**Carey Historical Society ‘The Rogers Casement’ conference**

**Speakers: Patrick Casement, Jeffrey Dudgeon, Jordan Goodman and Angus Mitchell.**

**Ballyvoy Hall, Saturday 25 June 2016**

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*Angus Mitchell and Jeff Dudgeon at Murlough cross 25 June 2016*

***Roger Casement: Co. Antrim, Ulster and Partition***

***Jeffrey Dudgeon***

Thank you for inviting me to this memorable part of the world, and, in particular, to Fionntán McCarry, and the near eponymous Carey Historical Society, for their work putting this event together.

We meet in Ballyvoy at the Carey Hall a place where Casement spoke in 1906. Roger David Casement or RDC as he is known by some, given the plethora of Rogers there were in the family, was someone who loved Antrim as few others have.

However on his name – and he had many Irish and English variants, as well as diminutives like Scodge and the O’Scodgie, he ultimately wrote to his cousin Gertrude in July 1916 “Don't let them send me down to history as “RDC”. My name of Roger is enough – & Ruari better still – and remember darling I was always the same – just as you were.”

If I go down a different route from some of the speakers here today, it will be in a spirit of open discussion and fair debate. This is the world we have been living in for a number of years now.

Casement was a revolutionary, but a revolutionary who knew that what flowed from his rhetoric and, importantly, his own deeds, had to be measured. In his final decisions, he was cautious, not wanting to spill blood in what might be a vain fight.

Today, in my remarks, I am looking at Casement and the northern question through the prism of Unionism but that does not mean I cannot, and have not, addressed his life and career objectively in my biography. First I want to try and throw some light on why he was what he was. And deal with Casement’s great failure, for he succeeded beyond his dreams in the creation of a separate, sovereign Irish state but it was not a state for the island as a whole.

The word that dare not speak its name in the centenary commemorations is ‘partition’.

Everyone is human and different, and Casement was no exception. Rarely did he fit, and even more rarely act, within a set of regulations or rules. He was in every sense of the term a rebel. This attitude he displayed in his public life as a consul; as an investigator into King Leopold’s cruelties in the Congo and the genocidal activities of Julio Arana and the Peruvian Amazon Company along the Putumayo river; in his political life as a humanitarian campaigner, Irish separatist, gun runner (twice) for the Irish Volunteers and defector to Germany in 1914; and in his private life as a gay man who was unashamed of his lifestyle, even if he never explained or defended it.

It is his early days which I believe explain who he was and who he became. And the influence of his parents. One knows the trajectory of most people’s lives if you are aware of that of their parents.

As someone who knows the details of Casement better than anyone, except my colleague here Angus Mitchell, I probably know him as well as myself, and have analysed him more. Some of our background and identities are remarkable similar, although nearly a century separated us.

First, as I said, know them by their parents. In his case, both father and mother were somewhat unusual. His father served in the 1st Afghan War, and was for three years from 1855, a Captain in the North Antrim Militia – not a force with a kindly reputation when dealing with the 1798 United Irish rebellion. The Captain was from Belfast, his own father, Hugh, having a shipping business in the city until it failed in 1842 when he emigrated to Australia. Casement’s great grandfather, a solicitor, also Roger, had been the land agent for Lord Massereene. He lived at Magherintemple while the family also had Ballymena connections.

Captain Casement then abruptly left the army. He seems not to have had a life plan or alternative career and, apart from that period in the Militia, did not have a regular job again. He was instead reliant on financial handouts from his Antrim relatives while he and his wife brought up four children at a series of increasingly impoverished addresses in London.

The very recent digitisation of newspapers has meant the most amazing details of people’s lives have surfaced at the click of a mouse. One such I noticed a year back was a newspaper report of Roger and his brother Tom being convicted of theft.

In January 1876, Thomas aged 13 and Roger aged 11 were on a charge of book stealing from a newsvendor in York Road, Lambeth. The boys admitted “they took the books to make money of, as they had none.”

The report continued, “The prisoners’ father, a respectable-looking man, here came forward, and said he could not account for the lads taking the books unless it was to pay for the loan of them some other day. They were inveterate readers of juvenile literature…He allowed his boys money to buy books and would have paid for them. He believed that the showy covers and sensational titles attracted their attention and desire to read them. He assured his worship that they were not thieves.”

