**Did Michael Collins betray Roger Casement's' gay diaries to British?**

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**Sir Roger Casement and John Devoy: Approaching the 100th anniversary of the Rising, in the pantheon of Irish American heroes he stands out.**

In a year when Ireland made history by legalizing gay marriage, it seems appropriate to remember that this year also marks the 99th anniversary of the death of one of Ireland’s most famous gay icons, Sir Roger Casement. On August 3, 1916 he was hanged by the British at His Majesty’s Pentonville Prison in London. He was the sixteenth—and last—of the Easter Rising rebels to be executed.

Casement also plays the central part in one of the great riddles of the Irish War of Independence—what association did he have with Ireland’s greatest rebel, Michael Collins? The Collins-Casement road is full of twists and turns, populated with some of the greatest Fenians in Irish history: Tom Clarke, Joseph Mary Plunkett, John Devoy and, of course, Michael Collins himself. Here’s what your correspondent has unearthed.

During the fateful autumn of 1921 Michael Collins tried to hammer out a treaty that would rescue Ireland from British rule. During this period, Collins forged important relationships with Winston Churchill and Lord Birkenhead. As a result of Collins’ friendship with Birkenhead, in February 1922 he was allowed to examine Sir Roger Casement’s “Black Diaries,” safely secured in the Tower of London.

These diaries—the controversy still rages to this day if they are genuine or a forgery of the British Secret Service—exposed Casement to charges of deviant behavior, engaging in homosexual acts with aborigines on two continents. The diaries first appeared in the summer of 1916 as demands were made by prominent citizens, including George Bernard Shaw and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to spare the life of the Irish rebel. The contents of the diaries served to quell these calls for mercy and Casement became the last martyr of 1916.

After examining the diaries, Collins, according to Casement’s biographer Brian Inglis in "Roger Casement: The Biography of a Patriot Who Lived for England, Died for Ireland," was “convinced they were genuine.” Collins based his opinion on the fact that, according to Inglis, he “claimed to know Casement’s handwriting.” One of Collins’ biographers, T. Ryle Dwyer, wrote in his book "Big Fellow, Long Fellow" that “Collins had no doubts about their authenticity after he saw them.”

One of the great mysteries of Irish history still remains. Just how did Collins know what Casement’s handwriting looked like? Because, except for one tantalizing supposition, they apparently never met. Did he help put the nail in Casement's coffin by identifying them as his in order to win support from his British adversaries?

**Two Different Types of Revolutionary**

You couldn’t find two men as different as Collins and Casement. One, Collins was a young, robust Catholic from rural Cork, a compartmental genius who basically invented modern urban guerrilla warfare and who, as Ireland’s first Minister for Finance, floated a brilliant international loan that cemented Ireland’s security as a new nation. The other, Casement, although Dublin born, belonged to the “other” Ireland—Protestant (although he would later convert to Catholicism), a member of Britain’s Consular Service, and knighted for his humanitarian work in the Belgian Congo. Their one common thread was a hope for an Ireland free from British occupation.

The who, what, when and why of the Collins-Casement connection has never been broached—never mind solved—by any of Collins’s or Casement’s biographers. In fact, I have never seen it addressed. So, what, exactly, was their connection? I have come up with a scenario that might best explain the riddle and how Joseph Mary Plunkett, one of the 1916 martyrs, made it all happen.

**Is Joseph Mary Plunkett the Key?**

While in Dublin recently I came across a book that may contain the answers to this Fenian riddle. The book is "All in the Blood: A Memoir of the Plunkett family, the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence" by Geraldine Plunkett Dillon, edited by Honor O Brolchain, Geraldine’s granddaughter (A. & A. Farmar, 2006). Geraldine was Joe Plunkett’s sister. They were extremely close, according to Geraldine, and if anyone knew any of Joe Plunkett’s secrets, it was his sister Geraldine.

Geraldine breaks new ground in this book and clarifies many aspects of the shadowy life of her brother. At the time of the Rising, Joe Plunkett was dying of tuberculosis. That, however, did not stop him in the preceding years from traveling far and wide, basically serving as the foreign secretary of the Provisional Government which would come out of hiding at Easter 1916.

One of the most important things Geraldine clarifies is when Collins returned to Dublin to prepare for the uprising. Almost all of Collins's biographers say that he returned to Dublin in January 1916. Geraldine points out that Collins actually arrived in November 1915 and went to work for the Plunkett family, straightening out their real estate holdings, which had been ignored by the wildly eccentric Countess Plunkett.

