

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 366.....

Witness

Miss Alice M. Cashel,
St. Catherine's,
Roundstone,
Co. Galway.

Identity

Vice-Chairman Galway Co. Council
1920-21;

Parish Justice, Connemara.

Subject

- (a) Cork - Easter 1916;
- (b) Organisation of Cumann na mBan in North and West 1918-19;
- (c) Galway Resolution December, 1920;
- (d) National events up to date of Treaty.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S. 1420.....

1914-1922.
ORIGINAL

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BURO STAIRA MILEATA 1913-21
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I had better begin my story in 1914. For some years previous to this date I had been a member of the Cork Branch of Sinn Fein. We had very few members; Terence McSwiney, Tomas Mc Curta in, Dr A lice Barry, Miss Gaffney and a few others. We made no progress. I remember saying to Terence Mc Swiney, and his answer was that the people were all right, that they were Fenians at heart. Later events proved him right, but it took a physical movement to rouse them. Sometime about this date, Annie McSwiney and I formed the Cork Branch of Cumann na mBan. The Volunteers were not yet in existence. There had been an attempt to form them but owing to a misguided call for three cheers for Carson/ which was misunderstood by the audience, the meeting broke up in confusion and nothing was achieved. I think that it was the women who called the next meeting, under some other auspices; at least I know that I was the Secretary to the meeting and that I communicated with Bulmer Hobson and others. This meeting was a great success and the Cork Volunteers were launched.

In 1914 I had a cottage in Ballingearry, near the Pass of Melmanleigh, and when Sean Hegarty was ordered out of Cork by the British, I offered him the cottage. He and his wife took it over from me and he lived there for some ^{years.} ~~time~~ restricted to a certain area.

In 1916, I was living in Limerick, and I went to Ballingearry to spend Easter with Sean and his wife. Sean then told me of the intended Easter Rising and of the proposed route march on Easter Sunday. On Holy Thursday I received an order from Thomas McCurtain from to report to the Volunteer H.Q. Cork. I went up to Cork at once and saw Tadgh Barry at H.Q. I was told that I was to assume a good Protestant name, and and to go to a certain garage and order some motor cars. As the day was Good Friday the garage was shut. I learnt afterwards ~~that the cars~~ that the cars were to go to Kerry to receive some of the arms which Roger Casement was expected to land there. ^{After} ~~When it was~~ dark, I went out to report to Terence Mc Swiney. When I arrived at his house I found that he was engaged with "Ginger" O'Connell who had arrived from Dublin with orders about the proposed Rising. A message was given to me telling me to remain in Cork until the next day. I reported to McSwiney's next morning and was told that I could go back to Ballingearry. The morning papers told of Casement's arrest. There was no need of ^{cars} ~~cars~~ now. I went back to Ballingearry on Easter Saturday. On Easter Sunday Sean and the local volunteers went on route march as arranged. During

the week nothing happened. We waited for orders—Sean with his gun ready. Towards the end of the week, on Friday I think, Sean asked me to go up to the Volunteer H.Q. Cork to find out what was happening. When I reached Cork I found Annie Mc Swiney waiting for me at the station. She told me of the situation. The fighting was practically over in Dublin. Cork was held by the British, and British Military were at the Volunteer H.Q. I went to the H.Q. and found Terence Mc Swiney and Mc Curtain in conversation with some British officers. I had learnt by this that on Monday the city had been strongly fortified by the British. Their barracks ^{which} were on the hills overlooking the city, made any movement by the volunteers impossible. Cork lay a cup, with the enemy guns on its rims.

Later I returned to Limerick but I must have seen Sean H Hegarty again that summer as he gave me a written account of the Rising which he asked me to give to John Devoy when I got to New York. I had arranged to go to Canada, via New York, in the autumn, and I sailed from Falmouth on the New Amsterdam in August. (1916). Before embarking we were sent one by one before a military investigation council and closely questioned. Luckily I had destroyed Sean's paper, after memorising its contents, and I had no incriminating documents with me. I was nearly held up, however, as I had some papers printed in Irish but on informing my questioners that even my prayer book was in Irish they let me through. On the boat, which was Dutch, or or when I landed in New York, I wrote out Sean's story of Easter Week and brought it to Devoy. I remember Devoy talking very bitterly of Casement and the organisation at home, saying that they seem to think that they in America could do nothing.

