

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 611

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 611.....

Witness

Mr. Sean T. O Ceallaigh,
President of Ireland,
Aras an Uachtarain,
Phoenix Park,
Dublin.
Identity.

President of Ireland.

Subject.

Biographical note on Roger Casement.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.9.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

W.S. 611



UACHTARÁN NA HÉIREANN
(PRESIDENT OF IRELAND)

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
(DUBLIN)

P.4690

15 Samhain, 1951.

Secretary,
Bureau of Military History,
26, Westland Row.

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A Chara,

I am desired by the President to send you herewith the text of a speech made by him on 1st November, 1951, at King's Inns, Dublin, on the occasion of his unveiling of a painting by Sir John Lavery, of the Appeal of Roger Casement at the Court of Criminal Appeal, London, on 17th July, 1916, against the sentence of death passed on him for High Treason on June 26th, 1916.

As the speech contains references to historic facts within the knowledge of the President it might be regarded as suitable for inclusion in the archives of the Bureau.

Three copies of the speech, autographed by the President under date of 14th November, 1951, are enclosed.

Mise, le meas,

Rúnaí.

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Speech made by the President

MR SEÁN T.Ó CEALLAIGH

on 1st November, 1951

at King's Inns, Dublin

on the occasion of his unveiling of a painting by
Sir John Lavery, of the Appeal of Roger Casement
at the Court of Criminal Appeal, London, on 17th
July, 1916, against the sentence of death passed
on him for High Treason on June 26th, 1916.

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This speech was subsequently recorded by the
President for the Bureau of Military History,
at the premises of the Folklore Commission,
on 14th November, 1951.

anocht

Ruaidhrí Mac Easmhainn, an té atá dá mhóradh/againn, do daoradh ina fhealltóir ag Cúirteanna Shasana é, agus do b'í an chroch ba chríoch dó. Ach má daoradh féin, ní h-ionann breith na staire agus breith na cúirte.

Sul má thosnaigh Ruaidhrí Mac Easmhainn ar an obair úd a thug chun na croiche é, bhí a ainm in áirde - agus ní háidhbhéil an chainnt í - ar fuaid an domhain, agus san i ngeall ar obair eile a rinne sé; an saothar san a ghlac sé de lámh san Chongó agus ina dhiaidh sin i bPutamayó, ag nochtadh na h-éagcóra agus an cos-ar-bolg a bhí n-imirt ar dhaor-aicmí.

Aoinne a scrúddóidh saoghal Mhic Easmhainn go cúramach, chídhrídh sé ná raibh deifríocht ar bith idir an obair sin a ghnóthaigh molad agus cáil dó ar fuaid an domhain agus an obair eile úd. a thuill tarhuisne an tsasanaigh dó. An grádh don cheart agus don tsaoirse ba bhun leo araon.

Cé gur in mBaile Átha Cliath a rugadh Ruaidhrí Mac Easmhainn ba de bhunadh Ultaich é, agus is in Ultaibh a chaith tús a óige, thart fá chósta Aontroma ar an mBeinn Mhóir agus lámh le Báigh Mhurlocha. In Ultaibh a fuair sé chuid scoilíochta, agus is ann a chéad-chuir sé eolas ar scéal a tíre dhúchais. Agus dá fhaid ó Bhaile dhó ina dhiaidh sin, san Aifric agus in Americe Theas, níor shéan sé riamh agus níor cheil a dhílseacht d'Eirinn.

An suí so de Chúirt Athchomhaire Choiriúil Shasana atá le feiscint againn ins an ola-phictiúir so de cuid Lavery, do scuir sí ar 18ú la de Iúil, 1916, agus do dhaingnigh sí breith an bháis ar Ruaidhrí Mac Easmhainn. I gCarcair Pentonville dó idir an lá san agus lá a chrochta ba mhinic dó le linn an ama/ag^{sin}cur síos ar laethe a óige in Ultaibh agus go mór mhór ar na greasa síulóide a dheineadh sé thart ar an mBeinn Mhóir agus ar bháigh Mhurlocha. La des na laethe sin dubhairt sé na focail so:-

"Nuair a bheidh deire déanta aca liom", ar seisean, ag tagairt do Ghallaibh, "ná fágtar mo chnámha san áit uafásaigh seo ach tógtar ar ais go Murloch me, agus annsúd bíod m'uaigh!"

