**Irish and Sunday Independent**

**Sunday Indo Living**

<http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books-casements-tragic-diary-of-treason-34611159.html>

**JP O'Malley**

**10 April 2016**

**In 1911 Roger Casement was knighted by King George V for his work exposing abuse of human rights in the Congo Free State. It wouldn't be long, though, till Casement became enemy number one of the British Empire he had once been such a loyal servant to.**

But with defiance from the IRB, the rebellion on Easter Monday went ahead in Dublin at any rate.

On August 3, after many months of deliberations in the public domain which discussed his clandestine war time activity with the Germans, Casement was hanged for treason at London's Pentonville prison.

Casement's biography is unusually quirky in the pantheon of Irish republican martyrs: he was an aristocratic knight errant; he had a striking conversion from British imperialism to Irish nationalism; he was publicly shamed and discredited before his hanging, due to information that leaked out from the infamous 'Black Diaries': which revealed his appetite for casual sexual encounters with men and teenage boys, on his earlier humanitarian missions as an employee of the British Empire.

These diaries were seen by Irish Republicans, for many years, as forgeries used for propaganda purposes. But it's now almost universally accepted by historians that the diaries revealed the truth.

Despite his involvement in setting up and financing the Irish volunteers, along with Eoin Mac Neill in 1913, and his prominent role in helping to secure a cargo of arms from Germany to Howth Pier in 1914- that would eventually be used in the Easter Rising - Casement always remained outside of the inner circles of the Irish revolutionary movement.

It was this distance, both physically and intellectually, from the revolutionaries, and their secretive ways, back in Dublin, which would eventually prove to be Casement's downfall; subsequently plunging him into a violent depression in the months leading up to his arrest.

In August 1914 Casement visited John Devoy in Philadelphia from the secret society, Clan na Gael: a prominent Irish republican organisation in the United States.

Casement's plan was to seek German assistance, and to recruit Irish prisoners of war fighting in the British army, to return to Ireland and help fight for independence.

Devoy was extremely sceptical of the mission. Still, using his connections with German diplomats, as well as his hefty purse strings, he helped to fund Casement's rather daft military plan.

The mission ended in abysmal failure, and Casement's 'Irish brigade' amounted to a pathetic 56 men.

*One Bold Deed of Open Treason: The Berlin Diary of Roger Casement 1914-16* documents these disastrous months spent in imperial Germany, where Casement was, for the most part, severely ill, suffering from nervous exhaustion.

The diary, even today, remains one of the most candid confessions of treason ever scripted by a subject and servant of the British Crown.

When Casement arrived in Germany in late October 1914, his mood was one of healthy optimism.

Pretty quickly, however, his writing began to descend into extreme negativity.

Casement was a highly emotional character, who was often infused with feelings of anger, frustration, self pity, guilt, and inconsistency of thought.

This raw, emotional tone, leaden with a heavy heart, percolates through almost all diary entries from mid 1915 onwards. At other times, Casement's ideas appear to be drastically contradictory.

For example, in December 1914, Casement became so enthralled and enthusiastic about the German temperament of character, that he wrote of his wish to be born German, and not Irish: claiming he felt ashamed to belong to so contemptible a race [as the Irish]." Strange words indeed for a so-called fervent Irish nationalist.

Roy Foster, in his book, *Vivid Faces*, has argued that, even if this behaviour might seem illogical, it tends to fit "with [Casement's] rather febrile and hero worshipping temperament."

As these diaries progress towards Casement's arrest in April 1916, we begin to witness a man watching his pride, ego, self worth, and reputation, slowly disintegrating before his eyes.

Casement is extremely self aware, when penning these diary entries, that his words will become important historical documents that posterity will study in great detail.

Mythology and martyrdom are two vital ingredients that have held the narrative of modern Irish history tightly together for the last 100 years.

No other figure, however, has acquired the same level of mystique, honour, shame, and curiosity, attached to their name, from both loyal admirers, and most vehement of enemies alike, as Sir Roger Casement has.

