

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BUIO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,703

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1703.

Witness

Francis Phillips,  
Ladyswell Street, Cashel,  
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Secretary and Vice-President of Sinn Féin Club.

Subject.

Sinn Féin Club, Cashel,  
Co. Tipperary,  
1914 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No. S. 2999.

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1703

STATEMENT BY FRANCIS PHILLIPS,

Ladyswell St., Cashel, Co. Tipperary.

Upon a dark night, October 14th 1914, a few spirited young men assembled in the City Hall, Cashel, with the object of forming a Sinn Féin Club. Among them was the writer, and though they were actuated by the noblest motives, their meeting was a meeting of stealth because, at the time, the British recruiting bugle was sounding all over the country, calling Ireland's manhood to "Join Up" to fight for England.

The days rolled by, and through sheer determination and patriotic endeavour, we kept the feeble club alive, and winning, by such efforts, much suspicion and unpopularity. We proved bold enough to defy all opposition, confident that in the end our loyalty to our country's cause would prove a success. The rattle of the guns in the "Howth Landing" was in our ears, the drilling, the organising, the marching and the stirring speeches followed, until at last the bursting shells of Easter Week, 1916, told us our brothers were in arms and that the old cause, led by Ireland's unconquered sons, was once more a living reality.

Encouraged with this idea, we still organised, knowing that dangers and sacrifices would be encountered. We counted not the cost, but persisted in the face of bitter opposition which came from not alone the foreign government but from our own people. Here in and around Cashel we had a large Volunteer body at the time, which dwindled much at the Redmond split, leaving us with no more than 40 or 50 "Irish Volunteers". Very many became disinterested and, because of R.I.C. vigilance, spying and petty persecutions by the said British servants of the Crown, our gatherings and club meetings were held in secrecy and silence. However, less than a dozen of us held together, the most

prominent among them I, with respect, mention: Seumas O'Neill, a Rockwell College Gaelic Professor; Richard Luby, baker (an aged man at the time); Patrick Phillips (brother of the writer), who in 1919 and 1920 was imprisoned in Cork and Belfast Jails and removed to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison, where he endured a 17 days hunger-strike; the late Patrick Casey who fought in some ambushes; Ed. Grogan, Paul Mulcahy, Patrick Nolan, William O'Donnell, Tom Nagle, Paddy Hogan, and others I cannot now remember, all played a self-sacrificing and bold part in the grim struggle for their country's rights.

In the quiet town of Fethard during the time I am dealing with, our Sinn Féin Club used meet perhaps once a month according as conditions were favourable, and upon more than three occasions we were followed at late and early hours by the police. Some of our members travelled by side-car, others cycled, but whatever way we strove to meet in the little Town Hall under the presidency of the late Pierce McCann, we were harassed and hunted as though we were evil-doers. With modesty I mention that the writer, who had since the "sowing of the seed" identified himself with the activities of the movement, became Vice President of the Club, and under the patriotic McCann was in demand at meetings all over the county as an organiser and chiefly as a platform speaker. With many of the leading spirits of the time in Thurles, Clonmel, Cappawhite, Doon, etc., I addressed enthusiastic gatherings, thereby attracting police attention and, as a marked man, won the vengeance of the authorities which shortly revealed itself in the same manner as bitterly as it did to many others who advocated the liberation of their country.

One morning after a Thomas Ashe demonstration in Bansha, Co. Tipperary, Seumas O'Neill was arrested and