Guím go láidir go dtabharfar achuinn sin Ruaidhrí uasail
Mhic Sasmhainn chun críche fós.

Members of the Honourable Society of King's Inns,

It is for me a great privilege that my first official act as an Honorary Benchler of this Honourable Society is to unveil a painting which depicts one of the closing scenes in the life of one of Ireland's noblest sons - Roger Casement.

I would like to say here, that I am deeply grateful to the Benchers of the King's Inns for the honour they have done me in inviting me to unveil this picture. I would like the Benchers to know too, that I deeply appreciate the privilege they have conferred upon me, as President of Ireland, in inviting me to be an Honorary member of their ancient and honourable Society.

Though he was born in Sandycove, Co.Dublin, Roger Casement was of Ulster Protestant stock. His father and his family for generations were natives of Co.Antrim. His mother died when he was about nine, so from then on he was reared by cousins who lived near Ballymena. It was at Ballymena Diocesan school that Casement received his early education.

From what source he imbibed his nationalist opinions, I do not know, but from early boyhood he evinced a keen interest in Irish history. In particular, he displayed an admiration for Irish leaders of the type of Owen Roe O'Neill, Patrick Sarsfield, Tone, Emmet, the Sheares brothers, and other leaders of rebel Ireland. He was an early adherent of the Gaelic League, and he enjoyed the confidence and friendship of Dr.Douglas Hyde, its President, and of many of its leading personalities. It is well known that he assisted his friend Pádraig Pearse, financially and otherwise, in the founding of Scoil Éanna in 1908.

I mention these details because unfriendly voices have said that Casement cared nothing for Ireland, and seldom gave her a thought until the Great War was declared in 1914. I do know personally that Casement was in intimate association with many of the leaders of the Irish-Ireland movement as early as the year 1907.

Before he became generally known as an Irish patriot, Roger Casement's magnificent humanitarian work for the much-tortured peoples of the rubber countries of the Congo and Putamayo, had gained for Britain immense prestige and won for himself world-wide renown and many high honours.

When, broken in health after his strenuous but successful labours for humanity in the disease infested swamps of Putamayo, he resigned from the British service in 1912, he returned to Ulster. There he found a political storm of the most intense character raging. It will be sufficient indication of the excited political conditions in Ulster at that time to say that the Home Rule for Ireland Bill had that year been introduced into the British House of Commons. Casement took the deepest interest in this impressive political struggle. He organised a successful meeting in favour of Home Rule at Ballymoney. It was attended by a considerable number of his Antrim neighbours and friends, all Ulster Protestants, who duly declared themselves in favour of accepting Home Rule, if the law were enacted.

Nothing pleased Casement more than the success of the Unionist Party in securing arms for their adherents and landing them safely at Larne. Here he discovered a splendid headline for Nationalist Ireland. At once it occurred to Casement that what could be done in the North against Home Rule, could, and should, be done in the South in defence of Home Rule. He hastened to Dublin where he found that this view was shared by many leaders of the Nationalists of the South. Casement urged that the Nationalists of the South be organised as a military force, and arms be procured for them to defend the Home Rule Act, which, it was anticipated, would be in operation within a year or two. John MacNeill, Vice-President of the Gaelic League, took hold of this idea at once, and hastened to put into practice. He and Casement secured the support of The O'Rahilly; Seán MacDermott; Bulmer Hobson, Laurence Kettle, who, with three or four others, became the founders of the Irish Volunteers. In the later months of 1913, Casement spent much time travelling throughout the country addressing meetings and organising companies of Volunteers. Everywhere he had gratifying success. His next step was to set about finding arms for his recruits.