I returned to Ireland in January 1917 to teach in the McSwiney's school in Cork. I was living there when Terence was arrested and deported to Wales where later he was married.

In January 1918 I was living ^{with} my brother-in-law, James O'Mara ^{how} in Galway. At his request, and expense, I went with his son Stephen to help in the Darragh election. In February I was appointed an organiser for Cumann na mBan. I organised a branch in Newry, which was our election H.Q. WHILE THERE I received instructions to proceed to Derry to join Valera and Sean McEntee. I spoke with them at meetings

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in Derry and Carndonagh. They were on an organising tour of county Donegal and my instructions were to follow in their traces and organise branches of Cumann na mBan. Subsequently in this manner I started branches all over Donegal. Subsequently I worked in the Tyrone election, toured Monaghan with Sean McEntee and Count Plunkett, worked in the Cavan election. In August 1919 I was ordered to go to Clifden to organise Cumann na mBan. Orders had been sent from Sinn Fein H.Q. that on the 15th August a manifesto should be read in public by every Sinn Fein club in the country. On the morning of the meeting I was informed by one of the local R.I.C. that if I held the meeting I should be arrested. We held the meeting near the square, it was broken up by the police, the platform planks on barrels, being pulled from under our feet. We stayed on until the last plank was taken. Then I re-organised the women in the street and marched them out of the town and held my meeting on the monument base which stands on a hill outside Clifden. While the police followed me the Secretary of the Sinn Fein club finished the reading of the Manifesto. I then had to "go on the run". The local I.R.A., especially the Bartleys, arranged places of "safe keeping" for me, which however were eventually discovered by the R.I.C.. Gerald Bartley then got me safely out of Clifden by night. I cycled to Galway where I continued my organising work until the "hme and cry" reached me there. The bicycle used on these trips was one belonging to Countess Markievicz. On the morning of the Clifden meeting I had a letter from her from Holloway jail in London telling me that she was sending me her bicycle as she knew mine was decrepit-she had used it in the Armagh election. It arrived that morning, just in time for me to "go on the run". I left it, later on, to the Connemara volunteers. Father Tom Burke, who had got Liam Mellows away disguised, after the Rising, brought me away from Galway-as his sister-- to his home in Headford. From there I continued my organising work through Mayo, through Cong Clonbur Westport etc staying a night in each place and moving on before the police got word of my movements. And so I worked round the coast until I reached Achill. I stayed in Keel for some weeks until word reached me that I had been traced there when I returned to Dublin. Later I continued my organising work.

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work in Donegal Leitrim Fermanagh, until my health failed. A bout Easter 1919-as far as I remember -I worked at Cumann na mBan H. Q. in Dublin for some time.

In the summer of 1919 I went to live in my brother-in-law's House, Cashel House, in Cashel Connemara. He went to America that Autumn to join De Valera and I promised to run his oyster ~~bushmazzam~~ fisheries, (which he had just bought, in Cashel and Kilkerrin,) while he was away and to keep "quiet" for the time being. He was thus able to leave his affairs in Ireland and to carry on his work in the States. Owing however to the fact that I was known to the local police on account of the Clifden episode of the last August, I was evidently under suspicion of getting arms from America and landing them by means of Mr O'Hara's very powerful motor boat which lay at the oyster quay in Cashel. I was told that the police from Roundstone used to come to Cashel to feel "the ropes of the boat to find out whether I had had her cut to sea. At any rate the house was raided one Saturday in April 1920 and one document addressed to me taken away. A most innocuous paper-a letter from a priest in Athlone-whom I did not even know- about "Holy Q" Wells". He evidently knew that I was writing a thesis on the subject and sent me some further information. I wonder did the military think that I was burying those mythical guns in those wells?. On the following Monday a lorry load of soldiers held up the roads leading to Cashel House, arrested me and took me in the back of the ^{open} lorry surrounded by soldiers to Galway Jail where I was lodged in solitary confinement, until the men in Mountjoy had won out in their hunger strike when I was allowed out in the jail precincts. I was retained a week, without any charge being preferred against me, when I was returned by the military to Cashel House. I had demanded to be returned by them as they had taken me away so they provided a motor car and a soldier driver.

