DESTRUCTION OF CASEMENT PAPERS BY GEORGE GAVAN DUFFY BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY (BMH) WS 381

EMAILS AND NOTES

**Emails to Margaret et al**

NB this is not in 2nd edition but 3rd. All the boyfriend letters were destroyed so it is likely it was wholesale destruction.

[MacColl say there were boyfriend letters uncovered at Ardrigh by Joseph Bigger p. 224]

Full witness statement 381 by George Gavan Duffy now kindly provided by BMH.

Nothing startling that I could see beyond the 1915 joint inspection with Art O'Brien of Casement's papers.

By a process of elimination one can deduce what they consisted of. Obviously this was material not stored in London. The big absence in London is correspondence from E.D. Morel **[not so]** and tellingly, F.J. Bigger. Also likely to have been in the three cases were letters from boy friends in South America that the diaries tell of receiving (and others from earlier times I guess). And likely more diaries not connected to the 1903 and 1910 and 1911 investigations.

This may have led to the wholesale destruction by Gavan Duffy and O'Brien of the contents of the cases.

I suspect the latter Art O'Brien may have been gay. Roy Foster describes him as an "upwardly mobile sophisticate".

Duffy certainly knew Casement was gay and always insisted the topic was totally avoided.

Jeff

From: Military Archives <militaryarchives@defenceforces.ie>  
Sent: 25 July 2018 10:53  
To: Jeffrey Dudgeon  
Subject: RE: George Gavan Duffy - WS 381

Dear Mr. Dudgeon,

This WS has been rescanned but not republished, as I mentioned this can only be done once we have access to the server. I will send you on a digital copy of the rescanned version. I hope this is of some assistance.

Kind Regards,

Linda

Duty Archivist

Military Archives  |   Cathal Brugha Barracks  |  Rathmines|  Dublin 6|  Ireland

From: Jeffrey Dudgeon [mailto:jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com]   
Sent: 25 July 2018 10:19  
To: Military Archives <militaryarchives@defenceforces.ie>  
Subject: Re: George Gavan Duffy - WS 381

Thanks Linda.

You don't say if WS 381 has been rescanned and re-published.

It looks not as the version on line is still missing many pages.

Might it be rescanned or is that just what was there to start with?

Jeff

OLD PARTIAL VERSION HERE:

<http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0381.pdf>

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| [B. Contemporary Documents. MATERIAL BY BUREAUREGARDING ...](http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0381.pdf)  [www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie](http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie)  Material Collected by Bureau regarding Roger Casement, A. PERSONAL, STATEMENTS OF EVIDENCE. W.S.4 - Diarmuid Lynch - Distribution in 1915 of a pamphlet |

From: Military Archives <[militaryarchives@defenceforces.ie](mailto:militaryarchives@defenceforces.ie)>  
Sent: 24 July 2018 14:25  
To: Jeffrey Dudgeon  
Subject: Re: George Gavan Duffy - WS 381

Dear Mr. Dudgeon,

Thank you for your query. All of the witness statements have been rescanned and there is a plan to scan them again in grey to improve the quality. However as the BMH was set up as a joint project we didn't have access to the backend of the server to make amendments/changes for a long time. We are currently in the process of changing this and once we do we can make the necessary improvements. I'm afraid I don't have a date but we're hoping it will be soon. Thank you for your patience.

Kind Regards,

Linda

Duty Archivist

Military Archives | Cathal Brugha Barracks | Rathmines| Dublin 6| Ireland

From: Jeffrey Dudgeon <[jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com](mailto:jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com)>  
Sent: 23 July 2018 16:38:11  
To: Military Archives  
Subject: George Gavan Duffy - WS 381

Dear Archivist,

I wonder if the George Gavan Duffy witness statement, WS 381, has yet been reviewed and improved?

Thanks

Jeffrey Dudgeon

From: Military Archives <[militaryarchives@defenceforces.ie](mailto:militaryarchives@defenceforces.ie)>  
Sent: 05 February 2016 09:51  
To: Jeffrey Dudgeon  
Subject: RE: George Gavan Duffy - WS 381

Dear Mr Dudgeon,

Thanks for your email. We are in the process of updating the Bureau of Military History to correct some technical and scanning issues. George Gavan Duffy’s statement is one of those earmarked for editing so this should be resolved shortly. I don’t yet have an exact date for when this update will be completed but if you would like to view the original statement I can make an appointment in our Reading Room. The Reading Room opens to the public Tuesday to Thursday each week between 10.00-12.30 and 13.30-16.00 and appointments typically run a week in advance.

