



PLATE 1: Civilian witnesses for the prosecution: Michael Hussey (1); John McCarthy (2); Mary Gorman (3); Martin Collins (4); Maurice Moriarty (5) (Source: Author)

## **Ardfert Witnesses at the Trial of Roger Casement**

*Helen O'Carroll*

Roger Casement and two companions landed on Banna Strand on 21 April 1916, in the early hours of Good Friday morning. Casement was subsequently arrested, tried and convicted on a charge of high treason in London, and hanged in Pentonville Prison on 3 August 1916. Four people from Ardfert gave evidence at the trial. Their story is usually told as a footnote to the drama of Casement's trial. In the years after 1916, if the Ardfert witnesses were remembered at all it was as informers or traitors who had betrayed Casement by testifying against him. This article is about what happened to these four very ordinary people caught up in extraordinary events over which they had no control and which had a profound impact on their lives.

## **Who was Roger Casement?**

Born in Dublin in 1864 and brought up in Co Antrim, Roger Casement spent eighteen years in the British Consular Service in Africa and South America between 1895 and 1913. During that time, he conducted two major investigations into the rubber trade in the Congo in Africa and later in the Putumayo River region of Peru. His reports detailing the enslavement and torture of indigenous people in both areas had a considerable impact and gained Casement international recognition as a humanitarian, as well as a knighthood.

Casement resigned from the Consular Service in 1913, disillusioned with the British Empire and what he had come to regard as its unjust dominion over Ireland. He openly committed himself to the cause of Irish independence, becoming involved in the recruitment of Irish Volunteers throughout the country and took part in organising the Howth gun-running in 1914. Later that year, after war broke out, he went to Germany to recruit men and arms for an Irish insurrection. Early on Good Friday morning 21 April 1916, Casement, along with two other men, Robert Monteith and Daniel Bailey, put ashore in a small boat at Banna Strand from a German submarine.

The plan was to rendezvous with the *Aud*, the German ship that was due to land a cargo of 20,000 guns and ammunition on the Kerry coast. The *Aud*, however, arrived in Tralee Bay earlier than expected, and with nobody there to meet her, the ship left the area early on the morning of Good Friday. She was subsequently identified and pursued by the Royal Navy and was scuttled by her captain, Karl Spindler, outside Cork harbour.

Soaked and exhausted after landing on the strand, the three men made their way through the early morning dark until they arrived at a ringfort, known then as McKenna's Fort, as it was on McKenna's farm, and now known as Casement's Fort.<sup>1</sup> Ill and overcome by fatigue, Casement remained there while the other two walked into Tralee to get help from the local Volunteers. Before any help could arrive Casement was arrested and brought first to Ardfert, then to Tralee and the next day sent onwards to London. Bailey was arrested after attempting to find Casement with Austin Stack, the Volunteer leader in Tralee, and Con Collins, both of whom were also arrested; Monteith managed to escape. By the time the Easter Rising happened in Dublin on Easter Monday, Casement was in the Tower of London.

### **Who were the Ardfert witnesses?**

The wheels of state began to move rapidly after Casement's arrest on 21 April. Less than a fortnight later, on 3 May, Detective Inspector O'Donnell of Scotland Yard arrived in Tralee to collect evidence, interview witnesses and to take statements.<sup>2</sup> He also arranged for a photographer from Tralee to take photographs of the boat and the spot on the strand where it had been found.<sup>3</sup> He left Tralee on the 6.40am train on Friday 5 May taking with him most of the Kerry witnesses – the remaining four were sent to London the following week.<sup>4</sup>

Within a fortnight of Casement's arrest, therefore, the people who had encountered him in Kerry were on their way to London. In total, there were twenty-seven witnesses. Seven of these were repatriated prisoners of war giving evidence about Casement's recruitment for the Irish Brigade in Germany; six Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) officers from Kerry; seven Army and Navy personnel; two Scotland Yard officers; and five civilian witnesses. There were four from Ardfert and one from Tralee.<sup>5</sup> (See Plate 1) The four from Ardfert were:<sup>6</sup>

- **Michael Hussey** in his late thirties, a farm labourer from Carrahane, who gave evidence that on Holy Thursday night he had noticed a red light out at sea around half-past nine.
- **John McCarthy**, a farmer in his late forties from Carrahane, described how, on his return from a visit to a holy well, he had found a boat coming with the tide at around 4.00am, along with a number of items including a dagger, a tin box, three revolvers, and a leather bag. He also observed three sets of footprints leading from the boat in direction of his own house.
- **Mary Gorman**, a nineteen-year old farm servant on the Allman farm in Knockenagh, told how she had seen three strange men passing the gate of the Allman house at 5.20 am that morning, coming from the sea and going towards Ardfert, and that all three were carrying overcoats. One of them was a tall man and she recounted how she saw him later that day and identified him as the man she had seen in the early morning.
- **Martin Collins**, aged twelve and a half and a farmer's son from Ardfert, gave an account of how, on his way back to his aunt, Mrs Allman, on a pony and trap, he had come across Sergeant Hearn and Constable Reilly with a strange man at McKenna's Fort. He noticed that as they were

crossing the fence the strange man dropped some papers from behind his back. He then drove Constable Reilly and the strange man to Allman's where Mary Gorman identified him as the man she had seen earlier on. On his return to Ardfert, Martin Collins stopped at the fort and sent his companion, a younger boy called Thomas Dowling, into the field to pick up and bring to him the papers that the man had dropped. He then caught up with the RIC men and Casement on their way to Ardfert and gave the papers to Constable Reilly.