I got a great reception in Cashel, a bonfire on Cashel Hill etc. As a result of this short adventure, I was co-opted on the Clifden District Council in the following summer. (1920) I was also selected as their representative on the County Council where I was elected Vice-Chairman, with George Nicholls, Solr.

as Chairman. I was now out of the "quiet" and busy again in national work. With Miss Katie Kelly (who had been "out" in Easter Week) I formed a company of Volunteers in Cashel. They received their instructions from me after I had got authority from the Volunteer H.Q. Galway, to "carry on" Their activities consisted mainly in dispatch carrying and control of the poteen traffic. They patrolled the fairs, seized the poteen which they brought up to Cashel House and on order poured away on the lawn. These I.R.A. patrols got the poteen traffic well under control and were far more efficient than the subsequent recognised "police".

Meantime the Republic was getting under way. The courts were next tackled. At a convention in Galway, justices for the county were elected. On a poll I was elected (I was second in the county - Father Meehan being first,) as a Parish Justice for Connemara. John Cloherty was also elected for this area. So we proceeded to hold our "courts". Sometimes we held them openly - at other times secretly at midnight. I remember holding one openly with John Cloherty in Clifden. The matter at issue was land trouble. It was the case of the Clifden Castle estate. Some time before this a certain Toby Joyce of Clifden had bought the castle and lands which the tenants claimed should be divided amongst them. The case had been fought on behalf of the tenants by Canon MacAlpine, a bitter opponent of Sinn Fein,) in the British courts but without success. There was very great bitterness over the matter; riots in the town were frequent. Joyce attended our court but we failed to get him to give up the lands. Eventually the question was settled in the Galway (Sinn Fein) court under the presidency of Dr Dillon. I received a telegram asking me whether I would act as Trustee with John Cloherty and a Mrs Gordon. I accepted the Trusteeship. The next step was to acquire the money for the purchase of the lands. About this time the Land Bank had been started in Dublin for just such a purpose. I went to Dublin, saw the Manager of the Bank, put my case before him and obtained the necessary thousands to buy the land from Joyce. We bought the estate, stripped the land, and transferred the land to the tenants. I remember getting Dick Mulcahy to witness the transfer of my right in Fitzwilliam Place - I think it was in 1921 after my release from jail. While in jail I had been

active in the matter.

I held one midnight court. It must have been in the ~~Aut~~ Autumn or winter of 1920. I was still living in Cashel House where I got a message to meet certain volunteers at Toombeola, about three miles distant, at midnight and that they would bring me to Roundstone where a court was to be held. I cycled to Toombeola and was met by volunteers as arranged, and we went on to about a mile or so outside the village where we left our bicycles by the roadside. We climbed over walls into the fields and so bye-passed the village where the police still lived. (incidentally in the house which I now peacefully occupy) At length we arrived at a small stone building apparently standing alone in a field, but actually in a graveyard as I learnt later. The other justice, John Cloherly, had already arrived. Then the prisoners were brought in, blindfolded. They had been held on charges of larceny. We adjudicated on the cases and I remember convicted in one instance but found the other case not proved. The prisoners were led away and set out for home. We came back by a different way and to my surprise I discovered that we were in the grounds of the Franciscan Monastery. The court had been held in the mortuary chapel (now demolished) in their graveyard. I heard quite recently that the prisoners had been in the charge of Steve Mannion who still lives here in Roundstone.

