**Hugh Lane Dublin City Gallery Talk**

***Researching Roger Casement’s Role in Political and Cultural Controversies***

**Jeffrey Dudgeon**

**16 June 2016**

Thank you for inviting to contribute to this *Artist as Witness 1916-2016* series of lectures.

The first six months of this year have seen an outpouring of written material and cultural representation concerning Roger Casement, as you would expect given the centenary of the Rising; of his landing in Kerry in April and his execution in London.

His death was on 3 August, so it is likely there will be much more written and said over the summer for that anniversary.

There have been a score or more articles and lectures of significance in that time alongside an interesting Presidential address by Michael D. Higgins which partially rehabilitated the 3rd man on the U Boat, Daniel Bailey; an RTE radio documentary by Colin Murphy on Casement in Africa; an award winning play - *McKenna’s Fort* by Arnold Thomas Fanning; a Casement dance project lovingly choreographed by Fearghus O Conchúir and coming to Ireland from London later in the year; a book by Angus Mitchell in the *16 Lives* series; my own book’s second edition while another unabridged version of the German Diary to rival that just published by Mitchell is ready for publication in July[[1]](#footnote-1); a review with a slew of articles in the online magazine *breac* produced by the University of Notre Dame in Indiana; seminars and talks galore; and two major art exhibitions at IMMA, *The Humanizer* by Simon Fujiwara, and here in the Hugh Lane Dublin City Gallery.

Aidan Dunne in the Irish Times on 9 June 2016[[2]](#footnote-2) has an extensive review of both, under the title ‘Separate exhibitions highlight the complexities and ambiguities of Casement and explore the many identities that have been thrust upon him’.

If I might say a few words about the exhibition around us today, which has had in recent weeks differing review treatments, I was impressed at its artistic excellence, both modern and contemporary.

Alan Phelan’s film, *Our Kind* grows on you, not least because of its superb cinematography and creepy depiction of Adler Christensen, Casement’s sociopathic boyfriend, in whom he invested far too much love and loyalty, for minimal reward.

(I might add here that a biography of Adler is in preparation by a Norwegian compatriot writer, Bjorn Godoy. It promises to reveal many hidden aspects of his career of accomplished deceit, less than successful fraud, and his inevitable sorry end in a Paris jail.)

The collection of paintings brought together in the Dublin City Hugh Lane Gallery is a great achievement, in its breadth and effect.

I have to say that over and above the paintings I know and appreciate, like Sir John Lavery’s appeal panorama and Purser’s 1913 portrait, there are several others that are quite stunning. Charles Wellington Furse’s depiction of a younger Lord Justice Darling says so much about his class, intellect and manners. Indeed it is no surprise that it was the same Darling who brought Sir John Lavery to the commission for the vast appeal painting. Lavery’s accompanying portrait of F.E. Smith is both powerful and devastating, saying so much about that flawed character.

Churchill once said tellingly of Smith, “He had all the canine virtues to a remarkable degree – courage, vigilance, fidelity, and love of chase.” Smith prosecuted Casement as Attorney General despite, or because of, being Carson’s Galloper.

An example of the casual and knowing flippancy which FE felt he could get way with is this story: A judge presiding in a sodomy case sought advice on sentencing from him by then Lord Chancellor: “What do you think one ought to give a man who allows himself to be buggered?” Smith replied, “Oh, thirty shillings or two pounds; whatever you happen to have on you.”

It may be hard for Dublin, but I believe Lavery’s Appeal painting should be shared with the Ulster Museum by its owner the Royal Courts of Justice in London. They seemed too eager to dispose of embarrassing material by offloading it through a time unlimited loan to the Honorable Society of King’s Inns in Dublin. Lavery and Casement both had strong Ulster connections.

Sarah Purser confusingly painted two portraits of Casement that year. One, which is in the gallery today is on the cover of my first edition of *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries*. It is the definitive painting, more austere, more revealing. The other, lusher and more visual, is on the cover of my 2nd edition[[3]](#footnote-3) (and was on a 2nd edition of Brian Inglis’s book on Casement published by Blackstaff).

