

Roger Casement: the Limerick Connections

by Angus Mitchell

In March 1916, Roger Casement summarised in his Berlin diary the outline of a guarded conversation with the German spymaster, Rudolf Nadolny. Plans for an insurrection in Ireland were now prioritised at the highest political level in the German Foreign Office. In the course of their exchange, Nadolny read out a letter he had received from the IRB chief John Devoy, dated 16/2/1916. The communication set out plainly the requirements for the planned rebellion. Devoy asked for 100,000 rifles, trained artillery-men, officers and plenty of cannon. Then Casement noted the following: 'He suggested Limerick as the best place for landing—and said that the 'rising' would take place on *Easter Sunday*.¹

The idea that Limerick was the preferred landing place for the arms shipment, just two months before the final plan was activated, is a detail that appears to have been overlooked in much of the mainstream analysis of 1916. Unsurprisingly, Dublin has come to dominate the narrative, but certainly in the early preparations for a rising, circulating between the US, Ireland and Germany, Limerick was considered of critical strategic importance. Devoy's preference for Limerick as his chosen place for the landing of arms was doubtless based partly upon the location of the city in the tidal estuary of the River Shannon. He knew he could depend, too, on a high level of support on the ground from a well trained local Volunteer regiment. Strategists within the German General Staff eventually decided against Limerick. Instead, Ballyheigue Bay and the great sweep of beach at Banna Strand in County Kerry were chosen as the site for the rendezvous. It was there that the *Aud* conveying the armaments on behalf of the IRB and the submarine, the U-19, bringing Casement and his faithful comrade, Robert Monteith from Germany arrived on Holy Thursday. But various unfortunate circumstances meant that the two vessels failed to link up. Casement was captured, stood trial

for high treason and was executed in London. Monteith remained on the run for many weeks, holed up on a farm in County Limerick, until he escaped back to America.

Despite the significant reference to Limerick in this early plan for the Rising, the city is not mentioned again in Casement's diary, which is surprising as both Casement and Robert Monteith were familiar with Limerick and the surrounding region. When Casement was eventually arrested, however, a flag of Limerick was found among his possessions, which had been given to him on the eve of his departure by the Limerick-born, Thomas St John Gaffney. This unique possession would indicate that Limerick was still part of some imagined scenario among the various contingent plans that Casement was considering as he disembarked from that submarine on 21 April 1916.

While Limerick is mentioned in various historical essays written by Casement over the years, there is no surviving record of his visiting the city before his arrival here with Patrick Pearse at the end of January 1914 to address the Irish Volunteers. The two men stayed at Cruise's Hotel and spent a good deal of time in the company of the legendary Fenian, John Daly and his immediate family, based at their fine Georgian house in Barrington Street. Details of their visit were extensively covered in the *Limerick Leader* of 26 January. An editorial statement entitled 'The Volunteer Movement' wrote positively of the founding of the movement. This was then followed by detailed coverage of the meeting in the Atheneum, where both men spoke to a capacity crowd.²

Pearse spoke first and his speech focused on the responsibility of the Irish citizen to render service to Ireland.³ He spoke of the historical provenance for Irish independence and the long genealogy of resistance to foreign rule. He assured the audience that the volunteer movement would in no way interfere

with the passage of the Home Rule Bill. Casement followed on from Pearse and was more brazen in his approach. The appearance of 'Sir Roger Casement' on a platform would certainly have excited talk in many different quarters of the city and provided an exotic touch to the Home Rule discussion.

Born in Dublin in 1864, Casement had distinguished himself after many years of service in sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil as a British consular official. His investigations carried out on behalf of the Foreign Office, into outrages committed against indigenous people enslaved to supply rubber for a new age of western manufacturing, brought him respect and international renown. He was held up as a symbol of the moral authority of the British Empire. With the journalist and activist E.D. Morel, he founded the Congo Reform Association. In 1911, he was knighted for his courage and integrity in the conduct of his duties and his name and reputation were associated with the long struggle against international slavery. Two years later, when Casement emerged into the open in support of Irish sovereign independence, he added a defiant anticolonial voice to the intellectual struggle for an independent Ireland. It was an apparent ideological shift that confused his British Foreign Office colleagues, but Casement understood the logic behind this inner evolution and was happy to speak about it in public.

As he addressed the Limerick Volunteers that night in late January 1914, he focused his talk on his experiences during the Boer War or second South African War (1899-1902). He reminded his audience that the Boers were a volunteer army and put up the 'greatest fight against the greatest army in the world.' Casement claimed that he had gone into the war in support of the empire but had emerged by the end as a supporter of the Boers. He saw Boer sons as young as twelve fighting and felt that this should inspire the

Irish Volunteers in their own cause. The Boers now had self-government and were at peace. He went on to admit that his experience of that war [where he had worked mainly as an intelligence officer reporting on the movement of arms into Boer territory] had sown inside him the seeds of doubt. It set him on a path leading to his rejection of the oppressive forces of empire and to embrace instead the dreams and aspirations of an independent and sovereign Ireland, where a new form of international compassion might flourish.

