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**THE GHOST OF CASEMENT**

[0](http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/23rd-december-1955/4/the-ghost-of-casement)

Afraid they might be beaten Before the bench of Time They turned a trick by forgery And blackened his good name.

WAS the diary found in Roger Casement's luggage a forgery? Or a genuine diary belonging to some rascal Casement had encountered on his travels? Or was it his own journal? The ghost of Roger Casement has risen many times since his execution as a traitor in 1916 to demand a retrial before the bar of public opinion; not on the justice of his sentence (for in the circumstances his fate when captured could not be in doubt) but on the truth of the rumours, put about in England and America at the time, that his diary had revealed him to be a pervert. It was a mean action; and the fact that it was felt at the time to be strategically necessary in order to provide the American State Department with the evidence needed to restrain public opinion there, explains but does not excuse its meanness—even if the diary was genuine. But was it genuine? It is only fair to Casement, seeing that the account of his perversion is now generally accepted outside Ireland, that the question should be reopened. In this issue the subject is discussed by Admiral Sir William James, whose biography of Reginald Hall brought the subject up again; and a second article by an eminent Irish historian will follow.

**The Mystery of a Diary**

**Spectator**

**23 December 1955**

[0](http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/23rd-december-1955/9/the-mystery-of-a-diary)

**BY ADMIRAL SIR W. M. JAMES**

IN Last Changes, Last Chances H. W. Nevinson wrote: `Yet I still believe Casement's life would have been saved by the appeals but for the action of the Government in diverting sympathy by raising a personal issue that had nothing whatever to do with the case.' The personal issue concerned Casement's private life. Prominent people were shown extracts of his diary- in which he had recorded the experiences of a homosexual. It was described by Sir Basil Thomson, Head of the CID, as unprintable in any age or any language. Many people believed at the time, and many still believe, that Sir Roger Casement would not have gone to the gallows if the campaign which was organised to obtain a reprieve had not abruptly ended when the extracts were shown to his sympathisers; but, though the Cabinet was divided on the issue of carrying out the sentence, it is doubtful if his chances of reprieve were as good as his friends believed. It is no longer seriously contended that the Cabinet was responsible for the circulation of the diary, though Casement's more extreme sympathisers have always turned a blind eye to the irrefutable evidence to the contrary. Nor is it in dispute that John Redmond and other prominent men ceased their efforts on Casement's behalf after reading the diary. But the authenticity of the diary is still in dispute, and the recent publication of a biography of Admiral Sir Reginald Hall has blown on the embers of a controversy that once raged fiercely.

There has always been a body of opinion, mainly Irish, that the diary was a forgery and that it was kept in readiness to produce at the right moment to load the dice against Casement. Those who believe it was a forgery find support in Dr. Maloney's The Forged Casement Diaries, but this publication has been variously stigmatised as a cheap piece of propaganda, full of inaccuracies and irrelevancies, and only by courtesy called a book at all.

There is another body of opinion that the diary belonged to a scoundrel whom Casement met when investigating the Putumayo atrocities, and that it was taken from the Putumayo papers in the Foreign Office to discredit Casement, if he was captured. The strange feature of this revived controversy is that the disputants either ignore or are unaware of the War Diary of Sir Basil Thomson which was published in 1939. Casement's biographers—Denis Gwynn in The Life and Death of Roger Casement and G. de C. Parminter in Roger Casement—published their works some years before Thomson's diaries were published, and how, when and where the diary was discovered was still a mystery.

But since 1939 there has been 'no mystery. No one has ever suggested that Thomson's diary is not an accurate chronicle of events that came within his province. He records that on July 13, 1916, when he and Hall were interviewing Casement. Superintendent Quinn entered the room and asked for the keys of Casement's trunks, then lying in the Special Branch. Casement handed over his keys, and the Superintendent returned later and handed Thomson an MS. volume which had been found in one of the trunks. A few days later Casement's solicitor demanded the surrender of the contents of the trunks. Everything except the book was sent him, and there came a second letter pointing out that the police were retaining some property. This disposes of the charge that the diary was 'planted' in Casement's luggage.

As some American papers were championing Casement, Thomson had some pages of the diary photographed and showed them to Dr. Page, the American Ambassador. Thomson does not say that he showed the photographs to anyone else, but recorded at a later date that he found a typewritten copy of the complete diary amongst his papers and destroyed it. But the photographs and possibly typewritten copies did reach a considerable number of people.

Those who, despite this evidence, still believe that the diary was a forgery must also believe that Thomson and Hall engaged someone to write a diary of a homosexual which would be so accurate in detail (e.g., handwriting, dates, geographical data) that it would pass the close scrutiny of a reader who was well acquainted with Casement's life and activities in Africa and South America; that they went to all this trouble on the off-chance of Casement being captured; and that they took the appalling risk of employing as co-conspirators Scotland Yard officers who, if they did not maintain complete silence about their part in the plot, could wreck their careers. Those who, despite this evidence, still believe that the diary was extracted from the Putumayo file in the Foreign Office must also believe that either Thomson, who only went to Scotland Yard in 1913, by some necromancy knew of the existence of the diary, or that some Foreign Office official, on hearing of Casement's arrest, extracted the diary from the file and gave it to Thomson to use as he wished. The more closely the claims that the diary was a forgery or the Putumayo diary are examined, the more preposterous they appear. Hall and Thomson would go to great lengths to stop the activities of a spy or traitor, but they were far too astute to devise a plot which, if exposed, would cause their downfall.