Both are now in the possession of the National Gallery of Ireland, the former donated in 1930 by William Cadbury, Casement’s friend and ally in the anti-slavery movement. Cadbury of the chocolate firm had been the author of a report similar to Casement’s on the near-slavery conditions in Portuguese African territories, notably the islands of São Tomé and Príncipé. He had proposed a boycott of cocoa products from there in that 1909 report after an extensive visit. Apparently some 70,000 slaves had been purchased from ‘a huge expanse of Central Africa’ for ‘perpetual indenture’ in São Tomé and Príncipé, between 1880 and 1908, most of whom came through ports in Angola. (Slavery was only abolished in Portugal in 1876.)

It would be interesting if the two Purser portraits could be displayed for a period, side by side, to illustrate and compare. I first saw the painting in this gallery in the Cathaoirleach’s office in the Seanad through the good offices of then Senator Shane Ross but am not sure where it came from most recently or where it is intended to be returned to.

Might I digress to say, that in my capacity as a recently elected Belfast City Councillor, I have been encouraging the development and building of an art gallery in Belfast’s city centre to display the extensive collections that are currently in the Ulster Museum but for which there is no gallery space. (Interestingly, the Ulster Museum actually started off life as Belfast’s Municipal Art Gallery not unlike this one.)

The Hugh Lane Gallery’s accompanying book for the exhibition entitled *High Treason,* being part of the *Artist as Witness* programme, has many fine reproductions of the works on view here, some of which I have mentioned, and includes two more of a number of articles produced to date on the Casement trial. That by Judge Donal O’Donnell is a masterful legal exposition of the trial and appeal (and the painting). As he says, the truth is a little more complex than the accrued legends although in his defence of Serjeant Sullivan he does not recount how Sullivan had the courage to admit he was wrong in the 1950s controversy after the publication of René MacColl’s biography. This concerned Casement apparently making justificatory remarks about his own homosexuality, and that of other famous men. He didn’t, and on reflection Sullivan accepted that was the case.

Casement was far too canny to enter that particular discussion, having already endured problems in prison from friends, like Sidney Parry, who were trying empathetically to display an acceptance, and indeed understanding, of his homosexuality. Parry is recorded in Edward Carpenter’s 1915 diary as discussing whether Casement was ‘homogenic’.

Serjeant Sullivan was as wrong as Michael Francis Doyle, his American defender who inaccurately said Casement had furiously denied the rumours circulating about him and the diaries. And it is worth dealing at some length with that particular episode, and with M.F. Doyle, whose propriety left something to be desired.

Martin Mansergh, for one, has made great play of that only reported denial by Casement of the Black Diaries, writing: “A US attorney visiting Casement in Pentonville with Gavan Duffy, made him aware of what was going on and recorded Casement’s indignant disbelief of the slur. Nor did this deter him from high-minded self-vindication till his death.” (This was in his *History Ireland* review of Angus Mitchell’s biography *16 Lives - Roger Casement*.)[[4]](#footnote-4)

That report by the American lawyer, Michael Francis Doyle, is also significantly relied upon by Mitchell who describes it as “one of the few surviving documents about Casement being aware”[[5]](#footnote-5) of the rumours that were then circulating. Doyle, in his 1932 statement, recalled that Casement after referring to the reputed habits of certain of his English persecutors “could not get it into his mind that the British would stoop to such forgery to destroy his character,” adding “it was clear to Gavan Duffy and me that the diary was not his; and he emphatically repudiated it.” The only problem with this report is that it is not true on two counts.

Casement made frequent references in Germany to the fact that the British would or could do just that, as he knew well his correspondence and diaries were scattered around the UK, and his lovers around the world. Too many hostages to fortune to be unprepared for, although oddly the Foreign Office did not utilise their earliest knowledge of Casement being gay when it first came to them, unexpectedly, from Norway in 1914 through Adler Christensen. It took the discovery of the diaries after his capture in Kerry for that to happen. Casement also took steps from Berlin to have his papers stored in Belfast hidden.

George Gavan Duffy, a treaty signatory and Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1922 conspicuously failed to endorse Doyle’s remarks when they were first made. In 1933 in relation to Doyle’s version of events, he wrote, “I am wholly unable to corroborate it.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Duffy did not call anyone a liar but he was adamant about the precise truth of the matter. Having had considerable experience in 1916 of trying to stop friends talking to Casement about the diaries and of matters homosexual, he would have had a clear memory of any such conversation.