But his first experience of Limerick as a spokesperson for the Irish Volunteer movement was a positive one. He was highly impressed with this inaugural meeting and the impressive turnout of local citizenry. That night he scribbled a note to Joseph Mary Plunkett: 'Tonight's meeting was a great success. Pearse spoke splendidly – a real orator. The Mayor presided & all went magnificently. The finest audience I've seen yet in Ireland – from the faces – all handsome, strong, good, young men mostly, but many old and middle aged & the respectable and well to do prominent & to the fore – most enthusiastic throughout. The Volunteers have been given a good start – & if no "political" pronouncement is made against the movement, Limerick will raise the siege!'"⁴

The following morning, Pearse and Casement left Limerick and on reaching his rooms in Malahide, Casement scribbled a letter to Daly on Irish Trade Mark paper:

My dear old friend,

I want to thank you and all your nieces and your sister for your great kindness and hospitality to me at Limerick.

It was a real pleasure to see you again and so much better than I had expected to see you. I hope this change for the better will continue, and that you may soon indeed be able to 'hobble after'.

I shall be glad if fate brings me to Limerick again, and to see you once more. Meantime, a hundred thanks to you and yours for your welcome to the old grey city.

Yours very sincerely,

Roger Casement.



Roger Casement (1864-1916) visited Limerick with Patrick Pearse in January 1914 to address the Irish Volunteers.

P.S. I have lost a "Cash" book – just a little paper backed red a/c book *(cost 1d.!) which has some items of cash expenditure for January in it – a few odds & ends. If it was left in your home might I beg that it be sent to me by post to this address. I should be much obliged.

Don't forget some copies of *Limerick Leader* of y'day with the report of the meeting.⁵

Addressing Daly as 'my dear old friend' would suggest that the two men were already well acquainted. By 1914, Casement had been moving within republican and advanced nationalist circles in both Ireland and US for well over a decade. His appearance at the Feis na Gleann, in County Antrim in June 1904 is generally accepted by Casement's many biographers as the occasion for his first public display of support for the spirit of cultural nationalism. Over the next decade and sustained by his Foreign Office salary, Casement discreetly supported a series of causes associated with the independence movement. He funded and attended Irish language initiatives and radical newspapers and his early contact with John Daly may well have resulted from the fact that Daly had helped to both found and finance the publishing of *Irish Freedom* (*Saoirse*) – an advanced nationalist publication that Casement would contribute to under

various pseudonyms.⁶ One might only guess at the kind of conversations the two men had, but Casement doubtless felt enormous admiration for Daly and his long revolutionary pedigree. He would have enjoyed, too, listening to Daly reminisce about his friendship with the legendary Young Irelander, John Mitchel, and his life of sacrifice and adventure.⁷

Casement sent a second letter to Daly that same day thanking him for copies of the *Limerick Leader* and adding that he had seen Tom Clarke the previous night. Clarke, of course, was central to organizing the movement from the cover of his newsagent's shop in Dublin, an outlet familiar to Casement and through which he organized his subscriptions to various advanced nationalist newspapers.⁸ In a letter from Clarke to Daly, Clarke made reference to that meeting with Casement commenting, 'Sir Roger Casement called this evening & told me of the meeting yesterday and how delighted he was with his stay with you. Both he and Pearse say your Limerick meeting was the best in many respects of anything they have been at yet. That's grand.'⁹

Over the following weeks, the atmosphere in Limerick for the movement heightened. On 4 February, there was a large demonstration in support of the Irish language attended by Douglas Hyde and Limerick's Bishop O'Dwyer. Behind the scenes, Casement helped to link Limerick into wider national networks working for the common end of independence. He returned to Limerick, this time without Pearse, for the St Patrick's Day celebrations in March 1914.

St Patrick's Day 1914

According to the press accounts, the weather was desperate – cold, blustery and 'driving showers of sleet'. Irish National Volunteers gathered in and around the Milk Market. Mass was held in St Michael's church. At 11.30, the column of Volunteers began their march. The *Limerick Leader* reported: '.....the principal feature of the day was the vast and inspiring procession of the Limerick Corps of Irish National Volunteers ... Several hundreds took part in the march, and it must be said without exaggeration the turn out would do credit to a fully drilled first

class regiment.¹⁰ The Volunteers were led by two bands. Their route took them via William Street, O'Connell Street and Ballinacurra on to Raheen Church, where they were inspected by Casement.

That evening nearly 150 boys of the Sluagh Lord Edward Fitzgerald of Na Fianna Eireann, congregated at 8.30 under Capt. Dalton at the Fianna Hall in Little Barrington Street.¹¹ Casement was introduced by James Ledden of the Wolfe Tone Club. Ledden, too, was an IRB man and the gathering began with an impressive display of exercises in signaling, squad and company drill.¹² Once the demonstration was over, Casement was introduced to the assembled and after applauding the display he spoke briefly of his work in Africa and South America before concentrating the main part of his discussion on the 'Fianna of old'.¹³

From the newspaper reports, Casement's address appears to have been based extensively on his essay published, a few months later in the *Fianna Handbook*, under the title 'Chivalry'. The opening lines of the essay: 'Chivalry dies when Imperialism begins' captures the essence of his argument that while chivalry has been appropriated through time by imperial power structures, this was a travesty; the real adherents of chivalry are more honestly revealed in the long tradition of those who opposed imperial power. Provocatively, Casement pitted chivalry directly against the forces of imperialism and argued that once the

chivalric code is debased for imperial intentions then its very essence is eroded and lost. He went on to claim chivalry as the core value of both the Fianna and the Fenian tradition and the martial spirit that inspired successive generations of Irish men and women to resist English rule.