Their father, described as a captain in the militia residing in South Lambeth, was ordered to enter into recognisances for their future conduct. This incident highlights the dysfunctional nature of the boy’s parenting.

The family’s perpetual moving around the south of England resembles in many ways the upbringing of an Irish contemporary, James Joyce, for whom such instability was to work its way through, and out, in his writing. Without such a problematic family background, Casement may not have become homosexual or a rebel searching for a different background, and a new family. His Irishness amongst the English must have become a badge of honour, the only one he could display.

In so many ways he resembles Oscar Wilde whose mother Speranza and father Sir William, although always well-off, displayed many of the same outlooks as Casement’s parents.

Captain Casement from what little is known of his views was a radical, and, if family lore is to be believed, a supporter of Irish nationalism, indeed of the 1867 Fenian rising. (That many upper class Protestants threw in their lot with the growing national spirit of those 19th century decades is a well-worn and recognised pre-partition phenomenon.)

As is well known, Roger was actually born in Dublin in Sandycove, leaving as an infant for England where he spent his formative years up to the age of twelve Earlier his mother died in Worthing, oddly separated from her husband, and seemingly her children.

Anne Jephson or Jepson, it has recently been recognised was a Dublin Anglican whose family worshipped in St George’s in Portland Row. She came from a progressive background as her mother Jane Ball, for some 20 years, ran a Ladies Seminary in the north of the city. In the mid-19th century women’s education, where it existed, was in the home and only a very few went to school so such a seminary was most unusual.

Captain Casement and his youngest child only then came to live in Ballymena where he too soon died, this time of the White Plague as tuberculosis was known. The boy’s life was therefore complicated by the early deaths of both parents and the lack of money for his education, beyond the few years at Ballymena Diocesan School.

One correspondent of the many Antrim relatives, the various Youngs of Galgorm Castle and Wellington Street, and the Pottingers (more than the Ballycastle Casements) who were helping to fund his life, remarked that he seemed not to have been to school previously which does not mean he wasn’t exceptionally well educated at home, perhaps educated to an important degree by his mother. He was obviously an intellectual although never attending or learning at a university.

He was taught in Ballymena in a period when there was an Irish sensibility in education in Protestant schools. Indeed that lingered on into my primary school in Belfast in the 1950s where we sang Thomas Moore songs like *the Harp that Once through Tara’s Hall,* and even in my secondary school where we were regaled in Irish history classes with the stories of heroic United Irishmen in 1798 and the sad tale of Betsy Grey. Partition however finally put paid to that cross-over of sensibilities.

The Diocesan School was of course a Church of Ireland establishment; an island of educational Anglicanism in a sea of Presbyterianism. Rev. Robert King, the headmaster in Casement’s time, and his predecessor, Dr William Reeves shared the distinction of being Gaelic language scholars and heritage enthusiasts. Reeves became Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore in 1886. His translations included *Adamnan’s Life of St Columba,* while he is also remembered for his researches in the antiquarian field with works such as *The Ancient Churches of Armagh*. Rev. King, described as “the father of modern Irish church history” published in 1860 *The Book of Common Prayer* in an Irish translation. Nina Casement’s sister was to describe him as “the greatest Gaelic scholar then living.”

Oddly, none of this influence seems to have been remembered by the teenage Casement, who was entirely empathetic to the Gaelic Irish, their Lords and Kings, which would not have been something he picked up from fellow pupils.

His political poetry was far from Unionist, and it was heartfelt, while his cousin Gertrude recalled that in his attic room in Liverpool as a teenager, “The walls were papered with cartoons cut out of the *Weekly Freeman* showing the various Irish nationalists who had suffered imprisonment at English hands for the sake of their belief in Ireland a Nation.”

The titles of his long romantic poems, gathered together and self-published as *Dream of the Celt* in 1901 tell of his unflinching loyalty to the heroes of the Irish past, those who had seen off the Saxons and the Scots, especially in Ulster.