It is also the case that Doyle did not see Casement alone – Duffy, his solicitor, always accompanied him and a warder had to be present. Indeed the Brixton governor sat in on the visit of 15 June and sent a report of what he heard to the Home Office, including that Doyle was giving the impression of being uninvolved in Irish political matters.

A good example of Casement’s mode of dealing with potential diary eruptions comes in a letter to Gavan Duffy of 14 July 1916[[7]](#footnote-7) where he only alluded to the diaries, asking him “to protect my name” and saying “I left it to you and those other friends to protect my name after all was over - and you know why I kept silent and why I did not refute many things as I might have done.”

Casement’s best friend, Dick Morten, whom he posed as at McKenna’s Fort, saw him in prison with their mutual friend JH Morgan, who later wrote: “I am sorry indeed that Dick Morten talked as he did…Had I known he was going to talk thus I should not have left him behind.” He quoted Morten as having asked “What about the other things Roddie?” to which Casement made no reply, except to say “Dick you’ve upset me.” Morgan was relieved that “Morten said not a word about it being common talk” reporting that Casement talked to Dick “as he would talk to no one else not even Miss Bannister.”

Gertrude reported separately that a sleepless and emotional Roger, in his distress had clasped Dick’s hand for several minutes. Morgan was most worried that Dick’s tactlessness revealed to Casement that he knew of the stories. He felt Dick was “probably the last man he would wish to hear of them.” Casement was later to write to his friend pleading opaquely, “Don’t mind what anyone says about me, Dick – It is easy to pelt the man who can’t reply or who is gone.”

Sullivan, who loathed his client, finally admitted in the Irish Times on 25 April 1956 that Casement, “told me nothing about the diaries or about himself,” after initially suggesting that he had spoken of homosexuality “as a mark of distinction”.

Gavan Duffy had another role to play as early as 1915 in relation to Casement, his diaries and private papers, which I will turn to later.

Droves of writers have now picked over the enduring, and it has to be said, intriguing controversy about the Black Diaries. Angus Mitchell writes, doubly doubtfully, in the same pamphlet as O’Donnell when dealing with the trial, “Casement’s sexuality will always remain an ambiguous matter, but the validity off the diaries is an issue that still has some way to run” (p. 58).

Tim O’Sullivan, once Secretary of the Roger Casement Foundation, in the May 2016 edition of The Irish Political Review writes of the Hugh Lane exhibition, “The room containing the installation has the aspect of an Oratory where the blessed Diaries are honoured in solemn exposition. So-called post Catholic Ireland has retained a talent for unexamined dogmatic faith.”

O’Sullivan adds, in a less abrasive conclusion, “*Our Kind* reflects a point of view which challenges the self-satisfied centenary commemorative ethos. This viewpoint holds the passionate ethnic nationalism which Casement’s speech was based upon to be out of date and positively dangerous. It has elements of the old German nationalism of blood and soil. The world has moved on…In challenging Casement’s famed speech from the dock Phelan provokes us to reflect”.

This would be a thoughtful view from the anti-revisionist school which, unwisely has hooked on to Casement’s Anglophobia as something righteous and therefore cannot accept the diaries.

Coming to Dublin, to the Manuscript Room of the NLI, as I have done over nearly two decades, has always been an enjoyable experience. The room itself is a joy to work in overlooking Kildare Street as it does and so spacious - it being the Old Kildare Street Club but it is who you may meet there that is often most interesting.

Casement author BL Reid, one of the most readable, recalled seeing Brian Inglis there. Montgomery Hyde went looking in the early 1960s for Casement’s famous poem *The Nameless One* which later went missing along with other key items although a copy luckily surfaced in the NYPL.

I have met and been pleased to assist Roy Foster several times during what must have been research into his most recent book *Vivid Faces* and come across a host of other Casement operatives. I have seen my rival Angus Mitchell, the main proponent of the diary forgery theory there and many others, some who go away abandoning their plans for a book or a film when they hear of the competition.

The NLI staff are helpful and know the Casement folders are the most popular they possess. There is an ongoing process of digitisation by the library of the revolutionary era and personnel which may take a fair amount of time in regard to Casement, given the mammoth amount of material he himself generated, not to mention that written about him by his colleagues, friends, researchers and campaigners.