imprisoned in Derry Jail, thence to Cork Jail where, with Austin Stack, Eamon O'Dwyer of Ballagh and other prominent men, he underwent much sufferings. Still we kept the flag flying and organised a monster Thomas Ashe memorial meeting for September 30th 1917, the day of the Ashe funeral, which was addressed by Darrell Figgis in a sports field in Cashel. The meeting was truly magnificent; it brought thousands to the field, with 15 bands, brass and fife. That night we held, after a great procession, a reunion at Stewart's Hotel, where in oratory, recitation and song we proclaimed our undying allegiance to Dark Rosaleen. By that time the Sinn Féin policy was being accepted by the people, and raids, arrests and petty annoyances from the R.I.C. assisted largely in fostering a feeling of tolerance for the agitators and disturbers of the peace, as we were called by our enemies. No less than a dozen raids my family were subjected to, often at the dead of night, as were a few other families that were associated with the movement and whose sons or daughters were active in the cause. These tactics of the oppressor embittered many and were instrumental in the liberty campaign in bringing those who otherwise would be against us into the ranks and affording us confidence to forge ahead. Forge ahead we did, in the face of strong and bitter opposition which declared itself in numerous arrests which reduced our little band to a few really active and useful members.

Early in 1918 the anti-conscription campaign absorbed much of our time, and though drilling was carried on as quietly as we believed safe, the sound of the British recruiting bugle was still heard and winning to its ranks numerous young men who, through unemployment or poverty or blinded by English promises, answered its call and found themselves victims. The writer and his colleagues resisted

with all the manhood and boldness at their command the enticements of the enemy, proclaiming with courage their undying loyalty to the cause they were ready to sacrifice much for.

From Sinn Féin headquarters were issued orders that "Ireland's Manifesto" or "Proclamation" should be read in public on August 15th 1918, and the duty of so doing fell to me as secretary of the Cashel Sinn Féin organisation as far as that body was concerned. Though entreated by friends, particularly so by the late Very Reverend Dean Ryan, P.P., V. G., who, believing he was for my good and the good of my family, came to my office where I was employed as a clerk and pleaded with me to desist and mind my position. Yet I insisted, and that night I read the manifesto at the Croke Memorial Cross in Cashel. The meeting was large, and enthused by the music of the brass band and the warm reception we got, I delivered a spirited speech, which was applauded, notwithstanding the presence of several members of the Royal Irish Constabulary.

At 9.30 on the morning after, i.e. 16th August, 1918, I was surprised by a visit of six R.I.C. men who arrested me while at breakfast. I was sent to Clonmel Jail, where I spent a month, and afterwards to Belfast Jail. Tried at Victoria Barracks, Cork, with my companions John Hassett of Barnane, Co. Tipperary, Seumas Mulcahy Lyons, Richard Treacy and others, we received a sentence of two years each for our faith in Ireland's cause and our uncompromising loyalty to her ancient claim to liberty. In Belfast Jail I made the friendship of Austin Stack, Ernest Blythe, Eamon O'Dwyer, Ballagh, Fionán Lynch and others, all brothers in the new vigorous and unbreakable Sinn Féin movement. Released with four others after enduring the horrors of hunger-strike and the fearful

misery of solitary confinement for nine months, I came home.

After a couple of months I sought my employment, but the bigoted Orange firm bolted the door against me and refused to restore me to the position which I held for 20 years. That I made a sacrifice is no idle boast, and unable to find suitable employment, having neither trade nor profession, I was without work for six years, until I finally secured a petty office job in town. Many of my close co-workers in the movement were badly treated too, some of them impoverished for life, but yet unbeaten

we held by the principles of freedom and helped in various ways those 'on the run' who also were upholding the flag in defiance of opposition.

I believe we acted a fair part in the great freedom campaign, and though bitter criticism was often launched against us, we, in the end, whether through military endeavour or virile organisation, gained our point. The results stand bold and can be recorded at the credit side of Ireland's accounts. Here in this hurried sketch I am concerned only with the great independence struggle, the noble spirits it brought together, the men who did the spade work when the "sowing of the seed" was looked upon as something akin to political heresy and national lunacy. Unwilling to speak only of what I have experienced, I desire to reveal but what is true, to favour no man, least of all myself. I maintain such records as this will prove valuable to generations yet to come, who, with the calm begotten of years, will be able to understand them and the men who laboured in our country's noble cause.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY STAIRS MILEATA 1910
NO. W.S. 4703

Signed: James P. KellyDate: 3 Dec 1957Witness: Grace

(Investigator).