*The Triumph of Hugh O’Neill* recounts the 1598 victory of the Ulster woodkern over the army of the Earl of Essex under Henry Bagenal at the Battle of the Yellow Ford. The 1642 victory, two generations later, of Owen Roe O’Neill over General Robert Monro’s Scottish army, also along the Blackwater river, is memorialised in *Benburb*:

*Since treason triumphed when O’Neill was forced to foreign flight,*

*The ancient people felt the heel of Scotch usurper’s might;*

*The barren hills of Ulster held a race proscribed and banned*

*Who from their lofty refuge viewed their own so fertile land.*

*Their churches in the sunny vales; the homes that once were theirs,*

*Torn from them and their Faith to feed some canting minion’s prayers.*

The contents of this poem are fairly unforgiving and oddly blind to the fact of his own and his family’s comfortable existence in Antrim, courtesy of those Scots and English.

Despite all this, there were moments when Casement could not stop returning to his Protestant roots. In 1909 he was telling Bulmer Hobson after a brush with the Bishops, “Freedom to Ireland can come only through Irish Protestants.” Condemning many Irish nationalists as “Cawtholic and shoneen”, he also declared, “It would be a very excellent thing if Ireland could relapse into brilliant Heathenism for a year or two. When she got converted again the Bishops would all be gone…It is a hopeless thing to think you can free Ireland when she licks her chains.”

There was even a momentary sympathy for a certain minority outlook in Republicanism which saw the Catholic Church as damaging to the cause of Irish freedom – more so than the Church of Ireland for which a few, like Dorothy McArdle, actually left. Writing in 1907, Casement lamented “If only they had taught the people to fight for Ireland as for their faith, both would have been saved.” The Church of St Patrick “has done more to injure Ireland than the foreign Church could ever accomplish.” This was not a heartfelt view as his antagonism to Anglicanism was deep, although Ireland, for him, would always be a greater religion than Roman Catholicism – until the last days.

**ULSTER SCOTS**

The important question is why given his period as a boy living in Antrim did he get the Ulster Scots so wrong? Why was he so alienated from them or, more precisely, devoted to understanding the Irish not the Ulster Scots?

Perhaps it was part of a pre-existing mindset or an Anglican antagonism to Presbyterianism, perhaps an unconscious class prejudice. I feel resentment played a part; feeling rootless or ungrounded he sought a new identity. Many do through a marriage and then children. Instead he chose to love Ireland most.

By way of explanation as to who they are, Casement wrote of the Ulster Scots in 1913: “The truth is Ireland has been a fruitful mother of nations. In the past she founded Scotland and then taking back to her kindly bosom and warm heart something of her own with those repatriated Scots and the sons of her own hearth, united she founded the United States of America and gave a new law of freedom to mankind.”

He added then, “The ‘Scotch Irishman’ and the ‘Ulster Scot’ will go the way of the stage Irishman. They are intended for the same audience and when Irish history ceases to be written by buffoons and English music hall artistes we shall begin to see that the simple title “an Irishman” is the common and glorious heritage of every son of this soil.” (*Ulster Guardian* 14 May 1913).

In his 1914 diary, he gratuitously wrote of Scots accents: “I know no language that fills me with the sense of nausea that Glasgow or Butter Scotch does.”

Casement’s attitude to Ulster veered from the apprehensive to the severe. One year it was, “I go to Armagh for 12th July to an Orange gathering! I shall wear a green tie and probably be stoned to death.” Another time in 1912, he was declaring to Gertrude, “Sometimes the only thing to bring a boy to his senses is to hide him, and I think Ulster wants a sound hiding at the hands of her that owns her – Ireland’s hands. Failing that I pray for the Germans and their coming. A Protestant to teach these Protestants their place in Irish life is what is needed.”

In contrast, in his famous speech from the dock, Casement declared, ingenuously, “Neither I nor any of the leaders of the Irish Volunteers, who were founded in Dublin in November, 1913, had quarrel with the Ulster Volunteers as such, who were born a year earlier. Our movement was not directed against them, but against the men who misused and misdirected the courage, the sincerity, and the local patriotism of the men of the North of Ireland…We aimed at winning the Ulster Volunteers to the cause of a united Ireland.”

Despite this, his cousin Gertrude believed “the Ulsterman never excited his enmity – only the English politicians.” What she said might at times be true but his view remained that the Ulster Protestants were either misled or just unpleasant. He never once considered their predicament in terms of their having any national or group rights. Such neglect of empathy by a man of Casement’s stature and background enabled later generations of Irish Republicans to operate with little or no consideration of the true nature of the ethnic nature of the conflict.