I hope this information is of some assistance.

Regards,

Noelle Grothier

From: Jeffrey Dudgeon [<mailto:jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com>]   
Sent: 02 February 2016 10:03  
To: Military Archives  
Subject: George Gavan Duffy - WS 381

Dear Archivist,  
I wonder if you could review the witness statement file for George Gavan Duffy and advise?  
It is numbered 381.  
Many of the 26 pages on the website are blank, some carry a single line and others just a page number.  
This may be as you find them, but there were, obviously, once more pages, as some start in the middle of a sentence.  
Thanks  
Jeffrey Dudgeon

**GEORGE GAVAN DUFFY**

**BMH (BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY)**

**WS 381**

“I had in fact received the year before [1915], from a friend of his, three cases of his papers which the friend thought it unwise to retain and he wanted to dispose of them. I remember spending an arduous week-end with Art O’Brien, whom I called in, going through these documents to see what might be utterly seditious in them.”

Comes after re Casement. “I went back to London and on 1st May, 1916, I applied in writing to see him …”

Alternate option: Montgomery Hyde wrote in an unpublished letter to The Times (now in Austin Texas) dated 1 October 1967, “During this visit he was shown the papers consisting of several diaries and also a number of compromising letters from homosexual correspondents. After talking it over with his nephew [Professor Joseph Warwick Bigger], the antiquarian told him that that he thought the best thing to do was to burn the lot which he accordingly did.”

This suggests that Bigger may have extracted the more sexual papers including more diaries before passing the rest, the more political, to George Gavan Duffy for his inspection and ultimate destruction. See MacColl

<http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0866.pdf> - Gerald Hamilton

**BMH and Margaret O’Callaghan emails**

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Regards,

Noelle Grothier

**Duty Archivist**

**Military Archives  |   Cathal Brugha Barracks  |  Rathmines|  Dublin 6|  Ireland**

**From:** Jeffrey Dudgeon [mailto:jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com]   
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Thanks  
Jeffrey Dudgeon

From: jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com

To: m.ocallaghan@qub.ac.uk

Subject: Gavan Duffy's BMH statement 381

Date: Thu, 26 May 2016 11:19:04 +0100

Margaret

I noticed that too.

Tantalising lack of detail on what they found.

It was probably Bigger [wrong] who asked them to view the 3 cases but this then must presumably have happened in Ireland.

Roy described Art O'Brien as an "upwardly mobile sophisticate". Coded?

Duffy's emphasis on 'seditious' material is meant to divert attention I think.

Up to mid-1914 there would have been little if anything of an Irish political nature written down by Casement that could have harmed him.

It was all pre-war and pre-defection.

When asked, the BMH said you have to come and look although they were reviewing such problems in general.

‘We are in the process of updating the Bureau of Military History to correct some technical and scanning issues. George Gavan Duffy’s statement is one of those earmarked for editing so this should be resolved shortly.’

Jeff

From: m.ocallaghan@qub.ac.uk

To: jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com

Subject: Gavan Duffy

Date: Wed, 25 May 2016 18:40:57 +0000

Effectively most of the pages are missing. Did someone destroy them. Let's check. M.

**Email to Roy Foster of 24 February 2015 – no reply received**

Roy

I was re-reading parts of 'Vivid Faces' and checked a reference you made to Serjeant Sullivan's BMH witness statement. That led me to look at George Gavan Duffy's (381). It has strange blank pages which I mentioned to the BMH. They replied to say such problem areas were being gradually reviewed but I would need to go and look at the original.

Anyway you will see from the attached Gavan Duffy page something that was entirely new to me regarding Casement's papers.

Duffy wrote, “I had in fact received the year before [1915], from a friend of his, three cases of his papers which the friend thought it unwise to retain and he wanted to dispose of them. I remember spending an arduous week-end with Art O’Brien, whom I called in, going through these documents to see what might be utterly seditious in them.”