His gargantuan output of written material is revealing in its depiction of someone who had little private life that we are aware of, outside of what the diaries reveal. He relied on friends both for accommodation and conversational diversion but even Alice Stopford Green, his mentor and political conspirator (who I am sure knew he was gay) could tire of him. In 1913, she is to be found, after listening to “a particularly vehement Irish tirade” from him, once the hall door had closed, exclaiming, “Sometimes when I listen to that man I feel I never want to hear the subject of Ireland mentioned again.”

The diaries tell of his private actions and thoughts, those four anyway that remain due to them falling into London’s hand after his capture. The others were surely destroyed, along with some political and much of Casement’s personal correspondence in 1915.

There are key gaps in his correspondence, such as almost all incoming letters from E.D. Morel\*, a constant correspondent and fellow anti-Leopold Congo campaigner, and of his boyfriends except a couple of items from his somewhat decorous Larne-born lover, Millar Gordon, interestingly majoring on an art exhibition in Belfast.

[\*I was wrong about Morel’s letters as some are in the NLI. See the new wording in my 3rd edition: “That group, for whom there is voluminous correspondence in archives written by Casement, comprises Gertrude Bannister, F.J. Bigger, Francis Cowper, Alice Stopford Green, Bulmer Hobson, and Dick Morten. There is, in contrast, next to nothing, currently archived, from them to Casement written before 1913.”]

George Gavan Duffy, later his solicitor at the 1916 trial, and Art O’Brien were asked to do look these papers over as I have recently discovered from the Bureau of Military History archives. The details of what was in them or what happened are sadly absent but they disappeared for ever that year. [I now realise they were likely in Dick Morten’s house, The Savvy, near Denham and the inspection did not take place in Belfast].

Gavan Duffy is another person who therefore knew Casement was gay. He studiously avoided the topic in 1916, and after the execution, and on every possible occasion diverted people away from mentioning, let alone denying it. Duffy had had a somewhat cosmopolitan upbringing alongside a deep continental Catholicism similar in that era to others like Desmond FitzGerald.

I have to speak here of a very recent article by Paul Hyde in *breac*, a Notre Dame University interweb publication[[8]](#footnote-8) which lists the 20 unanswered questions that he says have the diaries failing the test of authenticity: the first three being how, when, and by whom were they found. Recent document releases tell of a Mr WP Germain of Ebury Street bringing them into Scotland Yard on 25 April 1916. He had been custodian of the clients of his rented rooms’ baggage. If Mr Hyde had read my book he would find his questions answered, but I know they would not satisfy him.

That 700-page book with all the diaries, except the German one, was published in 2002; the second paperback and Kindle edition has come out this centenary year. The German Diary is presently being indexed.

I quote here in self-praise, an appreciation from playwright Arnold Thomas Fanning, author of *McKenna’s Fort*, in the Irish Times in April: “This extraordinary book is a minute dissection and decoding of the Black Diaries, and the fullest and most thorough exploration of Casement’s private life as a gay man. As such, it is essential reading to get the full picture of who Casement was and how he thought.” Of course as the title suggests it is much more. The irony is that almost the only reviewer who dealt with the Ulster political aspect - of which I am especially proud - wrote it in Gay Times.

Put simply, Casement was an obsessive writer of manuscripts. This provides a convincing answer to those who ask why would he write such extensive, indeed repetitive diaries, an example being the 1910 Black Diary when he also wrote a second, less personal, account, ‘The White Diary’ of his investigation into the near extermination of Indian rubber slaves by the Peruvian Amazon Company.

The most extreme example of his prodigious industry is when he wrote four copies of a 28-page letter, dated 30 March 1916, to his German Foreign Office point man, Count von Wedel, explaining and justifying his recent actions in Germany since he learned of the Rising.

He wrote because he could, being untrammelled in time terms by family responsibilities - beyond paying the debts of his errant siblings, Tom, Charlie, and Nina.

Writing, Ireland and sex were his three abiding personal interests which make him a man who lives a life that most others don’t, or can’t, but may make it exceptionally significant.

In Germany, when forwarding some letters to Casement who was once again in a sanatorium, Captain Robert Monteith of the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army, knowing his leader’s tendency to scribble incessantly, had to warn, “I am afraid you are going to start writing again & if I was sure of it, I would not send on these things, a spade and a garden rake would be better.”