His argument ranged unselfconsciously across time and space. He drew comparisons to the Japanese spirit of sacrifice embodied in 'Bushido': the code of moral principles observed by Samurai warriors. He then related various stories from Irish mythology in an effort to capture and explain the martial spirit encoded into the stories of ancient Ireland and the 'heroic age'. He upheld such myths as the purveyors of the true and ancient values of the people:

The legends give us the imagination of the race, they give us that kind of history which it intends to exhibit, and, therefore, whether semi-historical or mythical, are prophetic. They unveil, if obscurely, the ideals and aspirations of the land and race which gave them birth; and so possess a value far beyond that of actual events, and duly recorded deeds.'

The essay becomes a staunch defense of Irish mythology and the challenge of each generation to nurture the values embodied in the ancient myths and legends in the imagination of the youth, before the empirical structures of



Fianna membership tag: detail.
[Photography by John O'Brien]

'fact' and 'known history' take over. The argument ends with a defense of the Fenian spirit: 'Would you have a picture of true knighthood, you will find it in the prison cell of the Fenian soldiers of 1866,' and a re-emphasis of the link between the Fianna recruit and the spirit of Fenianism. 'The true knight is he who keeps the boy's heart in the trained body of the man,' he claimed. Such comments from a public figure who had been knighted only three years previously by the very authority he now denounced was not merely provocative, but demonstrative of his decision to take the path of open treason. How his words moved the gathering of young Fianna is not known but many would have recognised in his words and argument a familiarity and respect for John Daly's revered work on *Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism*.¹⁴

Curragh Mutiny: Limerick to Belfast

The bad weather in Limerick over the feast of St Patrick took a toll on Casement's health and he spent a few days recovering as a guest in the Daly household on Barrington Street. But his convalescence was cut short by the news of the Curragh mutiny, when British army officers decided to take a stand against the government's line on Home Rule. On hearing the news,



Na Fianna Éireann. A photograph from 1913 showing members of the Limerick Branch assembled in front of the purpose-built hall at the back of the Daly household on Barrington Street. [Photograph enhanced by John O'Brien]

Casement left Limerick hurriedly and headed straight for Belfast in the hope of speaking with Sir Edward Carson. His intention was to allay the increasing tensions by trying to persuade both the Ulster Volunteers and Irish Volunteers to unite in common purpose based upon a wider sense of patriotism. It was a demand for the impossible. On his return to his lodgings in Malahide he wrote to Daly:

Dear Mr Daly,

I've been kept running about ever since I left you, without a spare minute. Up to Belfast at once & only back last night. This accounts for my failure to write you earlier.

I am all right again now – thanks to your sister-in-law's kindness to me when I was not well.

You were all so good to me. I shall not forget it.

A German friend will be visiting Limerick soon and I am giving him a letter of introduction to you, and I want you to put him in the way of seeing the true nationalists of Limerick – not the shoneen.

I'd like him to see the Volunteers too, if that were possible. He will be there only a day, or two at outside – and I want him to realize that Limerick is faithful to her ancient fame still in the hearts of her people.

With all kindest thoughts to you and your good family.

Yours always sincerely,

Roger Casement¹⁵

A few days later Casement wrote to Daly again with further details about his German friend. On the 28 March he wrote:

My dear old friend,

My German friend will go to Limerick perhaps Sunday and surely (?) Monday. I've given him a letter to you & he will call on you at once. Please see him and help him to see others in Limerick – the right type to convey to his mind a true impression.

His influence on the Continent will count for much – and it is essential the liars should not get him but that he should understand that, at bottom, Ireland is still Ireland.

Today shall be as yesterday,

The red blood flows in Ireland still

Show him the Fianna & if possible the Volunteers. He goes on to Galway probably Monday night – & has to return to Berlin very soon.

What you tell him may help much to give the truth to Europe – to Germany at any rate.

Yours always,

Roger Casement

Oscar Schweriner

The identity of the 'German friend' was Oscar Schweriner (1873-1934), a respected journalist and novelist, of Polish and Jewish extraction. After migrating to New York as a fourteen year old boy, Schweriner had developed skills as a photojournalist and learned English. Returning to Europe, he worked between Berlin and London, writing for the *Daily Mail* and various German newspapers. From 1908, he began to publish fiction for a mainly German audience.

In March 1914, Schweriner was sent to Ireland by the German newspaper, the *Vossische Zeitung*, and was one of over fifty foreign correspondents who arrived from around Europe and beyond to cover the story of the deepening tensions in Ireland in the wake of the Curragh Mutiny. There is an oblique reference to Schweriner in the diary of Elsie Henry that suggests that he had an established friendship with Casement. On 30 March 1914, Elsie noted:

Sir Roger Casement came in about 11 and sat conversing till 3; he had just come back from Belfast, and had found there 54 war correspondents of foreign journals – a greater number than had assembled anywhere since the Boer War. He of the *Vossische Zeitung* had left Berlin at 20 minutes notice. He had said can I not go home for my toothbrush? The *Vossische Zeitung* replied 'If you do not catch this very next train you

will be too late to get into Belfast before the siege begins.'¹⁶

There was no 'siege', but Schweriner managed to bring about a small scoop by obtaining a personal interview with Sir Edward Carson. In his subsequent article, he described how a Mexican minder, armed with a shotgun, stood by Carson throughout the meeting. After Belfast, Schweriner moved via Newry to Dublin and there talked with Casement about his many grievances to do with the government of the day. He also reported that in the course of their conversation, Casement mooted the idea of restoring a monarchy to an independent Ireland. Although this possible plan is not reported anywhere else in Casement's immense body of writing, it is one that other figures within Sinn Féin and republican circles proposed at that time.¹⁷

Casement then agreed with Schweriner that they should travel together through the neglected areas of Connemara so that he could see for himself both the levels of social deprivation and locally-organised humanitarian relief initiatives. But before they made that journey, Casement persuaded Schweriner to visit Limerick.

Schweriner boarded a train in Dublin unaware that he was now being closely watched and followed by secret service agents of the RIC. On his arrival into Limerick, he checked into Cruise's Hotel and during the evening of the following day he held his interview with Daly.¹⁸ The *Vossische Zeitung* published Schweriner's copy in their edition of 2 April. It included a comment from a powerful, but anonymous citizen, who stated: 'The English fear Germany, therefore we love the Germans. And should it come to a war between England and Germany and the Germans wanted to land in Ireland, they could rely on every Irishman's support.'¹⁹ It was a bold claim.

On 31 March, Schweriner left Limerick for Galway, where he met up with Casement and the two then travelled through Connemara. Since his resignation from the Foreign Office, in the summer of 1913, Casement had actively encouraged a campaign to draw attention to an outbreak of typhus in south-west Connemara. The initiative was supported by various intellectuals involved in the cultural nationalist project, including Douglas Hyde and Alice Stopford Green. The

issue was used as a way of building a network of nationalist and international support. Casement wrote a series of letters to the press denouncing British administration and the failings of the Congested Districts Board. At one point, he had controversially compared the situation in Connemara to the plight of the Amazon Indians of the Putumayo enslaved in their forest communities and driven to their death to extract latex rubber in order to satisfy market demand.²⁰

Casement and Schweriner spent the next two days travelling through Connemara gathering local stories and capturing images of the poverty and social exclusion. Over the coming days reports ran in the German press describing the deepening tensions in Ireland and highlighting the plight of a community living in intolerable conditions. It demonstrated Casement's talent for maximizing international publicity to drive home his message. On 4 May 1914, he wrote his last extant letter to John Daly:

My dear friend,

Yes – I'll write to the secretary and offer the flag. Thanks for telling me. Here are six of the eight articles on Ireland the little German wrote. The one about you is here. I'll get the other two and send on. Get some Limerick friends to translate them – & when you are done will you send them on to Professor O'Maille, 2 Dean Place, Galway.

The German said he had sent copies to him, you and another – but I think he did not keep his word. These are the only two copies I believe in Ireland – so I want all interested to see them.

Things look very black for "Home Rule". These craven, cowardly gangs of Englishmen, calling themselves a government, are driven to the ropes by the Ulsterites! What a gang – and the poor "party" seeing the Home Rule bird plucked & cut up before their eyes for English Tories, English Liberals and Ulster "Friendlies" to divide – while "the poor Irish get none."

Yours always,

Roger Casement

Events were now moving very fast. Thousands were joining the Irish Volunteers each week and Casement found himself, on the 8 May, in London, in the home of Alice Stopford Green, at 36 Grosvenor Road, on the Thames Embankment, just a brisk five minutes walk from the House of Commons. A group had gathered to discuss plans for running guns into Ireland to arm the Irish Volunteers. Although the question of arms had been part of the discussion within some circles in the Irish Volunteers for many months, the urgency for an immediate procurement was prioritized after the successful landing of weapons for the Ulster Volunteers at Larne in County Antrim, on 24 April.

In the devising of a strategy for the running of guns into Howth and Kilcoole, Limerick would feature prominently in both the planning and execution. In 2014, the work by the Mount Trenchard Memorial Committee marked the centenary of this event with the unveiling of a memorial plaque to this vital Limerick involvement.²¹ The occasion recognized the six individuals from Limerick who were concerned in the successful operation: Conor O'Brien, Kitty O'Brien, Mary Spring-Rice, George Cahill, Thomas Fitzsimons and Sir Thomas Myles. Their names were remembered beside the more prominent individuals involved in the venture namely, Erskine and Molly Childers, Roger Casement, The O'Rahilly and Darrel Figgis. But the figure who still remains something of a mystery in the narrative of the Howth and Kilcoole gun-running is Alice Stopford Green. Stopford Green loaned most of the money required to purchase the guns and served as treasurer on the committee established to organize the venture. A close friend of Casement since 1904, Stopford Green had strong connections with Limerick and as one of the forgotten women in the intellectual build up to the 1916 Rising, her contribution and her connections to revolutionary Limerick might be fittingly remembered here.