The friend must surely have been F.J. Bigger (a male as he is called ‘he’; possible females Ada McNeill or Gertrude Bannister can thus be excluded) unless it was someone in London. **[I think now it was Dick Morten].**

It is unlikely there was anything seditious in the papers so it must have been the gay stuff they spotted. We know Casement was concerned about his papers, in Belfast in particular, as he wrote in March 1916: “…These and many more letters & papers dealing with my past are in the custody of Francis Joseph Bigger, Ardrigh, Antrim Road, Belfast, a Solicitor. He was a close friend of mine & a nationalist – but now doubtless has been swept off his feet. However I am sure he would not give up my papers to the Govt. – & he buried them – or hid them I know, for I wrote to him from N. York before I sailed for Germany asking him to do this & got a reply that it had been done. So little had I “worked” against England or meditated treason that I have left all my other things at the mercy of the Govt.” (NLI 17021)

Casement had earlier written from Germany via their Washington Embassy to ask for Bigger to disappear his documents. (This may really refer to his request above.)

If the three cases of papers were from Bigger, then Duffy must have destroyed them, as Bigger (or his solicitor’s firm after his death) never sent any Casement-owned material in to the NLI.

There are a limited number of Casement to Bigger letters in the NLI (21530-1 and 35456), and some photographs of him, but absolutely nothing from Bigger to Casement.

I wasn’t aware of Art O’Brien before, but have now read enough to suggest to me that he may have been gay. (You described him as an "upwardly mobile sophisticate".)

See especially the NLI profile <http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/150_OBriain.pdf>

I always knew Gavan Duffy knew Casement was gay but he may have known for a longer time than I thought. Perhaps he asked O’Brien to help him sift the papers, knowing he would not be as shocked as some.

It must have been an interesting weekend.

This also explains why Bigger only got to destroy the one, 1914, journal.

Do you know anything of O’Brien's role in this or of his interior life?

I have also attached Gerald Hamilton's BMH statement (866) which I also spotted. It has an interesting commentary. He was Isherwood's 'Mr Norris'. (They index him as 'Gerard' Hamilton).

He was a complete fraud, but may indeed have been in prison in London at the same time as Casement for some sexual or financial misdemeanour.

That Irish Times assistant literary editor never replied after I asked him for some clarification on what he would like in an article.

Best wishes

Jeff

ISSUE OF THE PAPERS CASEMENT LEFT BEHIND IN 1914

Bigger's 'burial' of the papers says Reid on p. 472 is in NLI MS 17026 but a wrong reference was given. It is actually in MS 17021. (See also MS 10764).

NLI 17021 (copy obtained) “Extract made by Casement from "New Statesman" Feb. 27, 1915 on "Sir Roger Casement's Weltpolitik" and detailed rebuttal by him of the charges made. (9pp.) Munich, 26 Mar., 1916.” – pension issue majors, Morgan tries to get him a Governorship, mention of Bigger burying his papers but worried about them too.

MS 17026 “"A last word for my true friend Charles Curry": a secret memo from Casement containing instructions concerning his personal belongings and papers, an account of the Findlay affair and his forebodings of the outcome of his imminent venture to Ireland. Munich, March 26, 1916.”

– Sunday; Bigger's 'burial' of the papers says BL Reid (p. 472) but the actual mention is in MS 17021. Yes 45 pages or sides (eleven four-sided foolscap sheets with one more side of another, in large handwriting).

Starts – “Secret Memo for Dr Curry

Sunday morning with the Dom bells ringing!

…This is all for the present. R.C.”

Findlay incident dealt with at length. See also 10764, Trial papers – witness statements (huge volume). “The inner circle were bent on it” (the Rising).

MS 17,027 see separate file (copy obtained) “A final word' – Roger Casement's last instructions (to Dr. Curry?) and his reflections prior to his fatal voyage to Ireland. Dated April 6, 1916. 2½ double pages.”

– Not 45 pages but ten sides off three items. MS 17,026 is 45 pages. No mention of Bigger burying trunk. Mentions Beverley. Casement also wrote to Curry on 9 April 1916 with another undated item which is also in PRONI and partially in NYPL.

NYPL Maloney IHP 20 - original in Casement’s hand, unsigned probably to McGarrity, Berlin, 11 November 1914.

…My chief concern is for my sister in Ireland - & for my papers with Bigger and at the Agent's in London. How foolish of me not to have got them over to U.S.A. Now the enemy will get them I fear. They are in a state of mind that sticks at nothing - as you will realise - and so angry, and frightened too.