Similarly, B.L. Reid wrote of how John Devoy, “in his Recollections noted the awkwardness of Casement’s habit of writing at great length ‘in the plainest terms on large sheets of foolscap’ which he sent in very large envelopes usually further swelled out with masses of paper – cuttings, clippings, pamphlets, and documents of all kinds”.

The well-known Irish short story writer Frank O’Connor said of Casement that “the man was a maniac for scribbling.” Another biographer, Roger Sawyer, noted his “compulsion” to write was an urge that seems to have been at least as strong as his sexual desires: “He was capable of writing no fewer than three versions of the same day’s events, working at his largely self-imposed task long into the night, and into the early hours of the following day.” Casement records in his diary on one occasion that he wrote over 30 letters in a day in relation to a fundraising operation for the Congo Reform Association.

I concur with these assessments of a man who wrote too much and whose output ultimately did him reputational damage. But he could not be stopped.

The Irish Times regularly reports how new Casement letters have turned up and are about to be auctioned. One in July 2015 was to a South African, de Villiers. It was written in 1913 as Casement sailed back from a visit to his brother Tom in South Africa and was posted in one of his favourite Atlantic islands, Madeira

He was such an indefatigable correspondent that there must be more letters out there. Whether there are any that are personally revealing seems unlikely.

Returning to researching, there are then those moments when you realise you have found something significant or occasionally shattering. I worked most of the time in the pre-digital age which amazingly is only a dozen or so years ago. Much more material is now available and critically searchable like passenger lists and the BMH archive. One such fact revealed in the Ellis Island immigrant list is the arrival in America after the war of John McGoey supposedly executed in Stornoway by the English in 1916. Casement had sent him through Denmark to Dublin to call off the Rising. For whatever reason he didn’t, while the German military or *Grosser Generalstab* became apoplectic when advised of his mission.

There have been many occasions of elucidation and explanation, covering a number of the myths and accretions surrounding Casement’s life, the life of someone who has approached that of saint and certainly martyr in large parts of Ireland.

**PROVENANCE**

One example of a number of such moments was the resurfacing of Casement’s teenage ‘Scribbling Diary’ in the NLI.

If it had been stolen, it would have been a great loss, being such a rare and early Casement manuscript including the mention taken to be homosexual of the ‘Sweet Boy of Dublin’ by B.L. Reid. I looked long and hard for it but had effectively given up, assuming it had been illicitly removed, like the missing poem ‘The Nameless One’ and another key document the Francis Naughton note seemed to have been.

Accession provenance had not been the NLI’s strongest point in the early 20th century. Researching the origins of the various Casement file donations and purchases, I asked the NLI about folders in the 17000 numeric series handed over by Éamon MacThomas, one, in particular, accession 2922 in December 1971. They replied in partial explanation: “Shortly after this accession, a second donation relating to Casement came to the NLI in January 1972 from an anonymous donor under the name of Department of Foreign Affairs. It contained 27 miscellaneous documents relating to Casement. Its accession number is 2924 and they are catalogued as MS 17401-17420.”

Catalogued the 20 folders in the donation may have been, but they never appeared on an index. [They are now on the NLI’s electronic index] It is likely B.L. Reid saw them before they were numbered, and they were then accidently omitted from the Hayes Irish Civilisation Supplement 1965-1975, or were too late for it. They then failed to get on to the later index cards which preceded computerisation. The manuscripts emanated from Gertrude Parry, but how they got to the Department of Foreign Affairs remains a mystery. They may actually have been bought in London from a dealer, like the rediscovery announced in 2012.

In that year, the NLI advised the public of another file series which should have been in the Hayes Sources volumes by virtue of its numeric sequence, but intriguingly wasn’t. This large batch of uncatalogued Casement papers, accession 1235, had been bought in London in 1952. Emanating from Gertrude’s sister Elizabeth Bannister, it is now numbered MS 49154, and with its 22 folders, is a trove of interesting documents, the earliest dating from1882.