Alice Stopford was born in Kells in 1848 into a large Protestant family from Meath, where her grandfather served as Bishop and her father was Rector of Kells and Archdeacon of Meath. After the death of her father, strained family circumstances forced her to leave with her mother for England. Through the



Alice Stopford Green (1848-1929), the nationalist historian had strong connections with Limerick and the surrounding region.

support of relatives, most notably her cousin, the radical clergyman, Stopford Augustus Brooke (1832-1916), she met the historian John Richard Green, author of one of the best-selling histories of the late-nineteenth century, *A Short History of the English People*. After two years of courtship, they married and would remain inseparable for almost seven years. During that time much of it spent nursing her husband, Alice Stopford Green gained the most extraordinary apprenticeship in the emerging profession of history and grew close to several of the most noted historians of the age, including W.E.H. Lecky, James Bryce and Frederick York Powell. Following her husband's death from TB, Alice inherited a small annual income from the royalties of his best-selling history and, by careful management of her personal affairs, nurtured a progressive literary and political salon in London. Her friends included the writer, Henry James, the actor Elizabeth Robins and the Africanist, Mary Kingsley. In the early 1890s, through regular attendance at the Irish Literary Society, she fell under the influence of various intellectuals involved in the Irish cultural revival, including Eoin MacNeill, W.B. Yeats and George Russell. Through these influences her literary and historical interests turned to Ireland, and in 1908 she published her most controversial work *The Making of Ireland and its Undoing*, a social and intellectual history of medieval Ireland. But how did such a well connected historian

resident in London become a key figure in the developing revolutionary politics in Ireland? Part of the explanation lies in her relationship with the Spring-Rices.

Stopford Green's long association with the family grew out of their shared social circle in London. Her name appears alongside those of Frederica Spring-Rice, Catherine Spring-Rice and Lady Monteagle in the somewhat reactionary 'Appeal against Female Suffrage'.²² During the late nineteenth century *fin de siècle* and early decade of the twentieth century, various members of the Spring-Rice family were closely in touch with Alice and her social circles. In turn, Alice brought friends to stay with the Spring-Rices at Mount Trenchard, including Roger Casement. Mary Spring-Rice attended soirées and dinner parties at Alice's house in London and wrote to her before her mother's death at the end of April 1908: 'She has deeply prized your faithful friendship growing as it has been for years.'²³ In the months before the Howth plans were hatched, Alice was involved in building up interest in the mid-west of Ireland. In an early edition of the *Irish Volunteer*, she contributed an article 'A Warrior Heritage: Limerick's Voluntary Army', emphasizing the spirit of sacrifice shown down the ages by the people of Limerick.²⁴

Beside her role as treasurer of the Howth gun-running venture, Alice shouldered important responsibilities in the planning. A letter from Erskine Childers to Stopford Green, dated 29 July 1914, and written from Holyhead, after the guns had been landed, casts some light on the up stream organization required. Childers wrote fondly: 'As for you, how can I express what I feel about your serenity and steadfastness & generosity in the whole business from start to finish ... I shall never forget the strain of the week prior to our sailing, seemingly insuperable difficulties ... in every direction & the time so short. The strain of the actual crossing was nothing to it.'²⁵

After the outbreak of war, Alice remained concerned for Mount Trenchard and the welfare of the surrounding district. In late 1914, she encouraged her niece, Annie Brunton, an able botanist and horticulturalist, (and the sister of Elsie Henry), to travel to Foynes to help teach market gardening skills in an effort to allay the food shortages caused by war.

The latter part of Annie Brunton's diary describes in detail her months living at Mount Trenchard and the life she experienced in Foynes, and in the west of Limerick.²⁶

Stopford Green's friendship with the family underwent some level of strain during the trial of Roger Casement, as a more hostile attitude to Casement was taken by many who considered his efforts to forge an alliance with Germany as an unforgivable act of treason. The family's loyalties were further split by the fact that Cecil Spring-Rice was serving as British ambassador in Washington and was discreetly involved in the intellectual subversion of Casement's reputation in the U.S.. Stopford Green herself confided to friends that she found Casement's mission to Germany a step too far, she nonetheless stood by him as a loyal friend during his trial and the days before his execution, because their friendship was unassailable.

The German chapter of Roger Casement's fifty-one years of life is in many ways the hardest to either defend or explain. Its interpretation still causes bouts of mystification and bafflement. His Limerick link during this period of isolation was stimulated through his association with two individuals with noteworthy ties to both the city and county. The most familiar of these individuals is Robert Monteith, who had spent several months training the Limerick Volunteers, before he was dispatched to Germany via the US to train the few recruits who had joined the ill-fated Irish Brigade. Monteith had arrived in Limerick to live with his family at the end of 1914 after he

was forced to surrender his job and was compulsorily deported from Dublin under the Defence of the Realm Act. In the memoir he wrote of his life, he recalled that while in Dublin he had established a strong friendship with Edward Daly, who doubtless helped him with vital introductions when he arrived into the mid-west region.²⁷

In Limerick, Monteith collaborated with Ernest Blythe to organise disparate groups of Irish Volunteers spread across the county between Limerick and the Galtee mountains. Monteith's work training men and building up the military capacity among the volunteer movement in the region continued until the summer of 1915, but then things changed dramatically. He would recall how: 'On the day following the Rossa funeral, Tom Clarke came to Limerick, where I met him at the house of John Daly. In discussing the general situation, the subject of the Irish Brigade came up, and Clarke spoke of its lack of officers' ...²⁸