Contrast that with the minority view of Father Michael Flanagan, Vice-President of Sinn Féin in 1920, and, according to Cathal Brugha, “the staunchest priest who ever lived in Ireland”. He declared, “I claim the right of the people of East Ulster to decide whether they are to throw in their lot with the Irish Nation or not…We have to come to an agreement with the Ulster Covenanters, even though it be an agreement to differ.”

In a draft written in Cushendall on 7 November 1913, Casement was blaming the Unionists for being misled by Englishmen and Tories, “The ‘Ulster’ resistance to Home Rule is a combination of the sincerity of deep ignorance, – that of the rank and file; of deeper bigotry – that of the ‘Churches’; and of political immorality – that of the politicians and agitator elements such as the Carson’s, Smiths etc etc.”

And four days later, on 11 November 1913, it was, “If only that infernal British Providence would withdraw from Ireland and leave us each face to face we’d soon settle the gang of terrorists who rule ‘Ulster’.”

This was simple bravado as the Catholics of Ulster were neither mobilised, nor of his opinion. Belfast, in particular, did not even vote Sinn Féin in serious numbers until the 1980s, seventy years on. De Valera failed to win the West Belfast seat by 8,488 to 3,245 votes when standing in 1918 against the city’s Home Rule leader, Joe Devlin, another charismatic bachelor who could charm women off trees, and who, after F.J. Bigger’s death, bought his house, Ardrigh.

Ulster Protestants were, and remained, overwhelmingly Unionist even if a few thousand individuals were Home Rulers, or in a handful of cases, separatists.

It was a common view of home rulers and nationalists at the time including John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party that Ulster was both bluffing and misled by others. Casement normally believed both and relied on those views as a sufficient justification for ignoring the Unionists. In 1913, he offered Alice Stopford Green a more sophisticated, if premature, opinion, “Two factors are against Ulster – time and the tendency of the British people to regard Home Rule as inevitable and as a good thing imperially.”

That may be true but a hundred years have passed which is stretching inevitability.

**ANGLOPHOBIA**

If nationalism is a positive force it is also, and by definition, negative in that it defines itself against another nation. In Casement’s view Ireland had two antagonists: England and Scotland. One was an imperial power and the other was represented by a colonising and Protestant people.

Britain and the British were not then phrasings in significant usage; it was always England and the English. An early private expression of Casement’s view comes from an unguarded jotting of around 1900, “England just struck me with enmity the minute I saw the face of them.” This suggests again an early antipathy from his childhood in the south of England.

Casement was Anglophobic, which is not agreeable or productive. This is honestly addressed by Angus Mitchell in his recent address at the Four Courts in Dublin when he said, “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.”

Casement’s Anglophobia – for it does reach near pathological proportions – was the major and recurring theme of his last twelve years. This is not to say that, like paranoia, it cannot be justified, and certainly explained by a history, over many centuries, of conquest and domination. But it did not allow for the nuances of a millennium of shared experiences on the island, not to mention the waves of settlement which included the old English of the Norman era who assimilated, and the newer English of the Cromwellian and Plantation period who did not. There is no large European country that did not either absorb neighbouring territories or insist on a key role in the affairs of contiguous countries. Economic imperatives alone will make this happen.

But Casement who accepted and understood the value of trade in Africa was not one to give credence to such market forces in the north of Ireland. He had therefore much the same brand of certainty that enabled England to gain an empire in the nineteenth century; except that his certainty was now in opposition to Britain’s empire – in particular to the colonising and control of Ireland. “Irishmen are to her, cattle either to feed her workers in one shape or when they are not castrated to fight her battles”, he would declare.

Contemptuous of every other imperial power, Casement was left with a single candidate to support. He had in turn come to dislike England, France (and its client Belgium), Portugal, Spain, the United States, Russia and Turkey. Each had been found wanting. His remedy for the ills of the underdeveloped world, by a process of elimination, was instead a relatively untried imperial power.

He believed in the necessity of a long period of imperialism before self-determination or independence could flourish. That belief was most recently grounded in his South American experience where he had no time for the successor states of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, and repeatedly said as much. This is not to say he did not have ideas of a non‑imperial or post‑imperial nature. He did, and most of them, in the form of decolonisation and the creation of a British Commonwealth of independent states, came to pass in the half century after his death. Such ideas were for the most part inconceivable to those in the London of his time but would become commonplace during the life of many of his acquaintances.

