

W. S. 1,034

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1034

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,034

Witness

Mrs. Mary Leech (Nee O'Meehan),
Loughcurra Lodge,
Kinvara,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Sister of Fr. O'Meehan
who was C.C. in Salthill, Galway, 1921.

Subject.

Circumstances of death of Fr. Griffin, C.C.,
Rahoon Parish, Salthill, Co. Galway, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2353

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STATEMENT BY Mrs. MARY LEECH (née O'Meehan),

Loughcurra Lodge, Kinvara, Co. Galway.

My brother, John William O'Meehan, was born at Dunkellin in the parish of Clarenbridge, County Galway, in November 1881. He went to school at Kiltarnan N.S., later to St. Ignatius College, Galway, and finally to Maynooth. He was ordained priest in 1906.

I cannot remember my brother speaking of Ireland or its history or language before he went to Maynooth. During his vacations from Maynooth he always sought the company of old people, to hear them speak of their young days, to learn Irish from them and to listen to their stories about the Land League and the hardships they underwent in that period. The people were very fond of him and liked to tell him all they knew or had heard of the Penal Days and Land League period.. I understood from him that he had no love for the landlord class. He was always denouncing the custom of those people who were cringing and debasing themselves before the landlords.

After his ordination he spent two years in the Dunboyne Establishment doing his B.D. Degree. During those two years he frequently visited Dublin and spent much of his time in the company of Pádraig Pearse and Arthur Griffith and others who later became leaders in the Independence Movement. Having obtained his B.D. Degree he was appointed Catholic Curate in Ennistymon and later in Ballyvaughan. He went to Australia in 1910 and returned to Ireland in 1912. He taught in St. Mary's College, Galway, for a short period until he became Diocesan Inspector. He did not like teaching as it gave him little opportunity to be out amongst the people. I think it was in 1915 he was appointed senior Catholic Curate in Kinvara, Co. Galway, where he remained until 1919. He took a very active interest in the Irish Volunteers in Kinvara. He also supported the Language movement and taught Irish classes as well as helping financially.

In 1919 my brother was appointed Catholic Curate in Rahoon Parish, Salthill, Galway. The other Curate in the Parish was Father Griffin a native of Loughrea. The two Curates lived together in the same house in Mount Pellier Terrace, but my brother did not sleep in the house as he had got several anonymous letters threatening his life. He handed these letters to his Bishop, Dr. O'Dea, who publicly condemned the writers. I always understood from him that these letters simply contained threats to his life.

My brother, Father John, gave me the following details in the summer of 1921 immediately after the Truce:- He told me that he attended to the spiritual needs of Joyce, a spy, executed by the I.R.A. Shortly after Joyce's execution a party of Black & Tans called one night at the house of Dr. O'Byrne (now deceased) in Galway. They inquired if Father O'Meehan was there and searched the house. He had been in the house at a card party but had left before the arrival of the Black & Tans. He slept that night in St. Bride's Nursing Home, The Crescent, Galway. When the party of R.I.C. failed to find him, when they raided Dr. O'Byrne's, it seems that they went to the Curate's house in Mount Pellier Terrace. They did not enter the house. They sent in a man dressed in civilian clothes to knock at the door. The house-keeper, whose name I forget, looked out of a window upstairs when she heard the knock and inquired who was there. The man at the door below said "Urgent sick call".

The housekeeper called Father Griffin and told him of the urgent sick call. She advised him not to go as the night was very bad and it was past midnight. Father Griffin went out with the man who knocked and never came back alive. Father O'Meehan told me that man was recognised and that he afterwards met with a violent death.

My brother also said that it was he himself the Tans wanted to murder that night but, failing to find him, they murdered Father Griffin because he refused to tell where he (Father O'Meehan) was.

He also told me that some of his parishioners came to him shortly after Father Griffin's disappearance. They said to him that they thought they knew where his body was hidden. Their cattle had behaved in a strange way at a spot close to a bye-road near the village of Barna. The cattle became nervous near this spot. They shied and shunned the place. My brother went with the parishioners and found Father Griffin's body buried in the bog at the place so clearly indicated by the action of the cattle.

In conclusion I would like to state that I heard my brother, Father John, say that it was he who advised the leaders in Dublin to organise the West and that was the reason Liam Mellows was sent. He proposed and supported Mr. Frank Fahy, late Ceann Comhairle, as Sinn Féin candidate in the General Election of 1918. After the death of Father Griffin, Father John went to Scotland on the advice of his Bishop and remained there until the Truce in July 1921. He died on the 12th April, 1923.

Signed: Mary Leech
(Mary Leech)

Date: 7 November 1954

7 November 1954

Witness: Con Moynihan
(Con Moynihan)

