**Kathleen Clarke and Roger Casement**

[Mon, Oct 26, 2015, 01:03](http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/kathleen-clarke-and-roger-casement-1.2404002)

Monday, Oct 26, 2015

Sir, – The [article](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/roger-casement-made-a-fool-of-himself-kathleen-clarke-1.2399390) reporting Kathleen Clarke’s interview with Fr Louis O’Kane, where she reveals her disdain for Roger Casement, is interesting for what it divulges about the class and gender issues intrinsic to the remembering of the Rising (“Roger Casement made a ‘fool of himself’ – Kathleen Clarke”, October 21st).

However, 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.

But Clarke’s opinions about Casement should not go unchallenged, as they only serve to bolster historical distortions.

Having spent eight months speaking to Irish Volunteer rallies across the four provinces of Ireland, Casement spoke at his final recruitment gathering in the Glens of Antrim on June 28th, 1914, as news of the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo was being wired around the world.

A month later, he was with Joe McGarrity in Philadelphia where word of the landing of the guns at Howth reached him. As a key strategist behind that operation, he was accepted into the bosom of the IRB. This is evident from the letter Casement addressed to the kaiser, on August 25th, 1914, which was signed by every member of the Clan na Gael executive. John Devoy’s name headed the list.

In this communication, Casement argued that the war had been forced upon Germany “by those jealous of her military security, envious of her industrial and commercial capacity, and aiming at her integrity as a great world power”. He claimed that “thousands of Irishmen are prepared to do their part to aid the German cause, for they recognise that it is their own”.

The cause, as he identified it, was to build a peaceful and prosperous Europe rather than bolster a straining empire.

In October 1914, Casement went to Germany with the blessing of the IRB and with their gold in his pocket. He remained there for the next 18 months, during which time communications broke down, his plans for the Irish Brigade failed and Germany grew weary of the “Irish factor”.

Speaking in 1968, is it possible that Mrs 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? – Yours, etc,

ANGUS MITCHELL,

Limerick.

Sir, – The article on Roger Casement, which featured the testimony of Kathleen Clarke, the wife of executed Easter Rising leader Tom Clarke, was interesting for revealing the personal relationships (or lack thereof) of certain individuals central to the events of 1916, but offered very little in terms of objective truth.

As to Mrs Clarke’s contention that Casement’s attempt to enlist a brigade from amidst the British POWs held in Germany was foolish, we can only say that with hindsight because it failed. Had the operation to land 1,500 riles in Howth for the Irish Volunteers failed, with the gift of hindsight it too could have been described as foolish.

Instead the Howth gun running, in which Casement played a leading role, proved to the very thing without which the Rising could not have taken place.

It would have been nice if Mrs Clarke had had the generosity to acknowledge that.

For anyone looking to find a fairer appraisal of Roger Casement, the Dún Laoghaire 1916 Committee will be launching its book next month. It will of course feature an article on one of Dún Laoghaire’s most famous revolutionary sons. – Yours, etc,

CILLIAN DOYLE,

Dún Laoghaire,

Co Dublin.

**Kathleen Clarke and Roger Casement**

**Irish Times letters**

[Fri, Oct 23, 2015, 01:11](http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/kathleen-clarke-and-roger-casement-1.2401967)

Sir, – Further to the remarks on Roger Casement made by Kathleen Clarke (“Roger [Casement](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/roger-casement-made-a-fool-of-himself-kathleen-clarke-1.2399390) made a ‘fool of himself’ – Kathleen Clarke”, October 21st), which have just been revealed in the Fr Louis O’Kane archive in Armagh, she was plainly not happy with his behaviour in Germany and the reason for his submarine journey to Ireland just before the Rising. However, even though before the war Casement was seen as a leader of the separatists, that was not his choice but due to the fact that he was already well known where others hugged the shadows. He had been treasurer of the Irish Volunteers and helped organise and finance the Howth gun running.

Far from being an aristocrat, having left school at 15, he was however classless in the way the Irish can be seen in England.

He was certainly a gentleman and a scholar, despite never attending university.

His relatives in Co Antrim, in both Ballymena and Ballycastle, were prosperous professionals and manufacturers, although he was largely brought up in England.

A good assessment of Casement’s actions in April 1916 is provided by John Devoy who had certainly sent him over as an official envoy of Clan na Gael: “Casement admitted that he deceived the Germans into the belief that he wanted to go to take part in the fight but that his real purpose was to reach the leaders and get them to put off the rising and that if he failed in this he would ‘go out and die with them’. He had no military knowledge whatever and his judgment in this matter was wholly valueless and his presence would have added nothing to the force of the insurgents.” (*Gaelic American*, October 4th, 1924). – Yours, etc,

Cllr JEFFREY DUDGEON,

City Hall,

Belfast.

Mon, Oct 26, 2015, 01:03

Sir, – One of the factors that influenced Casement in his endeavour to raise an Irish Brigade in Germany stemmed from his meeting with Major John MacBride in Dublin 1913. Casement was enthralled to hear the details of MacBride’s successful organizing and co-leadership of an Irish Brigade in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1904.