Early in 1914 he went to London, having got the approval of his colleagues in Dublin to set up there a committee to raise funds to buy arms and to arrange for their being landed in Ireland. His close friend and ardent admirer, Mrs Stopford Green the historian, gave him the use of her house as headquarters for his Committee. There, arrangements were made for the purchase of the arms and ammunition which eventually were landed at Howth on July 26th, 1914

Having seen that historic project well under way, Casement's next move was to go to the United States, there to work up enthusiasm amongst Irish-Americans for the newly formed Irish

Volunteers, and to collect as much money as would enable the Volunteers to be properly equipped for the big fight he believed they would be confronted with later. Not many weeks after his landing in New York, the declaration of war in Europe came on the world. This put an end to his project.

Casement now took a very daring and hazardous decision. He decided to go to Germany to try to win support for the liberation of Ireland. That this idea of complete independence for Ireland was not a mere sudden impulse is proved by the fact that he had written, and had published in 1912 in the "Irish Review"- a monthly literary magazine founded and edited by his friends Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Plunkett - articles in which he set forth his views on the right of Ireland to complete independence

The story of Casement's work in Germany, if I were to deal with it, would require much more time than I dare ask you to give me now. That Casement was unhappy in Berlin, and somehow became convinced that little help from the German Government would be forthcoming, seems to be a fact.

Word reached Casement via Switzerland through Count Plunkett whose son Joseph had visited him in Germany the year before, that a Rising had been fixed for Easter 1916. This was a cause of the greatest anxiety to Casement. He believed that no Rising in Ireland could be possible without adequate German assistance, particularly in arms. He made up his mind that he must get to Ireland to prevent such a Rising. He decided to face for home, though he realised he was imperilling his life in doing so. He, with two companions, landed by German submarine on the coast of Kerry not far from Ardfert early on the morning of Good Friday 1916. Casement was captured by the R.I.C. in the vicinity later that day, and before any of his friends were aware of his arrival, was taken by police escort and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

His trial on the charge of treason opened before the Kings' Bench Division of the High Court, London, on June 26th 1916. There were three judges:- The Lord Chief Justice (Viscount Reading); Mr Justice Avory, and Mr Justice Horridge. Casement was indicted under a Statute of Edward III of 1351 "for adhering to the King's enemies without the Realm."

Counsel for the Crown were: The Attorney General (Sir F.E. Smith); the Solicitor General (Sir George Cave); Mr A.H. Bodkin Mr Travers Humphreys, and Mr G.A. H. Branson.

For Casement there appeared: Mr A.M. Sullivan, K.C. Sergeant-at-Law of the Irish Bar; Mr Artemus Jones, Mr J.H. Morgan.

As was expected, the jury found Casement guilty, and he was

condemned to death. An appeal was taken but the verdict was confirmed. Several petitions, one signed by many important and influential Englishmen and women in various walks of life, were presented asking for a reprieve which was refused. Casement was hanged in Pentonville Prison on August 3rd, 1916.

Englishmen may regard Roger Casement as having been a traitor, but Irishmen will not. Some may share the view of George Bernard Shaw who used these words when writing in defence of Casement after his execution: "He who fights for the independence of his country may be a fool but he is not a traitor, and never will be regarded as one by his fellow-countrymen."

My own view, which I imagine will be shared by my friends of to-night, is, that Roger Casement must be classed with Tone and Emmet, and the historic men of 1916 who sacrificed their lives for the cause of Irish liberty. He, like those - his glorious companions - gave up life and liberty in a cause that was dearer to him than either. His name, with theirs, is enthroned in a goodly company and a right noble succession. He, and they, shall be remembered forever.

I am indeed glad that this painting has come into the possession of the Honourable Society of Kings' Inns, and that it will hang here in a place of honour in vindication of Casement's name.

It gives me very great pleasure to unveil it.

Sean P. Keefe
Jan. 14th 1957.

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