**HISTORY IRELAND CASEMENT LETTERS 2016**

**MARY KENNY, PAUL HYDE, ANGUS MITCHELL, JOHN GRAY, JEFFREY DUDGEON**

**& TIM O’SULLIVAN**

**Casement’s Black Diaries**

Published in [Issue 6 (November/December 2016)](http://www.historyireland.com/category/volume-24/issue-6-novemberdecember-2016/), [Letters](http://www.historyireland.com/category/volume-24/issue-6-novemberdecember-2016/letters-issue-6-novemberdecember-2016/), [Volume 24](http://www.historyireland.com/category/volume-24/)



Sir,—A coda, if I may, to my article ‘Roger Casement and the History Question’ (HI 24.4, July/August 2016) that responds to the letters in the following issue. When working as a historical consultant for the exhibition at Kerry County Museum, ‘Casement in Kerry: A Revolutionary Journey’, I supported the idea of the curator, Helen O’Carroll, to apply for a loan of the Black Diaries from the National Archives (UK). In turning down her application, Juergen Vervoorst, Head of Conservation, reasoned that ‘we can only guarantee the files’ [diaries’] continued authenticity whilst they remain at the National Archives’. Such an unusual excuse, surely, reveals an internal anxiety about the status of the documents on the part of the very institution where they are deposited.

Political expediency inevitably overrules in the pursuit of historical ‘truth’ wherever Casement is concerned. The entanglements of the Black Diaries continue to mesmerise the public, confuse journalists, inspire playwrights, embarrass governments and silence historians. Securely archived beside the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, they endure as a rupturing aide-mémoire to the excesses of the age of high imperialism as it imploded into the mechanised slaughter of the Western Front and that flash of defiance in Dublin in 1916. The collective intellectual failure to bring about a satisfactory conclusion to the question of their authority reveals a crisis at the heart of Irish revisionism.

Reading between the respective national archives in London and Dublin, it is possible to trace how the innuendoes used in 1916 to execute Casement were transformed over the years by the Anglo-Irish entente cordiale. Through the fusion of a compliant media and careful diplomatic handling emerged ‘consensus’ and a ‘majority view among historians’. The Black Diaries were manufactured and promoted inside that undocumented alliance bridging national intelligence agencies and the Oxbridge axis. Apparently, the present line from within that nexus is: does it really matter if the diaries are forged or not? It doesn’t matter only if we don’t care about the truth. Mary Kenny’s letter demonstrates that we should care.—Yours etc.,

**ANGUS MITCHELL**
Limerick

Sir,—In response to the letters (HI 24.5, Sept./Oct. 2016) from Jeffrey Dudgeon and Mary Kenny on aspects of the Casement articles published in the previous issue, the following points might interest your readers. To be convincing, Jeffrey Dudgeon should explain why he prefers the version of one policeman to that of another and why other believers in authenticity disagree with his choice of policeman. Since at least one of the policemen was lying, he should explain how he knows which one was not lying. He should also explain why he believes any of the versions. Quinn’s Minute of 22 June claims that books and diaries were delivered by Germain, but the police list of contents shows no books in those two trunks. But even this misses the point; the existence of police documents attesting to the delivery/discovery of diaries proves nothing. There is no verifiable record that the diaries now in the UK National Archives were shown to anyone in this period. Typescript pages were widely shown but Casement did not type those pages.

Mary Kenny’s claim that Birkenhead showed the Black Diaries to George V is unsubstantiated in the extensive Casement literature of the past 60 years. It is recorded only that he saw typescript pages, like everyone else—the same typescript that Birkenhead offered to Casement’s defence. What has not been explained by the ‘authenticity authors’ is why typescripts were prepared for showing when it would have been easier, quicker, more convincing and more economical simply to show the diaries or photographic copies of these. This could have been done in days and would have made the later, unconvincing attempts at corroboration quite unnecessary. The above confusions are examined in depth in the research essays available at [www.decoding-casement.com](http://www.decoding-casement.com/), which readers might wish to consult.—Yours etc.,

**PAUL R. HYDE**

**Casement’s Black Diaries**

Published in [Issue 5 (September/October 2016)](http://www.historyireland.com/category/volume-24/issue-5-septemberoctober-2016/), [Letters](http://www.historyireland.com/category/volume-24/issue-5-septemberoctober-2016/letters-issue-5-septemberoctober-2016/), [Volume 24](http://www.historyireland.com/category/volume-24/)

Sir,—Angus Mitchell’s essay on Roger Casement’s Black Diaries (HI 24.4, July/Aug. 2016) was revealing and informative, and his affirmation that Casement was a ‘gay martyr’ is interesting—and honest. But, so far as I understand, Casement’s sexual orientation was not just about being homosexual: it was that he was attracted to boys between the ages of 12 and 14. In today’s world, his reputation would be trashed as a ‘paedophile’ and consigned to an enquiry on ‘historic sexual abuse’. (Sexologists describe as ‘hebephiles’ those who are attracted to 12–14-year-olds, on the cusp of adolescence, but the public does not seem to differentiate.)