Which makes these diaries, especially in the wake of the centenary celebrations - when Irish history is being constantly revised, reassessed, and re-evaluated - all the more compelling and intriguing to read.

**Tim O’Sullivan response:**

***Sunday Independent***

**Sunday 17 Apr 2016**

**Roger Casement's 'Black Diaries'**

Sir - In a review of the recent book on Roger Casement's Berlin diary, One Bold Deed of Open Treason, by Angus Mitchell (Sunday Independent, April 10), JP O'Malley, referring to different diaries, states: "The infamous 'Black Diaries', which revealed his appetite for casual sexual encounters with men and teenage boys on his earlier humanitarian missions as an employee of the British Empire."

He went on to claim: "These diaries were seen by Irish Republicans for many years as forgeries used for propaganda purposes. But it is now almost universally accepted by historians that the diaries revealed the truth."

It appears O'Malley was unaware that the author, whose book he was reviewing, was a researcher who challenges the authenticity of these diaries.

Such people are, and were, much more numerous than O'Malley seems to be aware.

Mitchell is the son of a senior British Army officer who later became a Conservative MP.

In place of the mindless presumption that those who leaned towards a suspicion of forgery consisted of "Irish Republicans", investigation would reveal that many writers who expressed sympathy with the forgery position had their roots in the neighbouring island.

Names such as the English poet and literature professor Alfred Noyes, who wrote a book on the subject, and Christopher Hollis, whose brother Roger was head of MI5, come to mind.

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Jeffrey Dudgeon response (unpublished):

From: jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com  
To: sunday.letters@independent.ie  
Subject: Casement's diaries- letter for publication  
Date: Tue, 19 Apr 2016 13:30:59 +0100

**Roger Casement's diaries**  
  
Tim O'Sullivan's in his letter of 17 April on Roger Casement's Black Diaries relies on several Englishmen who have been sceptical about their authenticity, or changed their opinion. Several were converts to Roman Catholicism which speaks of a more complex story, while Angus Mitchell, author of the book under review on 10 April, 'The Berlin Diary of Roger Casement', became an adherent of the anti-revisionist and conspiracy schools of Irish history.   
The Berlin Diary of course was not a private one. Casement tried to ensure its survival and publication as justification for his actions in Germany. Despite relentless radical separatism, when his revolutionary rhetoric led to a rising he got cold feet and came ashore at Banna Strand to stop it. Like Eoin MacNeill and Bulmer Hobson, he believed a rebellion without hope of success should not proceed. His humanitarian side had come again to the fore, along with disillusionment over Imperial Germany.  
In the new paperback and Kindle editions of my book, 'Roger Casement: The Black Diaries', I have published all his other, private diaries with back-up material about his life and family. The evidence for authenticity are the facts in the diaries themselves which can in many cases be cross-checked against other records, never in London's hands. Significantly, there is no documentary trace of the forging of the diaries, which would have been a mammoth task.  
It is true to say that the evidence for Casement being a homosexual or gay (neither were words he used) is sparse, aside from the diaries themselves. However historians can only make reasonable deductions from what is available. Casement's other papers in Ireland were destroyed by his friends, so much that was personal was lost.   
The question that remains to be answered in these changed times, is why so many deny that Casement could have been both gay and a sexual being. Conspiracy theories do not convince more than a few diehards.   
Cultural opinion expressed recently like the play 'McKenna's Fort' by Arnold Thomas Fanning (attended by President Higgins), Patrick Mason's RTE radio play 'The Dreaming of Roger Casement', and Alan Phelan's film 'Our Kind' playing at the Hugh Lane Gallery, not to mention Colin Murphy's RTE radio documentary 'Roger Casement's Apocalypse Now - Africa & 1916' tell a different story, one of modern Ireland's acceptance of diversity.  
Yours sincerely  
Jeffrey Dudgeon (Cllr)  
City Hall  
Belfast