through three additions. I showed him my typescript and having read it, we talked over the matter. His view was that the Duffy interview was new to him and therefore of value. As regards the baptism of Casement and his subsequent non-practice of the Catholic faith as he grew up to manhood, he gave me no light on the subject. Undoubtedly the Aberystrolyth ceremony was part of the act of reconciliation to the Church of his Catholic mother, who had married a non-Catholic "out of the Church". He (Denis Gwynn) told me that he had in his possession a personal statement of Dean Ring on the subject and of all he saw and heard at the Execution.

51e

Now that Fr. Jim McCarroll is expressly named in the enclosed cutting - in case you have no inside details of the last days of Casement - he would give the most factual and reliable information. I doubt now if Mgr. Murrough-Bernard would be the best man to give the Westminster side of the Casement reconciliation. If Mgr. H.E. Daly - a Duhallow man - is alive (in the 1948 Catholic Directory his address is given as 64, Barrowgate Road, Chiswick, W.4.) he would be a far more likely man to give information, tho' Mgr. M-B. would have access to documentary records probably. Mgr. Daly was a senior official at the time of Casement in Curia, and he was rather "more Irish" and prominent at that time.

I have also carefully read the second statement. No doubt, the escapees from Usk, if alive, could confirm if they met Fr. Knight in Dublin when he obliged me to travel on to Cork.

The "tan" who shot James Coleman had a curious subsequent history in England. It was known that he "bolted" with a girl from Cork after a little time. Chief Inspector Jones (City of London Police), the personal friend of mine, showed me his "pre-tan" record, when he was caught and sentenced to two years hard labour and a flogging at Old Bailey for robbery with violence of £500 worth of valuables from an East London jeweller's shop. It seems that at the age of sixteen, he was sentenced for matricide and while doing time volunteered for the front and then for the Tans, when war was over!

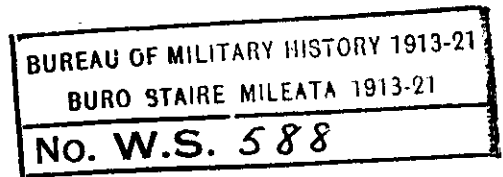
I should esteem it a favour if you would kindly give me a copy of the enclosed typescripts.

Would you please give with my compliments the enclosed cutting, "Last Letters of Roger Casement" to Commandant Brennan. My friend, Dr. James Walsh (a son of a Dowlais,

Glam. Irish printer), who is Editor-Owner of the Catholic Times, might, if necessary, give you the name of The Special Correspondent.

Yours faithfully,

(SIGNED) J.M. CRONIN, O.C.



Last Letters Of Roger Casement

from the **CATHOLIC TIMES** (London) March 31st 1930

I HAVE just been permitted to read letters
By A Special Correspondent

written in Pentonville on prison notepaper — by Sir Roger Casement who was executed in London in August of 1916 for the part he played in the Easter Rebellion in Ireland.

Baptised in the Catholic faith at Aberystwyth in North Wales, Roger Casement was brought up a Protestant.

A man of European reputation who held a position in the British diplomatic service, Sir Roger Casement was arrested, almost by accident, after he landed from a submarine near Tralee on the south coast of Ireland on Good Friday, 1916.

In the 34 years that have elapsed since he went to the scaffold for "Ireland and Kathleen M. Houlihan", a great deal has been written and published about Ireland's struggle for independence, always presenting Casement the nationalist and soldier.

ROGER CASEMENT made his first Confession to the Pentonville chaplain, Fr. J. McCarroll, now in charge of the first church dedicated to St. Joan of Arc, at Highbury, London.

Fr. McCarroll spent a great deal of time in the condemned man's cell in those fateful weeks of 1916. Indeed, he celebrated Mass in that cell on the morning Casement was led to the scaffold—led to the scaffold after making his First Communion. Invited to partake of breakfast, the Welsh-born Irish patriot said "No, I wish to face my God with the sacramental body and blood of Christ as my only sustenance."

THREE days before his death, Roger Casement wrote:

"It is a strange, strange fate and now I stand face to face with death I feel just as if they were going to kill a boy. For I feel like a boy and my hands so free from blood, my heart always so compassionate and faithful that I cannot comprehend how anyone wants to hang me.

"It is they—not I—who are the traitors—filled with a lust of blood of hatred of their fellows.

"Artificial and unnatural wars, prompted by greed of power are the

source of misery, are now destroying mankind....

"If I am to live—I should live for this—to redeem the broken years, mis-spent years, by sacrifice of self entirely and forever....

"It is now three days to Thursday morning [August 2; date of Casement's execution] and I am thinking of it and praying to God to strengthen me and cheer me and be with me on the way. I am at peace. I hope to think so; I pray only that God's will be done.

"No man in the world ever got so much undeserved friendship as I have found these last days. The great outpouring of love and goodness on me is the greatest proof of God's love for a poor, sinful man. But it is all so horrible to be here... God gave me into this captivity and death. And I kiss the Divine Hand that leads me to the grave.

"Alas so much of the story dies with me—the old, old story and yet the truth and right lives on in the hearts of the brave and lowly.

"It is better that I die thus on the scaffold: it is a glorious death for Ireland's sake—with Allan, Larkin and O'Brien and Robert Emmet and the men of the '98 and William Orr—all for the same cause, all in the same way. Surely it is the most glorious cause in history—ever defeated yet undefeated."

IN another letter Casement wrote:

"And if I die as I think is fated to-morrow morning, I shall die with my sins forgiven and God's

pardon in my soul and I shall die with many good and brave men.

"Think of them—the long succession of the dead who died for Ireland. And it is a great death—oh, that I may support it bravely.

"If it be said I shed tears remember they come not from cowardice but from sorrow and that brave men are not ashamed to weep sometimes.

"I hope I shall not weep but if I do, it shall be nature's tribute wrung from me: a human being whose heart was always compassionate and whose heart pitiful for the grief of others."

"This long waiting has been the cruel thing—three months, 11 days now."
(Signed) R.C.

THE last of these letters reads:

"My dominating thought was to keep Ireland out of the war... Ireland should not sell her soul for any mess of Empire. War means ruin for Ireland.

"If I die to-morrow bury me in Ireland and I shall be in the Catholic faith for I accept it fully now... It tells me what my heart long sought—in vain—in Protestant coldness. I could not find it—but I saw it in the faces of the Irish.

"Now I know what I loved in them—the chivalry of Christ speaking through human eyes as it is from that source the lovable things come for Christ was the first Knight.

"And now good-bye.
"I write with hope—hope that God will be with me to the end and that all my faults and failures and errors will be blotted out by the Divine Knight and Divine Nationalist."
(Signed) R.C.

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