“Mick was a good actor,” wrote Geraldine, “and could be the silly countryman with a Cork accent and so pass unnoticed through police cordons.” She added, “In January of 1916 Mick Collins went back to London for a week to settle his business affairs and to tell his stockbroker employers that he would not be returning.” After this time, he became the aide-de-camp and bodyguard for the feeble Joe Plunkett.

Parenthetically, Eoghan Plunkett, son of George and nephew of Joseph, recently said in the Irish Times that his part of the family was not quite as enamored with the Big Fellow: “I have to explain to you that my mother knew Mick Collins very well. He had an office in her flat and she despised him. He was a pup, a nasty piece of work. Whenever he came into their livingroom, the carpet on the livingroom floor was surrounded by a timber floor, but he walked on the timber part. Why? Because it made more noise. That’s the sort of fellow he was. She and he were both from West Cork; she recognized him for what he was.” When asked if he thought Collins was one of the greatest Irishmen, he replied: “Not in our eyes.”

Eoghan’s account, however, of Collins does confirm that he was working for the family at the end of 1915. (In all fairness it should be noted that the George Plunkett family wasn’t impressed with Éamon de Valera either: “He was a pain in the arse,” said Eoghan. “[My father] was put on the run by de Valera. As far as he was concerned, de Valera just fixed things for himself.” Eoghan also has perhaps the best—and funniest—line about de Valera of all time, playing on the term Sinn Féiner: “He was a Mé Féiner.”)

Geraldine also points out that Joe Plunkett had a friendship with Roger Casement, going back to his time as editor of The Irish Review, which Casement contributed to anonymously. He also spent considerable time with Casement when both of them were in Germany, trying to drum up German support for the uprising. Casement was thought of highly by the Plunkett family: “Casement was a fine, sincere and very intelligent man, remarkably kind and charitable,” she wrote. “Casement called himself ‘the leprechaun of Irish politics,’….My father [Count Plunkett] and Joe admired him very much and we always heard him spoken of with respect and liking.” Unfortunately, these salubrious feelings were not shared by the rest of the Fenian leadership.

**Don’t Get on the Wrong Side of Tom Clarke**

During the period of 1914-1916 Collins and Casement led separate, yet parallel lives, as revolutionaries—Collins in London, and Casement all over Europe and America. Collins was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the ultra-secret organization that planned armed insurrection to free Ireland from British rule. Casement, disgusted with British imperialism, had been bitten with the revolutionary bug, and sought ways to burrow his way into Irish revolutionary politics.

The archpoet Yeats in “Easter 1916” may have written about “MacDonagh and MacBride/And Connolly and Pearse,” but the guys who were planning the uprising from the beginning—along with Pearse and MacDonagh—were Thomas Clarke, Seán MacDiarmada and Joseph Mary Plunkett, IRB members all.

And that’s how Casement first got into trouble. He was not an IRB member. He was tolerated, certainly, but not trusted by Clarke and his confederates. “Casement was not a member of the IRB,” Geraldine Plunkett wrote, “because of a scruple he had about oaths; having taken the oath of allegiance for the British diplomatic service, he did not think it right to take the IRB oath on top of that.” This must have infuriated the hardboiled Clarke, a man who had spent years in British dungeons.

Also, Clarke was wary of Casement’s two mentors, Bulmer Hobson and Professor Eoin MacNeill—two of the most pacifist revolutionaries in the history of Ireland. Clarke’s suspicions about MacNeill soon proved to be true. MacNeill arbitrarily countermanded the orders for Easter Sunday maneuvers which resulted in confusion and chaos. The revolution had to be moved to Easter Monday and MacNeill had robbed it of its full impact.

“Casement had come into things national,” Kathleen Clarke, Tom’s widow, recalled in her book "Revolutionary Woman," “and Tom knew very little about him. Naturally, he had no cause to place much confidence in him; and the fact that he had been knighted by England in recognition of services rendered made Tom suspicious of him. Casement was not long enough in nationalist things in this country to prove his genuineness.”

**Roger Casement—Traveling Man**

Thus, Casement already had two strikes against him when he ran off to America and then Europe trying to win the Germans over to the Irish cause. In New York John Devoy, the tough old Fenian—Pearse called him “the greatest of the Fenians”—and close friend of Clarke’s, cast a suspicious eye on Casement. “John Devoy simply hated him,” Geraldine wrote, “and he was not sent [to America] by the Dublin IRB either.”

Casement left Devoy in New York and traveled to Germany in 1914. Casement had grand plans for a German landing of troops to coincide with the Rising, but, according to Geraldine, “The Germans had had doubts of Casement’s credentials and distrusted his temperament.”