Certainly, and deplorably, Birkenhead showed the Black Diaries to a number of influential people (including King George V, who was very dismayed) in an effort to destroy Roger Casement’s defence. This was wholly unethical and had nothing to do with the case. When I was researching the biography of William Joyce (‘Lord Haw-Haw’), who was the last man to be hanged as a traitor by the Crown in 1946, the Joyce prosecution drew on the precedent of Roger Casement. Joyce’s sexuality was neither here nor there, but they hanged him anyway for consorting with Germany in wartime, and the legal precedent was Casement, who, according to the legal records, had done likewise.

Angus Mitchell calls for ‘maturity’ in considering Casement’s sexuality: if so, we should also have the maturity to consider his apparent ‘hebephilia’. Men (and some women) are condemned for paedophilia (and hebephilia), but are individuals always responsible for their inborn sexual orientation? That should be part of the ‘mature’ discussion too.—Yours etc.,

**MARY KENNY**
Kent

Sir,—In his article on the Black Diaries, ‘Casement tied and tested’ (HI 24.4, July/Aug. 2016), Paul Hyde reiterates that there were a number of differing accounts of how and when the diaries came into the possession of the London authorities. Some have argued before 1916 and others, even, that forgery work continued on them up to their release in 1959.

Until the distribution of the relevant Metropolitan Police (MEPO) files in 2000 at the Royal Irish Academy’s Casement symposium there was indeed no hard documentary evidence.

However, in those MEPO papers there are two references to the diaries arriving from 50 Ebury Street on the precise date mentioned in the House of Commons in 1959. In a Special Branch minute of 22 June 1916, Superintendent Patrick Quinn wrote:

‘During the month of May 1914 Casement deposited with Mr Germain of 50 Ebury Street, Pimlico, S.W. some boxes containing books, etc. These books, which included three diaries for the years 1903, 1910 and 1911, a ledger, an address book and a memorandum book were brought to New Scotland Yard by Mr Germain on the 25th April 1916.’

This was on Easter Tuesday, after Casement’s interrogation had commenced, and is confirmed in the later reference dated 28 July 1916 to which Paul Hyde does refer. It is from a Metropolitan Police property list relating to Casement. There the contents of two trunks ‘brought to Scotland Yard by Mr Germain, 50, Ebury Street, on 25th. April 1916’ were enumerated and detailed as including ‘3 diaries, 1 ledger, 1 address book, 1 memorandum book’. Discovery of the Black Diaries was entirely the result of a voluntary act by a lodging housekeeper, Mr W.P. Germain.

I believe that this mystery is one that can now be regarded as settled despite the earlier contradictory accounts. It indicates that Scotland Yard failed to investigate the lodging houses in Ebury Street where Casement stayed, even though the police were aware of the various owners’ names from an inspection in 1915 of his cashed cheques. Had the Black Diaries been discovered a year earlier, 1916 history might have been different.—Yours etc.,

**JEFFREY DUDGEON**
Author of *Roger Casement: the Black Diaries—with a study of his background, sexuality, and Irish political life*

Sir,—Quite right that you should mark the centenary of the execution of Roger Casement. It is unfortunate that both articles supported the view that the Black Diaries are forgeries, when there is a strong body of opinion that they are genuine. In a mere letter it would be quite impossible to go into all the conspiracy theories involved. It may be that the various tests on the diaries have been inconclusive, though it is surely implausible to suggest that they are part of a continuing conspiracy, and one apparently continuing as late as 2002!
It seems to me that some simple points suggest their authenticity.
(1) Why forge hundreds of pages when a few pages would be sufficient? The authorities used samples only in their largely successful campaign to smear Casement during his trial, and especially to undermine the reprieve campaign.
(2) The authorities did set about attempting to verify entries in the Black Diaries, and notably in the case of the Belfast bank clerk, Joseph Millar Gordon. They wouldn’t have done so if they had forged the originals.
(3) There is sustainable evidence that there was another Black Diary or equivalent left at Ardrigh, and that a horrified Francis Joseph Bigger consigned this to a fire.
None of this detracts in any way from Casement’s role as a rebel on behalf of Ireland, and on behalf of the oppressed peoples of Africa and South America. But in this day and age Ireland surely no longer needs her heroes piously sanitised.—Yours etc.,

**JOHN GRAY**
Belfast