Given his affection for the Kaiser (“Wilhelm will yet do great things in Europe”) it cannot be argued that Casement was intrinsically anti-imperialist, rather he was anti-England and pro-Irish. In a letter of 17 January 1914 to the *Freeman’s Journal* he insisted, “As a matter of fact the people of Alsace-Lorraine today enjoy infinitely greater public liberties within the German Empire than we are ever more likely to possess within the British Empire”, adding praise for “the extraordinary liberty German imperialism accords a lately conquered territory.” He was a progressive, no different from the advanced Liberals of the same outlook in England, except that in Ireland such strength of politics made one a revolutionary.

In February 1914, England was “the fat man, the Stranger in the House” another time “the Emerald Isle’s giant parasite”. In the accent department she did not get off lightly either, “England ‘curse of Europe’: The horrid English speech, the twang, the dropped h’s and the rasping voice.” He was also withering about her soldiers, “an English Tommy is a liar and a cad.” Of the English race it was, “Individually I like many – collectively I loathe them.”

By the outbreak of war in August 1914 his regular and arguably only theme was, “England made the war inevitable. She leagued herself deliberately against Teutonic commerce and industry.” Six months into the war and after London had prohibited cable traffic from the continent, Casement excelled himself, reaching perhaps the zenith of his abuse of England, “My God! How much more will the world have to stand from that Bitch and Harlot of the North Sea”?

He hardly mentions or thinks about Ulster in his nearly two years in Germany leading up to the Rising as I have discovered from editing his Berlin diaries (which this week are on the point of publication in both Amazon paperback and Kindle versions). This is indicative of how the leaders of separatism had largely put the question of Ulster and the Unionists to one side.

Casement’s Irish nationalism could at times be couched in positive terms as he expressed to his favourite Englishman, Dick Morten, as late as June 1914, “A free Ireland means a close friend Ireland…Leave Ireland’s hands free and they will never do a dirty deed.”

**ULSTER, SEPARATISM AND THE RISING**

I have long argued that the role of Ulster and the northern counties – Tyrone in particular – in the birth of Irish separatism, the making of the Easter Rising, and ultimately independence has been insufficiently recognised.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the northern nexus involved a web of organisations, and of propagandising. These small groups covered language, culture and sport, linking with progressive Belfast politics and arts, while underneath was the renascent IRB, led or staffed by Denis McCullough, Bulmer Hobson and Patrick McCartan. They operated and recruited under various front organisations with titles such as the Dungannon Clubs and journals like *Uladh*.

Those three names, and their differing trajectories for half a century, tell the story of separatism and how it unfolded. None became leaders although McCullough was briefly President of Ireland in 1916 as head of the IRB. The north however, for a significant reason, played no role in the Rising, beyond a foray into Coalisland.

The linking up of liberals and Republicans in the 1900s was not unlike the experience in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s before the firestorm. And indeed in the 1790s before another firestorm.

That northern nurturing in the early 1900s moved, physically in some cases, to Dublin, blending with and giving political leadership to the burgeoning intellectual, academic, and socialist organisations moving over to separatism in the south.

This was in the period just before the Irish Volunteers, when the IRB or its inner junta was led by an old Dungannon Fenian, Tom Clarke, ably assisted by another northern political trainee, Sean McDermott. The Irish American leader Joe McGarrity, the key link to Germany, who long remained unreconciled to partition, was a Carrickmore man, like Pat McCartan. Major John McBride was educated in Belfast and James Connolly operated there as a trade unionist.

Around this Irish ferment and in an overarching role, was Roger Casement. He was Hobson’s mentor and with F.J. Bigger, the solicitor antiquarian and United Irish romantic, they maintained at Bigger’s Belfast house, Ardrigh, something of a University for the city’s young nationalists - a number of them radical Protestants. Herbert Hughes and Joseph Campbell, for two, developed more aspects artistically. With Casement throughout, was his early mentor and collaborator, Alice Stopford Green.

Casement in his extensive writings, and with his indefatigability and organisational skills, played a significant role in the provision of coherent political analysis for the early separatists. And this despite working in South America for a number of the key years.

He was an ersatz Ulsterman, but he saw and defined himself as one. Ultimately he was to provide the core of independent Ireland’s foreign policy with his German declaration of support Treaty in November 1914. Backing this up in 2000, Martin Mansergh said of Casement that he was someone, “legitimate to co-opt as a forerunner of Ireland’s independent foreign policy tradition.”