It was Casement’s journey from New York to Berlin (via Norway) that first led to speculation that Collins might have known Casement personally. In "Michael Collins: A Biography" Tim Pat Coogan’s writes on page 31:

'The following telegram was sent from the German Embassy in Washington to the Foreign Office, Berlin. It is dated 1 September 1914 and reads: “An Irish priest (sic) named Michael Collins and Sir Roger Casement are going to Germany in order to visit the Irish prisoners.”'

There’s nothing wrong with Coogan’s logic. If you were Clarke or Devoy, with a deep distrust of Casement, Collins is the perfect man to send along on the adventure to keep an IRB eye on Casement. So is it possible that this is the one and the same “Father” Michael Collins? The answer is no and I have come up with an impeccable source—Michael Collins himself: “It was in 1914, just before the declaration of war, that the chance came to take passage to New York,” Collins is quoted in Hayden Talbot’s "Michael Collins Own Story." This book, supposedly, was to be Collins autobiography, but he died before it was published. Collins went on to state that “…when I laid the scheme before Tom Clarke…he advised me not to go. His reason satisfied me. He said there was going to be something doing in Ireland within a year. That was good enough for me. I changed my mind about going to America, and plodded along in my uncongenial job [in London].”

To further distance Collins from Casement (and Coogan’s theory) at this time, it is generally accepted that Casement traveled to Germany with one Adler Christensen, a Norwegian sailor he had met in New York. Christensen became Casement’s factotum (and perhaps his lover), and may have been a double-agent, working for both England and Germany.

Collins goes on in the Talbot book to talk about Casement, but not as someone he knew personally. In fact, from what he says, he may have been parroting what he was told by MacDiarmada or Clarke: “Casement’s opposition to the Rising meant nothing to the leaders in Dublin,” Collins continued. “They looked upon it—and in a sense rightly—that this was simply one man’s biased view, formed as a consequence of his experiences in Germany. His outlook on the Rising, or indeed on any Rising, was naturally different from the outlook of men like Seán McDermott [MacDiarmada] and Tom Clarke. My own opinion is that Casement had acquired a world outlook, and his mind was consequently influenced by world conditions.”

It was during their time together in Germany that Joe Plunkett got to know Casement better. Plunkett was also in consultation with the Germans in Berlin, but he had no hope for Casement’s quixotic plans. It was during this period that Plunkett realized Casement entertained delusions of grandeur. According to Geraldine, “Joe said that Casement thought he was to be the military leader in command of the Rising and that every one of these things would be a disaster—it was far too late to re-cast plans, Casement was no leader and he could not be concealed at all.”

**The Collins-Casement Connection**

So the question remains—how did Michael Collins know Roger Casement’s handwriting? He must have seen it somewhere. This is when the spotlight shifts to Joseph Plunkett. 1) Plunkett was Casement’s editor on the The Irish Review; 2) he knew him in Germany; 3) he was also Collins’ employer in Dublin and Collins was his bodyguard up to the time of the Rising.

The logical conclusion seems to be that Collins and Plunkett had conversations about Casement. Plunkett may have showed Collins Casement’s handwritten manuscripts that he published in The Irish Review and perhaps even letters pertaining to his German adventures. No one knows, but this supposition, Casement + Plunkett = the Collins Connection. It’s the only logical conclusion.

Ironically, Casement, perhaps Ireland’s most enigmatic patriot, and Collins, perhaps Ireland’s first forensic handwriting expert, are buried about one-hundred feet from each other in Dublin’s Glasnevin Cemetery. It may be the closest they ever got to each other—not in life, but death.

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Jeffrey,

Thanks for the email.

The only photograph I'm responsible for is the one with Devoy (I just love the look on Devoy's face!), all the other ones were editorial choices.

I think that, maybe, you and I are the only people on this earth that this little mystery has bothered. It has annoyed me for over 20 years and I think Geraldine Plunkett's book--which gives an excellent feeling of the time--got me thinking again. This is of course speculation, but it has bothered me and this is the closest I think I can get to some form of truth.

I'm a great fan of Gogarty--he is a character in my recent book on Collins--and it's interesting that Collins would have spoken to him about that, although no confirmation of authenticity was forthcoming.

One of the problems of Irish revolutionary history is that so many of the participants did not survive the war of independence. I have read several different accounts of this fellow Christensen and don't know what to believe. Everyone, it seems, appears to have their own version of history. While researching the origins of the squad, I came across what were supposed to be the "meeting" when the squad was formed. In fact I came across three separate meetings in September 1919: Parnell square, north georges street and gardner street. Pick one--and you can't be wrong!

I think the editor at IC wanted to sensationalize this article a bit (the original gay "outing"!), but I was only trying to solve an annoying point of history.