Some hard things have been said of Hall for his part in disclosing the contents of the diary.' In retrospect it seems unworthy of him, but the war was at a critical stage, the threat to our sea communications and to our ability to continue the fight was increasing as more and more German submarines were being thrown into the Atlantic battle, and neither Hall nor the majority of his countrymen was in the mood to' deal lightly with traitors.

Hall knew that Casement had not only plotted with the Germans to stab us in the back by an armed rising in Ireland, but had also assisted German-paid saboteurs in the United States without any thought of the innocent lives that might be lost. Through his intercepting and deciphering service, Hall had followed the activities of the saboteurs. One of the most important of these intercepts was a telegram from the German General Staff to von Papen, the Military Attaché at Washington. It read as follows : You can obtain particulars as to persons suitable for carry- ing out sabotage in the US and Canada from the following persons: 1, Joseph MacGarrity, Philadelphia, Pa. 2, John P. Keating, Michigan Avenue„ Chicago. 3, Jeremiah O'Leary, Park Row, New York 16. 1 and 2 are absolutely reliable and discreet. No. 3 is reliable but not always discreet. These persons were indicated by Sir Roger Casement. . . .

Fourteen years later this telegram was one of the exhibits in the famous 'Black Tom' case which was argued before the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague. (Black Tom was the name of the freight terminal in New York which was destroyed on January 11, 1917, by a giant explosion, caused by saboteurs, which blew to atoms the railway station, the warehouses, a number of barges and ships, and a great quantity of high explosives.) It may be beating against the air to try to convince Casement's Irish sympathisers that the 'affair of the diary' was not a plot engineered by the hated British Government, but all who were privileged to serve under Hall, or to enjoy his friend- ship, are anxious that 'the affair' should be seen in its proper perspective.

<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/23rd-december-1955/9/the-mystery-of-a-diary>

**30 December 1955**

**The Mystery of a Diary**

**By T. D. WILLIAMS**

ADMIRAL SIR WILLIAM JAMES'S biography of Sir Reginald Hall has once more revived the bitter controversy over the authenticity of the diary of Sir Roger Casement—controversy prolonged over thirty years, yet the mystery is no nearer solution. Admiral James's recent article in the Spectator does not add very much to what had appeared in his The Eyes of the Navy. In the book, he seems to take for granted both the genuineness of the diary and the attribution of authorship to Casement. He does not even mention the fact that the charge of forgery had been raised by a number of serious contemporary writers, including Professor Denis Gwynn and Henry Nevinson. In the Spectator article he has mended his hand in so far as he concedes there is a mystery about the diary; and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he has been brought to do this by some of the criticisms passed in reviews and in correspondence arising out of the book.

**Spectator 13 April 1956**

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**BOOKS**

**Men Misunderstanding**

**BY BRIAN INGLIS**

IT is a cruel thing to die with all men misunderstanding- misapprehending—and to be silent for ever,' Sir Roger Casement wrote, while he lay under sentence of death for treason. He had known fame for his work on behalf of the Foreign Office in the Congo and Putumayo investigations; but the Irish separatist in him—always there, he claimed, in heart and thought—had rebelled; he had turned to Germany; had tried to raise an Irish Brigade there from prisoners of war, to fight against England. The English were then encouraging Masaryk, who had worked for the Austrian Government, to raise the Czechs against Austria, but this was not considered relevant; that Casement, if captured, would be convicted of treason was inevitable. But there also seemed a good prospect that he might be reprieved. The executions after the 1916 Rising in Ireland had caused a revulsion of feeling, particularly In the US; the British Ambassador warned that Casement, must not be made a martyr (it was Presidential Election year). But Casement, the renegade, was too deeply hated to be spared. On the day after he was sentenced, the Daily Express referred to his `degeneracy'; soon, photographs of a document illustrating the methods of a psychopathic pervert were being shown around Embassies, the House of Commons, and other London clubs as 'Casement's diaries.' Few men cared to have their names linked with such a monster's; the reprieve campaign fizzled out. Casement's request to be confronted with the evidence was left unanswered, and on August 3, 1916, he Was executed. Three main problems exist for the biographers. What manner of man was this Casement : saint or sinner, patriot or traitor? What was his place i' the story—particularly the history of Anglo-Irish relations? • And what was the truth behind the diaries' smear?