In that summer of 1920 the writ of the Republic ran. Local Government and the Judiciary were in the hands of Sinn Féin. The Galway County Council was a Sinn Féin Council - we received our instructions from the underground cabinet in Dublin and loyally carried them out. I remember going up to Dublin and with difficulty finding Kevin O'Higgins or Cosgrave, getting my orders from them and bringing down the papers hidden in my hair - it had ~~been~~ ^{put} at that time. The Secretary Mr Seymour, an old Grand Jury man, though of Unionist leaning and tradition, carried out our orders punctiliously, though he frequently warned me that I would be arrested. We ~~were~~ were open defying the British Local Government and it was evident that we would not be allowed to carry on our activities for very long. The great danger was that our funds would be seized and so our work brought to an end. Our Treasurer was the National Bank Galway; - it would be quite simple for the British to seize the money by Garnish so we had to plan to circumvent them. This plan was, I think, devised by Mr O'Loughlin of the Clare County Council. In a word, we arranged that the rates were ^{no longer to be lodged} with the County Council ^{Treasurer} ~~but~~ but in the names of certain Councillors appointed for the different areas of the county. The rates of Connemara were lodged in my name. These monies we later passed on to the account of ~~some~~ someone who was appointed to hold all the rates of the county on behalf of the County Council. So we held our funds and continued to follow instructions from Dublin. But the time was due for the final blow on the part of the English authorities. The Republic could not be allowed to flourish so defiantly, so they sent the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans to crush us. But the Republic still carried on. There were casualties of course, our chairman, George Nicholl was arrested (I do not remember the exact date) and as Vice-Chairman I took his place in the council, and carried our instructions received from Headquarters.

During the year, Cashel House, where I then lived, was invaded by a British military patrol. I refused them access to the house so they were quartered in the premises in the large courtyard. They evidently objected to the control I kept over

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Councillors and Rate collectors and I intended that at the meeting of the Council I would restore the status quo ante as to the lodgment of the rates. The Secretary, Mr Seymour, warned me that I would be arrested and he proved right in the after event. On my way to the Council Offices I was arrested ~~immediately~~ and brought into the ^{Eglinton St} Police Barracks. I was brought upstairs and from a window I could see the Councillors and Rate Collectors making the way to meeting. Later I heard that they too were arrested for the day and that no meeting was held. Still looking out of my window, I saw a lorry of Auxiliaries go down the Street and with them in the lorry was a fashionably dressed woman whom I took to be one of their wives. I was shocked at her assurance. But the lorry came back, with the lady still in it, and stopped at the barracks. In a few minutes the door of my room was opened and the lady was ushered in - no wife of an Auxiliary but a prisoner. She was

Dr Ada English who had been arrested that morning at Ballinasloe. They had brought her up to the jail, which is just across the river from the Council Offices, but they would not receive her there as they had no authority, so she was brought back to join the other prisoner. They then evidently decided to bring us before the military authorities at Renmoreas after a short time we were ordered out to a waiting car and under police escort we were driven off to Renmore Barracks. Even there there was delay in receiving us. I remember one fat policeman of our escort, grumbling as we waited. "Its all right for you - you will get all the glory and I'll get all the blame." At last we were brought inside to be interviewed. An oily suave, half-police, half-soldier, interviewed us separately. To me he said. "You were going to that meeting ~~to~~ to take action on the same matter about which you wrote that letter on your return from Paris" (or words to that effect). He was well informed. "But you want peace, Miss Cashel?" "Yes", I replied, "When you clear out". "Well he was most polite to me, so much so that when I went out I said to Dr English and my fat escort. "I think I am going home". "If you call jail home" said the fat one, "You're going home". And we went "home". ~~They~~