He wrote to Alice Green, “Can you imagine the feelings of an English Colonel who had given up his sword to an ‘Irish rebel’!” – Yours, etc,

ANTHONY J JORDAN,

Dublin 4.   
<http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/kathleen-clarke-and-roger-casement-1.2401967>

23 October 2015

Date: Wed, 21 Oct 2015 19:16:52 -0400  
Subject: RE: Kathleen Clarke view  
From: woodenworks@yahoo.com  
To: jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com

Thank you Jeffery....An interesting article. ...would love to see your response.

Best regards. ...Thomas

-------- Original message --------  
From: Jeffrey Dudgeon <jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com>   
Date: 10/21/2015 5:49 PM (GMT-05:00)   
Subject: Kathleen Clarke view

All  
There is a story in the Irish Times about Casement and Kathleen Clarke today. I have written a correcting response.   
Here is the link:  
<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/roger-casement-made-a-fool-of-himself-kathleen-clarke-1.2399390>  
Patrick Casement was on UTV's 'Lesser Spotted Ulster' two nights ago talking about the Glens and Magherintemple. Good footage.  
Best  
Jeff

**Roger Casement made a ‘fool of himself’ – Kathleen Clarke**

**Wife of executed Easter Rising leader reveals disdain for Casement on secret tape**



Kathleen Clarke: described Roger Casement as someone who really knew nothing about Ireland.

[Ronan McGreevy](http://www.irishtimes.com/profile/ronan-mcgreevy-7.1837400)

[Wed, Oct 21, 2015, 01:01](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/roger-casement-made-a-fool-of-himself-kathleen-clarke-1.2399390)

Sir Roger Casement “made a fool of himself” in his dealings with the Germans, according to the wife of executed Easter Rising leader Tom Clarke.

Kathleen Clarke described Casement as someone who really knew nothing about Ireland and who considered himself a leader of the Irish Volunteers despite being nothing of the kind.

The interview with Ms Clarke was recorded in 1968 by Fr Louis O’Kane and has been stored in the Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive in Armagh until now.

A full transcript of its contents has never been released previously.

The Fr Louis O’Kane collection includes some 120 interviews with about 70 veterans or witnesses of the War of Independence, nearly all from the North.

In late 1914 and early 1915 Mr Casement went to Limburg prisoner-of-war camp in Germany in an attempt to raise a brigade among Irishmen who had been captured early in the first World War.

He hoped it would be the vanguard of a German invasion force which would liberate Ireland from the British, but only 56 out of some 2,000 prisoners joined.

Mrs Clarke told Fr O’Kane that Casement had no mandate to do such a thing. “He went off to Germany and started things that the revolutionary group here didn’t want,” she said.

**‘Aristocratic kind’**

“They didn’t ask Germany for men. All they asked them for was arms. And he was trying to get men.” She described Casement as the “aristocratic kind and he assumed that when he went into any movement, ipso facto, he was one of our leaders, if not the leader . . . and what could he know of Ireland, when he was all the time out of it.”

However, Casement was successful in securing arms for the rebellion although the *Aud Norge*, the ship which carried the arms, was intercepted by the Royal Navy on Good Friday 1916 and scuttled.

Mrs Clarke said her husband had said, while awaiting execution in Kilmainham Gaol, that the Germans “to the last letter of the law” had sent the arms they promised and deserved credit. Mrs Clarke told Fr O’Kane her husband had made up his mind years before the first World War to start a rebellion if war broke out between Britain and Germany.

She and her husband only disagreed on one thing – they were living in New York in 1907 and he wanted to come back to Ireland but she initially refused.

“I said, ‘You’ve done enough for your country, as much as any man could be expected’ and he said, ‘You can never do enough for your country’,” she said.

Mrs Clarke said to her husband: “I don’t want to go. If you’re taking me home to a nice quiet life, I’ll be satisfied to go. I’d love to go, but if you’re going home for a revolution, I’m likely to lose you and I don’t want to lose you.”

She went back understanding the consequences. “Once I surrendered then I went into it wholeheartedly, even though I realised I couldn’t see, [how we would win] . . . with the small might that we could throw up against the immense might of the Empire.”

Mrs Clarke became a formidable republican in her own right after her husband was executed in 1916.

She was a founder member of Fianna Fáil in 1926, the first woman mayor of Dublin, a TD and senator. She lived until 1972.

She was anti-Treaty and was interned by the government during the Civil War, but claims in the interview that she tried to persuade the men who were occupying the Four Courts in 1922 to lay down their arms.

She told Michael Collins she would support the Treaty on the basis that it gave Ireland the “machinery to work out to full freedom”.

In June 1922 she went to the Four Courts to remonstrate with the anti-Treaty forces who were occupying it. The occupation led to the Civil War.

**Conference**

“It’s a challenge to Mick Collins and I know Mick well enough that he’ll only accept that challenge until such time as he can get an army together and kick you out of here. Are you going to wait for that?” she told them.

Liam Mellows, who was occupying the Four Courts at the time and was later executed by the Free State government, responded: “You’re only a woman, what would you know about it?”

The recording is available to visitors of the Cardinal Ó Fiaich library on Moy Road, Armagh, (the project is supported by the UK Heritage Lottery Fund).

Helen Litton, a grandniece of Kathleen Clarke, will give a talk about the relationship between Tom and Kathleen at a conference in the library on November 14th.

*Reflections on the revolution in Ulster: The Irish volunteers in the north, 1913-1923* takes place on November 14th in the Cardinal Ó Fiaich Library.