The Irish Brigade referred to the initiative to raise a fighting unit from among Irish POWs in Germany. By early 1915, Casement, who had originally gone to Germany to initiate this plan, had grown disillusioned with the idea and held out few hopes that men could be persuaded to desert the army and risk everything to join a cause that was still in a state of formation. Little improved following Joseph Mary Plunkett's visit to Germany in the summer of 1915, when Casement learned of the plans to hold a rising the following year. But there was still hope that something could be made of the



Mount Trenchard outside Foynes, home to the Spring-Rice family and visited by Casement.

venture. Shortly after his conversation with Clarke, Monteith left for America with his family in tow and having found some security for them in New York, he planned the next stage of his adventure. He linked up with Casement's manservant Adler Christensen, who was on a mission in the U.S. for Casement. Christensen helped Monteith to stow-away on board a ship bound for Europe. The plan worked. On his arrival in Germany, he met up with Casement and worked tremendously hard over the coming months to train the few Irish Brigade recruits and turn them into a fighting force. His friendship with Casement was based on deep, mutual respect. And Casement, who could be tremendously demanding of those he worked with, never found fault with Monteith. Their comradeship remained steadfast until that fateful Good Friday morning, when they shook hands for a final time.

Thomas St John Gaffney

Another key ally during Casement's time in Germany was the Limerick-born, Thomas St John Gaffney.²⁹ Like Casement, Gaffney was born in 1864, and followed the path of many of that post-famine generation: leaving Ireland for America to seek fame and fortune on new frontiers. Gaffney made his mark with the US diplomatic corps and was appointed American consul general in Dresden during the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft. In 1913, he was relocated to Munich by President Woodrow Wilson.

All seemed well with Gaffney's posting until the outbreak of war, when his pro-German and pro-Irish views rendered his appointment increasingly tricky. He met Casement in late 1914, shortly after returning from a short trip to Ireland to visit his brother, who was Crown Solicitor in Limerick. As their contact deepened, especially after Casement had relocated to the south of Germany in the summer of 1915, Gaffney found his path increasingly obstructed. In September 1915, he organised a luncheon in Munich at which Casement was a prominent presence and speeches were made. The matter so irritated Germany's enemies that discreet complaints were made through diplomatic channels to the U.S. State Department and Gaffney was relieved

of his consular duties and replaced with someone sympathetic to the British war effort. Gaffney's treatment might be interpreted as an early instance of how Casement's allies were being closed down on a number of fronts now that his treason had been openly identified. Immediately after the incident, Gaffney left for the US to defend himself. His lawyer there was Michael Francis Doyle, who would later attend Casement's trial as the representative of Clan na Gael.

The diary kept by Casement during his time in Germany, especially the entries surviving from March and April 1916, contains frequent references to conversations and encounters with Gaffney. Occasional criticisms did not



Thomas St John Gaffney, United States Consul-General in Germany

stop Casement entrusting Gaffney with important personal papers as well as substantial responsibilities for the welfare of the Irish Brigade, once he had left Germany. In the hours before Casement's departure with Monteith and Bailey aboard the submarine, Gaffney handed over two flags; one of them a flag of Limerick that has survived to this day, even if its provenance remains vague. Years later, Gaffney remembered the moment on the eve of the departure:

While we were discussing these matters Monteith joined us and I asked him to bring the Limerick flag with him to Ireland. He cheerfully assented, and I commissioned him,

in the event of the capture of my native city, to raise the flag over King John's Castle.³⁰

There is then a supplementary footnote adding clarification to this action:

'Mr Gaffney had presented a flag of Ireland and a flag of Limerick to the brigade. Both these flags were made in Limerick some twenty-five years before. The Limerick flag was found by the police concealed on the shore with other articles near where Sir Roger and his companions landed in Ireland. The English military authorities at first considered the flag as a revolutionary emblem. It was produced during the trial of Roger Casement where Sullivan, his counsel, announced that it was the flag of the ancient city of Limerick ... The flag is at present in the Tower of London with some of the other Casement relics.'³¹

But Gaffney's stated optimism for a rebel victory in Limerick proved somewhat premature. After the war and without the support of the US diplomatic service, Gaffney involved himself more deeply in IRB conspiracies.

If his experience demonstrates the ruthless treatment of Casement's allies, it reveals, too, the residual hatred aimed at Casement and his support network. In 1930, Gaffney published *Breaking the Silence: England, Ireland, Wilson and the War*, a volume of memoirs that promised 'Intimate revelation in the exact sense of that much abused term'. In the ocean of primary and secondary source material published on the Great War, this is a volume that has largely slipped through the analytical net. It belongs to a genre of studies that scrutinized the work of British propaganda during the conflict. What Gaffney meant by 'intimate relations' was a deep and unsettling insight into the manipulation of the public consciousness about the war by an acquiescent press determined to embed forever a narrative defending the Anglo-American special relationship. Gaffney's agenda was to expose the weaponry of propaganda and how news and information was routinely manipulated. His chapters describing his intimate knowledge about Casement is part of a much larger exposé of the war on truth.



After several months training the Limerick Volunteers, Monteith was sent by the IRB to Germany to help Casement in his efforts to raise and train an Irish Brigade. The two men returned to Ireland in April 1916 aboard a German U-boat.