I'm glad you emailed me because most of the comments were off the wall: I was anti-Collins! (that must explain the five portraits of have of the Big Fellow in my living room); anti-catholic (what are they talking about?); and that I was promoting the gay agenda (I only promote my own books!). People are nuts, what else can I say.

Thanks for the chat.

Dermot

On Fri, Jul 31, 2015 at 8:20 AM, Jeffrey Dudgeon <jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dermot

I posted a comment to the Irish Central site about your article but it failed to appear for whatever reason.

<http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/Did-Michael-Collins-betray-Roger-Casements-gay-diaries-to-British.html>

My words were mostly about the erroneous photograph they keep using of Casement with a group of Amazindians. It is plainly not him - too short and the pose too casual. For a height comparison, look at the one they also use of him with Mrs May French Sheldon in November 1903 in Sao Thome.

I have pondered the same questions you pose. Collins was with Eamonn Duggan when he was shown the diaries. They may also have recognised some of the Irish references in the 1910 and 1911 diaries particularly.

Here are my notes on relevant NLI folders, some you are likely to have seen:

NLI MS 17601 - 23 items in 13 folders, McGarrity papers: (1) Ben Allen, (2) Joseph Conrad (typed copies), (3) Herbert Dickie, (4) Michael Francis Doyle - dubious, (5) Gavan Duffy, (6) Eamonn Duggan who saw two diaries with Michael Collins who confirmed it was Casement’s writing. Duggan did not know it. (7) Oliver St John Gogarty letter of 11 March 1933 relating that Collins had told him he had seen a vice diary but not stating any confirmation of authenticity.

NLI MS 10999/i “Seven letters to or concerning J. M. Plunkett en route to Berlin via Switzerland including a letter from Roger Casement, 1914-1915. With seven other documents including a description of his journey, a draft of a declaration for the Irish Brigade in Germany, and a draft paper on "Germany's future World Policy", May-June, 1915.” – Adler note about a passport for Plunkett; also good description by Plunkett of entering Germany from Bern in Switzerland.

10999/ii “Thirteen letters and a post card to J. M. Plunkett on literary matters and in connection with the Irish Volunteers. Correspondents include Thomas Mac Donagh, George Plunkett, James Stephens, Bulmer Hobson, James Connolly, L. J. Kettle, and Roger Casement. With an autographed sonnet by Casement on "Lost Youth" 1911 - 1915.” – Lost Youth poem in manuscript, 18 February 1914 about a dead missionary. Letter from Casement to Meyer.

It is quite likely Plunkett recalled Casement's handwriting as much from his visit to Germany as from the earlier exchange of literary manuscripts like Lost Youth.

I wouldn't call Adler Christensen a British agent. He was a sociopath on the make who actually didn't come through to the British with the goods after initial contacts in Norway and Philadelphia (in 1916).

Best wishes

Jeff Dudgeon

PS This is what I wrote on the matter of Collins in my 2002 book:

Normand’s diary, perhaps fused to Casement’s, was the only ever suggested genuine source for the offending items. None at this time knew much beyond the word ‘diaries’ just what papers had been seized in London, although the Irish government’s persistent attempt to damp down interest in having them inspected or returned, indicates there was more detailed knowledge of their form and content in Dublin circles. Both Michael Collins and Eamonn (Edmund) Duggan had been shown the diaries in London in 1922 during the Treaty negotiations by Lord Birkenhead – F.E. Smith as was. They had gone to a room in the House of Lords and were left alone with them. Collins knew and recognised Casement’s handwriting. Duggan (1868-1927), minister for Home Affairs in the first Dáil and a former director of IRA Intelligence, reported that the diaries repeated “ad nauseam details of sex perversions – of the personal appearance and beauty of native boys – with special reference to a certain portion of their anatomy. It was disgusting.”

When de Valera was told third-hand, in 1966, of one Commander Clipperton who could attest to Naval Intelligence fabrication (by Blinker Hall), he wisely replied “the important thing is to get some positive proof. Nothing else will suffice.” The informant added gratuitously that Hall’s son had been about to be charged by Clipperton as he was “mixed up with a group of other young officers” but had been killed in an air raid. And de Valera’s outlook was always, until 1999, the official Dublin line, if not of other Republicans. The Sinn Féin President and West Belfast MP, Gerry Adams writing as late as 1991 stated that the “British Government circulated forged copies of his diaries to undermine the campaign and try to make his execution acceptable.” (Who Fears to Speak) The latter remark is certainly accurate. Even after the forensic results of 2002, Sinn Féin continued to favour the forgery theory.