On the first problem, Roger Casement : A New Judgment\* is extremely revealing. True, Mr. MacColl is a clumsy writer, with little judgement when to quote, when to summarise, When to omit; and he is addicted to such turns of phrase as 'In the world of Roger Casement there were no air-conditioners, no hydromatic cars, no TV. . . .' But his portrait is convincing : at once striking and melancholy. Casement was mad. Mad in the sense Swift was mad; in the sense that should have made Sir Edward Grey say, 'Mad, is he? Then I wish he would bite some of my Assistant Under-Secretaries.' Casement Was consumed with sceva indignatio: given a cause to feed on, cruel rage made him the stuff of martyrs; lacking one, it turned—as it so often does, with the Anglo-Irish—to bile. Had he acquired earlier the faith to which he returned on the way to the scaffold, he might have been a saint. As it was, his demons came to plague him with self-pity, hypochondria, Persecution mania. No doubt this made him intolerable to his Foreign Office superiors; they treated him shabbily; and his frustration curdled into hatred for England. All this Mr. McColl records sensibly and sympathetically; and the result Is. for the first time, a credible Casement.

\* By Rene MacColl. (Hamish Hamilton, 21s.) As a contribution to the history of the period, however, the book is laughable. If Mr. MacColl had gone to a building site, hailed down a couple of Irish gutties from the scaffolding, and asked them to run an eye over the galley proofs, they could surely have spared us many of its sillier errors. They could have told him that Eoin MacNeill, so far from being one of the leaders of the 1916 Rising, tried to countermand it; that the leaders were shot, not hanged; that Sheehy-Skeffington was not 'executed.' Most of the errors are trivial, but they reveal a quite spectacular ignorance of the background; a background that is essential if Casement's career is to be properly understood.

Casement suffered from a political split mind, the product of that divided loyalty that racks the Anglo-Irish (when they are interested in politics at all); a conflict illustrated in the lives of such men as Wolfe Tone and Erskine Childers. That Casement should have worked for and against England, should have admired and loathed her, at the same time, revealed not hypocrisy or treachery but a dual fealty unresolved. To bate Casement as a traitor or to revere him as a patriot is to be ignorant of him; and though Mr. MacColl realises this, he does not understand why.

Nor, surprisingly, does he help much over the problem of the Casement diaries. I feel it necessary to apologise for restating the case, as it were, for Casement; but it has to be done, when the author of what purports to be a 'new judgement' misstates it.

While Casement was on the Putumayo investigation, he copied out a diary recording the perversions of one Armando Normand, to provide evidence against Normand to the authorities (we have the evidence of two unimpeachable witnesses that Casement told them this at the time, a fact which Mr. MacColl does not mention). When Mr. Ben S. Allen, London correspondent of the American news agency AP, was shown the Casement diaries during the smear campaign in 1916, he became suspicious because he was not allowed to check them with Casement, then still alive. Eventually, he was convinced that it was 'a diary copied by Sir Roger Casement during the Putumayo investigations.' The theory that the 'Casement diaries' were in fact Normand's was later elaborated in an irritating but interesting book by Dr. William Maloney. Mr. MacColl is so imperfectly acquainted with it that he even misspells the author's name; and casually dismisses this 'curious rebuttal,' making little attempt to re-examine the evidence for it in the light of his own research.

The Casement diaries were probably not Normand's alone. It is possible that Casement recorded other erotica—perhaps even his own fantasies. There are misers of pornography, just as there are spendthrifts : men who collect and horde dirty stories, as others collect and distribute them. Neither hobby necessarily indicates depravity; indeed, they are often symptoms of arrested emotional development, and certainly in Casement's instance it would accord much better with what is revealed of his character in this and other biographies if he had a spinsterish attitude to sex, a compound of fascination and repulsion. Nobody, so far as I know, has studied the diaries with this possibility in mind; but if, as I believe, this is the explanation, it would clear Casement of the two really damaging slurs on his character: that he was a criminal, and that he was a hypocrite.

One last point remains: did the British Intelligence authorities, Sir Reginald Hall and Sir Basil Thomson, realise this, but deliberately suppress the knowledge that the diaries were not, strictly speaking, Casement's? In Thomson's case the circumstances are suspicious. The diaries at different times took different shapes to different viewers; Thomson's four accounts of how they were discovered are contradictory; and Thomson's own character was by no means blameless. Perhaps he even deceived Admiral Hall—who was certainly gullible about him.

Still, it is more likely that Thomson and Hall really believed they had found accounts of Casement's own life; Casement, after all, was unlikely to have written, 'This isn't me, it is somebody else,' in the margins. Not that this excuses them; the smear campaign called down a merited rebuke from The Times on the day after Casement's death. But it was 1916; and no doubt William Joyce would have been similarly smeared ti quarter of a century later, if the opportunity had arisen. All this, admittedly, is guesswork; and must remain so until the Home Office are persuaded to admit a fresh investigation. Unfortunately they have enlisted the Irish Government on their side. Long ago they succeeded in persuading the Irish Government that the diaries were genuine and foul; and naturally it does not really relish the prospect of their exhumation.

An excuse is thereby provided for the Home Office to refuse any information about the diaries, leaving Casement's repo- lion under a permanent smear. This is of a piece with the Home Office's whole record on Casement which, as Mr. MacColl shows, has been compounded of obstinacy, malice, and deception. The inevitable deduction is that they have something to hide; in fact the investigation ought really to be into the Home Office, rather than into its victim.