On periodic visits to Dublin, I checked the twenty unindexed and unlisted folders. Eventually, in November 2012, number 17413 was reached and there in front of me was the missing Smith’s Scribbling Diary with “R.D. Casement” neatly written at the top of the cover. Although for 1881, the diary was plainly used over a number of years and contained lines of verse, and much else, including notes written in Africa. It according to BL Reid contained these lines Casement had written to a Dublin lad:

*What Hand hath reft Hope of her crown*

*Or ta’en her gems away*

*Oh! sweet boy of Dublin, oft in my dreams do I see thee!*

Below the ‘Sweet Boy of Dublin’ lines there is actually a transcription of Thomas Moore lyrics. and further below are the words “…Give none of your sass/My Colleen Dhas!” The song *Colleen dhas cruthen na moe* (‘The Pretty Girl milking the cow’) is linked to Thomas Moore. On this evidence, ‘Sweet Boy’ may well be from an untraceable song lyric and not related to a lad Casement knew.

The provenance of documents is especially important given the contested nature of the diaries, while the issue of forgery by the British authorities, where available as in one instance when a Foreign Office agent in Copenhagen seeks permission from London to submit a scheme to “manufacture” evidence to render Casement’s position “untenable”[[9]](#footnote-9), or by Casement himself, add layers to the mix.

Angus Mitchell, somewhat obscurely alludes to this writing, “By November 1914, Casement was locked into a dangerous conspiracy with his former paymasters – a conspiracy that is clearly defined in his Berlin diary. This is unpalatable and toxic history which reflects well on none of the antagonists. But it clearly shows that not all conspiracies are theories. Those historians who dismiss the argument for forgery as a ‘conspiracy theory’ merely expose their own ignorance of this dimension.”

In that month, Casement, and his less than faithful companion Adler Christensen, concocted and delivered to the British Legation in modern Oslo a series of fake documents showing his intended movements by sea in the Baltic hoping to lure Royal Navy ships in to intercept him. This was part of the “shenanigans in Norway” as Angus describes them.

One example of confirmed British deceit relates to the origins and development of Casement’s nationalism. It was born of family influences and was not “sudden in origin”, as FE Smith suggested at the trial. His mind was not corrupted between 1911 and 1914, rather that period was the zenith of a decade of separatist campaigning. This was a distortion by Smith for effect, to make Casement appear more of a sudden, casual traitor.

He was an ardent teenage nationalist in Co Antrim where, despite a lingering liberalism, the dominant male Protestant characteristic was Unionism. The distaff side of the upper class was however often different and Republican, and these women such as Rose Young of Galgorm Castle and Margaret Dobbs of Castle Dobbs knew Casement well and influenced him.

**ANGLOPHOBIA**

Casement was also Anglophobic, which is less agreeable.

As happens with the British left, unwisely, too many hate their own country much more than they love the working class. Casement hated his. But he switched nationality which is honest, and indeed his religion.

This is honestly addressed by Mitchell in his recent address at the Four Courts,[[10]](#footnote-10) “Perhaps the hardest aspect of Casement’s interpretation to discuss is his stated hatred of England. His prosecutor, FE Smith, made reference to this. But even today, reading through the Casement papers, it is hard to process some of what he said – the loathing is so explicit. I will admit that one of the shortfalls in my own work on Casement has been to properly address this. But that hatred was a product of wartime hatreds. In a climate of reconciliation and in the context of the peace process, this is the most sensitive of issues…

…In his brief 1916 biography of Casement, LG Redmond-Howard argued that his radical turn was the product of nearly forty years of political fumbling over home rule. He was a creation of prevarication, the intransigence of the Unionist lords and the decision by Carson and Smith to arm the UVF and incite “the language of anarchy”.”

The controversy certainly continues and the Nobel prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa has, perhaps unwittingly, added fuel to the deniers when he novelised a Casement who basically fantasised about his encounters in his diaries, and had a mother fixation.

The Norwegian Bjorn Godoy tellingly says that “Vargas Llosa does a typical thing...Adam Hochschild did the same to ED Morel and Casement in King Leopold's Ghost. Their narrative model only allows for good and bad. Hence the heroes can only be presented as one dimensional idealist portraits. How much better the story would be if he had taken Casement's sensual pleasure at face value. The novel is not only false, the pitying tone is also unforgivably boring.”

**RELIGION**

I referred obliquely to the potential for a cult or religion to have built up over Casement, since he consciously traded on a certain saintly aura, as the permanent beard suggests. The one clean-shaven photograph of him on the submarine shows an entirely ordinary, modern man.

His martyrdom inevitably helped stoke the fire which is why the homosexual allegations, oddly, enhanced the religiosity of the campaign around and about him. But being, in time, provable or at least so argued, they ultimately prevented a cultic take off. That opportunity is now lost with the collapse of Catholicism in southern Ireland.