Gaffney's account of his wartime experiences belongs to an alternative and subjugated narrative of the First World War that has been largely overwhelmed within mainstream interpretation. The reason for this is not because it is wrong, but because the implication of the analysis is so threatening to the maintenance of the widely agreed narrative and its sustaining myths. As Gaffney describes, Casement's final years were entangled in the most malicious propaganda war and his argument is convincing because he had been both a witness to and victim of that war. His perceptive critiques of the manipulation of the message and the role of intelligence agencies in Casement's treatment by the authorities should be read alongside William J. Maloney's *The Forged Casement Diaries* (1936).³²

While Gaffney's influence made some small impact in Germany, his views on the war did not apparently circulate much in Limerick. As the actions of the 1916 Rising alchemised into historical narrative, and the event was mythologised and became the founding moment of the Irish Republic, Casement's part in the Rising was gradually contorted and marginalised in the historiography that appeared over the next century. The generation of "Irish Revisionists" that took control of the reins of academic

CASEMENT'S LAST ADVENTURE —
By CAPTAIN ROBERT MONTEITH
— First Battalion, Dublin Regiment,
IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY



ILLUSTRATED — PRIVATELY PRINTED
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, U. S. A., 1932

and media historiography proved to be particularly harsh in their representation of Casement. Instead of trying to understand him and his motives, they locked him down into an endlessly repetitive debate on his sexuality. There was a lingering sense of confusion and embarrassment about Casement's intention to return to Ireland to try and stop the Rising. In the late years of his life, John Devoy assumed an increasingly negative and antagonistic view of Casement and could never comprehend his intentions. Part of that confusion was due to the fact that most people were still unclear and confused about the type of work that Casement had carried out while serving as a British consul. That knowledge would take many years to emerge. Before it did, rumour and myth would fill the gaps which historical fact might have made more certain.

In 1968, Kathleen Clarke gave a recorded interview with Fr Louis O'Kane (21/10/2015), where she revealed her disdain for Roger Casement.³³ Clarke's comments are interesting for what

she divulges about the class and gender issues intrinsic to the remembering of the Rising. In the popular memory of Limerick, Clarke is remembered as something of a complainer; Madge Daly is considered with a much greater level of fondness.³⁴ Her comments, however, are interesting for other reasons. There is still a tendency to read the tragedy of the First World War through the outrages of the Second World War, which is one reason why Casement's meaning remains so conflicted. Speaking in 1968, is it possible that Clarke's comments were tempered by the inevitable process of retrospective detachment that occurred as Ireland tried to distance its nationalist past from historic alliances with Germany after the defeat of Nazism?

Casement's views on the war were largely allied with those who opposed the war and took the view that the First World War was an unforgivable betrayal of ordinary people by the British ruling class; a situation exacerbated over centuries by England's treatment of Ireland. It was this view that made Casement's brief volume of essays attacking the war and arguing for Irish independence so discomfiting.³⁵ But Casement's anti-war views are yet to return to interpretative fashion. If the experiences of Gaffney hint at a special treatment for those who stood out against the governing consensus of the day, he was certainly not the only one. E.D. Morel, Casement's colleague in the Congo Reform Association, was imprisoned a year after Casement's execution on a technical breach of the Defence of the Realm Act.³⁶ Alice Stopford Green found life increasingly hard in London and in her seventies moved back to Dublin to support the founding of the new Irish Free State. She was elected as one of only four women to the first Irish senate and

remained close to Mary Spring-Rice, until the latter's early death.

Perhaps Limerick never had the intense fascination for Casement as the people of County Kerry maintain until today. His life, however, attaches Limerick and the Shannon region to the wider Atlantic world. Tracing Casement's footsteps from the Milk Market down O'Connell Street through Ballinacurra to Raheen connects the historical imagination into an expansive geography of the wide Atlantic world. It links Limerick's revolutionary history to the rainforests of the Congo and Amazon, and the archipelagoes of the Caribbean, Canary Islands, the Cape Verdes and Azores. It places the 'old grey city' to ports of call that once fused the revolutionary Atlantic in a common cry for justice: Old Calabar, Cape Town, Loanda, Liverpool, New York, Buenos Aires, Santos, and Rio de Janeiro. This was the world Casement travelled and Limerick is intrinsic to that pathway that ended on 3 August 1916 on a scaffold in Pentonville Prison, a few miles from the Palace of Westminster and the administrative centre of British imperial power in London.

The evidence that Casement's memory lived on in the subaltern history of revolutionary Limerick can still be detected from monumental fragments. Many of the books written in the aftermath of independence and supporting Casement's role in the Rising still sit on the bookshelves in the room of one of the beautiful Tontine houses in Castleconnell, where the nationalist revolutionary and founder of Fianna na Éireann, Bulmer Hobson died in 1969. Casement's name is carved in Irish lettering on the monument on Sarsfield Bridge, along with the other executed men. In recent years, a framed memorial has been erected on a wall on Little Barrington Street to remind passers by of the Fianna hall that once stood at the back of the Daly household and where Casement gave his stirring talk on chivalry. Most recently, the artist David Lilburn's immense rendering in stone of an imaginary map of the Shannon valley, engraved on an outside wall of The Lime Tree Theatre, in Mary Immaculate College, has immortalized in stone the title of that great poetic invocation by W.B. Yeats,