He was totally embedded within the nationalist and separatist camp, indeed more than most who were, in 1916, to crash into armed politics. With a history dating back a decade, he was on intimate terms with the personnel in Belfast and, increasingly, with the revolutionary wing of the movement in Dublin from 1912 to 1914. Indeed he was outranked in seniority by few if any who were not also members of the IRB, a group he never joined or appears to have been asked to join.

Yet, as I have said, he had no ability to judge the Craig and Carson Unionists. Being so out of sympathy with them he could only sneer or make the self‑deceptive error that Unionists were misguided Irishmen and, given their suspicion of England, people who would easily turn into Irish patriots – even into Irish Irelanders like him.

Eoin MacNeill from this part of Antrim was not greatly different. As we know he published an article entitled *The North Began*, in a Gaelic League journal edited by Pearse, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, on 1 November 1913 calling for an historical repeat of the organising of the Volunteers of the 1780s. They had effected legislative independence for Ireland, an early form of devolution or home rule, although only for the Irish Anglican caste, the Protestant Ascendancy.

MacNeill wrote in the article “history shows and observation confirms that the Orange democracy and the Presbyterian rural party are home rulers in principle and essence.” He ended by remarking, “Some years ago, speaking at the Toome Feis, in the heart of ‘homogeneous Ulster’, I said that the day would come when men of every creed and party would join in celebrating the Defence of Derry and the Battle of Benburb. That day is nearer than I then expected.”

MacNeill was not a revolutionary or separatist. Significantly, he was averse to any adventures in the north, indicating that Ulster Catholics were too prone to violent responses. He knew the world of the Woodkern and the Ribbonmen, and later of Hibernianism well. However he could not have been more wrong in his grasp of Unionism.

MacNeill’s assessment may have been faulty but creating a counterweight to the UVF was not. The fact remains that the Volunteers are still with us in the form of the Irish Army and the IRA, that is *Oglaigh na hÉireann* for both.

What MacNeill did get obliquely right was understanding that element in Presbyterian i.e. Scottish Ulster that values devolution more than integration and that keeps Ulster intransigent. David Trimble expanded that view, once saying Unionism could have it both ways. I don’t necessarily agree but the loyalty of Queen’s Rebels is indeed the driver.

Casement veered between thinking Carson and the Unionists ‘home rulers in principle and essence’ or bluffers. Ulster’s Britishness however was not skin deep, rather it was, and is, conditional.

A Protestant response, favoured by women – Oscar Wilde’s mother Speranza being an early example – was to link into the coming power, at first only into the Gaelic cultural and language revival, but slowly from there into nationalism, separatism and thence Catholicism, by conversion or marriage. This was true of the many northern Protestant women who surrounded Casement although they were not the marrying kind, and it remains true to this day. Oddly gay men are not so susceptible, perhaps because of a metropolitan outlook, one Casement did not share.

The North may have begun the process of Irish separation through these individuals but they were sidelined and sidestepped in the Easter Rising and the critical years following. The north instead sadly descended into sectarian war for two years in the early 1920s until matters froze from the civil war on.

It was not just the Unionists, rather the work of the IRB, assisted by Asquith and his government’s failure to address reality, that led inexorably to partition.

It has taken the best part of a century to unravel history back to where we were in 1910.

To conclude, several years ago, I represented my party at the Haass Talks on Parades, Flags and the Past. I was appointed in large part because of my historical work and publications. It was in relation to the Past where we proposed a commission of historians to view the last nearly 40 years of Troubles.

Much of the dispute on how to proceed then and since was hinged to the question of the secret service and intelligence files. I was aware of how hard, if not impossible, it is for a government to reveal its security files, not least because of wanting to protect informants and their reputations, even long after their death, not to mention not wanting to discourage or deter future informants.

In relation to Casement, the British government has released pretty well all its files it appears. However there are still several documents now over a century old where certain names are redacted. I think by a process of deduction I know whose they are, but redacted they remain.

There may be no such thing as truth, or no single true narrative, but that does not mean you can’t from the evidence make a reasonable and balanced assessment and come to a coherent conclusion. Of course as in the case of the First World War there will never be a single explanation or one country to blame. What this means, however, is that history will remain contested and the legacy of Roger Casement is no exception.