As we know, Casement’s mother Anne had him re-baptised in a Catholic Church in Rhyl in Wales when he was about four. She herself had become a Catholic in adult life. Casement himself, and most writers, took it for granted, that she was a Dublin Catholic from a mixed marriage. In truth she was born into a North Dublin Protestant family from Portland Street who worshipped not far from here in the now derelict but once most popular St George’s Church in Hardwicke Place. Oddly both Anne and her sister Grace married in what is now St Anne’s Cathedral in Belfast. Her father’s origins are not clear. Their surname has confused researchers being spelt in early records Jepson not Jephson, as with the Mallow Castle family of Jephsons who were entirely unconnected.

Casement’s conversion to Rome was not dissimilar to that of many gay men of the era including both Oscar Wilde and Bosie Douglas (although he was anti-sodomy and anti-Semitic by that moment, like his father the Marquess.) From Casement’s letters, he seems to have had no great intellectual affinity to Rome except for the fact that the Irish majority was Catholic. That was the key differentiation from the rest of the UK once the language had died.

It was a nationalist and very Catholic, Belfast friend, Cathal O’Byrne who wrote of Casement’s view that “no one could love the Irish people without loving the religion that made them what they were.” That explains pretty much why he converted. As indeed shortly afterwards did his cousin Gertrude when she married Sidney Parry, a gay Catholic convert.

A relevant and broader explanation comes from Casement's ‘Last message to Ireland’ of 2 August 1916[[11]](#footnote-11) “My dominating thought was to keep Ireland out of the war. England has no claim on us, in law or morality or right. Ireland should not sell her soul for any mess of Empire. If I die tomorrow bury me in Ireland, and I shall die in the Catholic Faith, for I accept it fully now. It tells me what my heart sought long – but I saw it in the faces of the Irish. Now I know what it was I loved in them. The chivalry of Christ speaking through human eyes – it is from that source all lovable things come, for Christ was the first Knight.”

**FINAL WORDS**

Many modern Casement proponents, some accepting the possibility of him being gay (but not the authenticity of the diaries), are to be found in the anti-revisionist school of Irish history. Quite properly, as he was of that political faith.

Foolishly, such anti-revisionist historians hold to the conspiracy theories around the diaries and are thus doomed to political disappointment because forgery is no longer a credible option. They rely too on the Irish forgetting, or failing to realise they (like the British) have interests, and must make messy compromises.

I combine a number of key aspects that explain my interest and underpin my ideas - particularly being gay and a unionist. They don’t make me a bad person. Rather they give me insights that others do not have. I hope I don’t misuse that position and being devoted to facts and accuracy believe not, which is why in my second edition I have corrected a fair number of errors I had made although they did not change the thrust of my findings. And I am dedicated to opposing conspiracy theories of all sorts. They corrode history and make people incapable of sensible judgements.

I leave the other question, the area of Casement’s great failure in deed and understanding, the partition of the island of Ireland, to my remarks in Ballycastle next weekend. He left a living legacy of that we can be certain.

1. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Roger-Casements-German-Diary-1914-1916/dp/0953928756/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1467108625&sr=1-1&keywords=amazon+dudgeon+casement%27s+german+diary> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/the-blank-canvas-of-roger-casement-s-life-1.2677023> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=amazon+dudgeon+casement> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See my reply <http://www.historyireland.com/uncategorized/roger-casement/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *16 Lives* pp. 328-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. NLI MS 17601/5 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Maloney Collection of Irish Historical Papers, NYPL Box 1 Fol 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Paul Hyde article <http://breac.nd.edu/articles/65746-lost-to-history-an-assessment-and-review-of-the-casement-black-diaries/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See footnote 32 in Margaret O’Callaghan’s ‘Ireland, Empire, and British Foreign Policy: Roger Casement and the First World War’ in *breac* <http://breac.nd.edu/articles/65660-ireland-empire-and-british-foreign-policy-roger-casement-and-the-first-world-war/> (and KV2/6 TNA, 20 September 1915). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Address given on Easter Monday 2016 at Court No. 1 and published in *drb* <http://www.drb.ie/essays/one-bold-deed-of-open-treason> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. NLI 17046 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)