*The Ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the Door.*

Angus Mitchell contributed a biography of *Roger Casement* to the 16 Lives series published by The O'Brien Press. His edition of Casement's war time diary *One Bold Deed of Open Treason: The Berlin Diary of Roger Casement 1914-16* is published by Merrion Press (2016). Much of his extensive body of published work on Roger Casement, Alice Stopford Green and the Irish revolution is accessible at <https://limerick.academia.edu/AngusMitchell>

(Endnotes)

1. Angus Mitchell (ed.), *One Bold Deed of Open Treason: The Berlin Diary of Roger Casement 1914-16* (Merrion, 2016).
2. All historians of this period are indebted to the research of Thomas Toomey, *The War of Independence in Limerick 1912-1921* (Limerick, 2010) and John O'Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick: the republican campaign for Independence in Limerick 1913-1921* (Dublin, 2010).
3. Brian P. Murphy, *Patrick Pearse and the Lost Republican Ideal* (Dublin, 1991).
4. National Library of Ireland, MS 5459, Roger Casement to Joseph Mary Plunkett, Sunday night, January 1914.
5. University of Limerick, Madge Daly papers, Folder 46, Casement to Daly, 27 January, 1914.
6. See 'John Bull's Other Island: Roger Casement and the Press (1898-1916)', in S Potter, ed. *Ireland and the Imperial Press*, (Dublin, 2004), 217-233.
7. Des Long, *John Daly: A short history of his life and achievements* (Limerick, n/d)
8. National Library of Ireland, MS 31,647, Casement to Clarke, 9 January, 1914.
9. Madge Daly Papers, Folder 47, T. Clarke to J. Daly, 26 January 1914.
10. *Limerick Leader*, 18 March 1914.
11. On Fianna history see Marnie Hay, 'The foundation and development of Na Fianna Éireann, 1909-16', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxvi, no. 141 (May 2008); also Toomey, op. cit. and Des Long, *John Daly and Na Fianna Éireann in Limerick 1912-16* (Limerick, n/d)
12. *The Irish Volunteer*, vol.1:8, 28 March 1914.
13. *Limerick Leader*, March 20, 1914.
14. Owen McGee, *The IRB: the Irish Republican Brotherhood from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 2005).
15. University of Limerick, Madge Daly papers, Folder 46, Casement to Daly, 24 March 1914.
16. Elsie was the niece of Alice Stopford Green and wife of the botanist, Augustine Henry. Both Stopford Green and Casement stayed at the Henry's fine house and garden in Ranelagh during 1913-14, see Clara Cullen (ed.), *The World Upturning: Elsie Henry's Irish Wartime Diaries, 1913-19* (Dublin, 2013), 34.
17. This story is told in Jérôme aan de Wiel's indispensable study *The Irish factor 1899-1919 - Ireland's Strategic and Diplomatic Importance for Foreign Powers* (Dublin, 2008). The substantive reference to Schweriner's visit to Ireland is covered on pages 65-69.

18. Intelligence on Schweriner's visit to Limerick is held in National Archives (UK) CO 904/213/370.
19. Quoted in aan de Wiel, op. cit., 66-7.
20. See my article "An Irish Putumayo': Roger Casement's humanitarian relief campaign in Connemara (1913-14)", *Irish Economic and Social History*, 31, (2004), 41-60.
21. Mount Trenchard Memorial Committee, *Remembering Limerick's Gun-Runners, 1914-2014* (Limerick, 2014).
22. *Nineteenth Century*, CXLVIII, June 1889, 781-88.
23. NLI 15106 / 3, Mary Spring-Rice to AS Green, 14 April 1908.
24. *The Irish Volunteer*, 1:3, 21 February 1914.
25. Trinity College Dublin Archive, Erskine Childers Papers, 7847-51, Childers to Green, 29 July 1914.
26. NLI 13620/ 1&2. This rather interesting document compliments the diary produced by Annie's sister, Elsie Henry, op. cit. Around 1913 and realizing that history was in the making, Alice Stopford Green encouraged her two nieces to keep diaries to record events.
27. R. Monteith, *Casement's Last Adventure* (Dublin, 1953). For a recent biography see Helen Litton, *Edward Daly* (Dublin, 2013).
28. R. Monteith, *Casement's Last Adventure* (Dublin, 1953), 57.
29. For a recent article see Des Ryan, 'Thomas St John Gaffney, United States Consul-General in Germany 1905-15', *The Old Limerick Journal*, 47: Winter 2013, 33-38.
30. T. St John Gaffney, *Breaking the Silence: England, Ireland, Wilson and the War* (New York, 1930), 160.
31. Ibid.
32. Brian Murphy, *The Origins and Organisation of British Propaganda in Ireland 1920* (Belfast, 2006).
33. Reported in *Irish Times*, 21 October 2015; letters 23 Oct. and 26 Oct.
34. Sinead McCoole, *Easter Widows: Seven Irish Women who lived in the Shadow of the 1916 Rising* (Dublin: 2014).
35. Roger Casement, *The Crime against Europe* (Belfast, 2003).
36. Donald Mitchell, *The Politics of Dissent: A biography of E.D. Morel* (Bristol, 2014).

My thanks to Deirdre O'Brien-Vaughan of Newmarket-on-Fergus for access to the papers and photographs of her late father Paddy O'Brien, a member of the Limerick Fianna, who was present when Casement spoke on St Patrick's Day 1914.