So on this 19th day of January 1921 they took us back to Galway Jail which now admitted both of us. . . In the jail we found another political prisoner, Miss Anita MacMahon, of Achill, a writer and a worker for Land Reform in Achill. She had been there for some time and showed the signs of the strain of imprisonment. Well, this was my second time in this jail and on the question of our cells being raised I looked around and chose one with a broken window—and it was January!!—as I remembered feeling stifled when I was there last April. If the window was broken I could rest assured that I would have air. We were given plank bed with mattresses and bed clothes, and on these we slept for some weeks until a humane army inspector arrived and was shocked at our condition. He ordered propped beds—a luxury which we could now appreciate. After six weeks we were summoned before a Field General Courtmartial, in Renmore Barracks. A most formal pompous affair, members sworn in etc, and all to no purpose as we would not recognise the Court. As to the charges against me I said that I was carrying out the instructions of the only Government I recognised. Well, I was sentenced to six months imprisonment and Dr English against whom the charges were her activities in Cumann na mBan, to nine months. . . We were taken back to jail and I remained there until the end of my sentence on the 25th July 1921. The Governor of the jail. Mr Harding, was a kindly man but of course he had to faithfully carry out the rules of the institution. We saw our visitors under the eyes of our warders, with a table between us and them. The situation on my part was ludicrous. I was in Jail on account of my work in the County Council but the Secretary of the Council used to come to see me and I gave him instructions and he reported to me on the meetings of the Council.

On my release I returned to Cashel House but soon after went to Dublin where I worked in Erskine Childer's office under the name of Miss Armstrong. It was unsafe to work under my own name as I was so recently out of jail. Under Childer's direction I wrote two pamphlets "Atrocities on Women" and "The History of Local Government under the First Dail". The latter was unfinished when he left to go as Secretary to the Delegation to London on the 8th October 1921. I must have sent it on to London to him as I have a letter from him

asking for the typed draft. My work with Childers, under the Department of Publicity, finished soon after his departure to London and in the same month I was appointed Secretary to the Popular Lecture Society, ~~Chairman~~ President Mrs Stopford Greene. The work of this Society was the publishing and distribution of pamphlets written by experts on subjects of interest for the development of the resources of the country. These pamphlets were handed over to Padraigh O'Caomh, who distributed them to the Sinn Fein Clubs.

In November the Dail developed a scheme of decentralisation. I think it was felt that in the event of war breaking out again with England, should the negotiations fail, that it would be wise to have its administration distributed throughout the country. ~~So~~ The cabinet decided to set up a system of decentralised governments, so miniature cabinets or Administrative Councils were planned to be set up in each county for the complete government of the county should internal dislocation prevent contact with the Dail. The Committee for County Galway was formed with a ^{representative} representative for the most important Departments of public life. As a matter of fact, however, this was the only committee formed or in part at least functioned. To the best of my memory the following were appointed. -
Chairman & representative of Justice-Myself.
Defence, Padraigh O'Maille.
Education, Professor Whelan.
Agriculture, P. Hegan
Secretary, Myself- My appointment was made by the Dail Cabinet, and signed by the Minister of Justice, Austen Stack, and of Local Government Liam Cosgrave; I was re-instated in the Civil Service on the strength of this appointment and the papers of my appointment are presumably held by the Appointments Civil Service Appointments Committee.

In the beginning of December, on being urgently "requisitioned" by George Nicholls and Mr McLysaght, I went down to Galway to take up duty. I chose my office in the Court House - the Crown Solicitor handed me over the office. The Treaty came almost immediately so Mr McLysaght was unable to get the Administrative Committee going. I wired Stack that I was against the Treaty and offered my resignation, but I was ordered to carry on for the present.

My activities in my new position were those of a liaison officer between the I.R.A. Police, who still functioned, and the County Council, which still paid them. Communications with our H.Q. in Dublin became difficult so I went to Dublin in February (1922) and handed in my resignation to ~~Assistant~~ the Minister of Justice, Austen Stack.

I returned to Galway, where I carried on work

in conjunction with the I-R.A, under the Department of Defence-
 -First Mail-. Later I worked under the Department of Local
 Government-First Mail. In the pact election of 1922 I was ap-
 pointed Secretary for County Galway. I was also appointed by
 H.Q. in Dublin as organiser for the counties Clare and Galway-
 for election purposes. I worked, speaking and organising with
 Liam Clancy under the direction of Eamonn Donnelly.
 After the Four Courts my direct contact with the central authorities
 in Dublin ceased. Subsequently I worked with "The Irregulars".-
 -but that is another story.

Alice M. Cashel

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6th February 1950

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