The fifth civilian witness was **Maurice Moriarty**, a driver from Tralee who gave evidence about driving Stack, Bailey and Collins to find Casement. He, along with John McCarthy, Mary Gorman and Martin Collins, was called to give evidence in Dublin on 16 June at the court-martial in Richmond Barracks of Austin Stack and Con Collins.

### **Sequestered in London**

Subpoenaed to give evidence in London, only one of them, Michael Hussey, was allowed to return to Ardfert between the Magistrate Court's hearing in May and the trial proper at the end of June. Even then, he was returned to London for the trial under the watchful eye of all six of the Kerry RIC officers.<sup>7</sup> The others were brought under police escort to Dublin for Stack's court martial, and even though they were back in Ireland, they were not allowed return to Kerry. According to police correspondence, "it was considered undesirable" that they return home and so they were shipped straight back to London to wait for Casement's trial at the end of June.<sup>8</sup>

Why it was considered undesirable is not stated, but it had the effect of insulating them from public opinion back home, which was perhaps the deliberate intention. While they were in London, the executions of the leaders of the Rising were taking place and support for the Rising began to build as a result of the heavy-handed way in which the British government had responded.

The little group from Kerry would have been insulated from this as they were sequestered in London from early May until their return home at the beginning of July. They were accommodated in the Shaftesbury Hotel in the centre of London for the duration.<sup>9</sup> They first gave evidence at Bow Street, when Casement appeared before the Magistrate's Court in a hearing that lasted three days between 15-18 May. The trial proper opened on 26 June at the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand in the centre of London and lasted four days.



PLATE 2: *Daily Sketch* depiction of Mary Gorman as the Kerry Colleen  
(Source: National Library of Ireland)



PLATE 3: Front page of *Daily Mirror* 17 May 1916  
(Source: NLI)

## Media interest

At both venues there was intense media interest. This was the period when what we know now as tabloid journalism was really beginning to make an impact, with titles familiar to us like the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily News*, and the *Graphic*. Casement was big news and, for the tabloids, the people from Kerry represented yet another riveting angle in a story that had everything a sensational newspaper could ask for. Here, entering from stage left stepped characters that, with a small bit of stage management, could be cast in a Dion Boucicault play – the *Colleen Bawn* or the *Shaughran* maybe – stock Irish characters that they could have plenty of fun with.

As a young woman, and indeed the only female witness, Mary Gorman very quickly became a focus of interest, referred to constantly as the ‘Kerry Colleen’, dressed up as such and her photograph taken in what looks like a studio portrait<sup>10</sup> (See Plate 2). The press went to town on her and the *Daily Sketch* even went as far as making up an interview with her that depicted her as a caricature of “Irish Molly”, the country bumpkin commenting on everything from the traffic, London fashions, and the sights:

“Sure but London is a great place, I’m after thinking, said Molly, with her face wreathed in smiles and her big brown eyes a-twinkle. Motor ‘buses, electric trains dashing through the ground, searchlights in the sky, aeroplanes and people galore. There’s lashings of them and they’re all a-hurrying and a scurrying as tho’ they’ve got to catch someone three miles ahead of them. No, we don’t hurry so much in Tralee, but we get there just the same...”<sup>11</sup>

Repeatedly referred to as Kerry peasants, the press had a field day with their accents as illustrated by this headline from the *Daily Mirror*: “Colleen’s Brogue Which Counsel Could Not Understand”<sup>12</sup> (See Plate 3). The caption went on:

“Among the witnesses was Mary Gorman, a rosy-cheeked, round-faced farm servant, who identified Sir Roger as one of the three men she saw early on Good Friday morning. She is a typical colleen and showed not a trace of nervousness in the box. But she has a brogue that completely baffled Mr Bodkin. ‘Do you mind writing it down?’ he said once in despair after three efforts to understand her”. Rathoneen was the word

that Bodkin was having difficulty with.<sup>13</sup>

John McCarthy also became a figure of fun when he in turn found Bodkin's English accent difficult to understand:

“How old is your daughter? Mr Bodkin asked  
‘Phwat’s that sorr? Replied the witness, somewhat puzzled.  
Counsel repeated the question slowly and deliberately.  
Suddenly the witness appeared to understand.  
Oh, shurr sorr, he answered, obviously eager to please. About a hundred yards”.<sup>14</sup> Michael Hussey similarly was described as having ‘a brogue so pronounced that it was only with difficulty he was understood’.<sup>15</sup>

With all this stage Irishness going on it is easy to think that the Ardfert witnesses were there simply to provide a bit of colour. Alternatively, you could say that their role was in some way to diminish Casement – reducing his grand gesture to broad farce. However, they were also being used as pawns in a propaganda campaign to show that not all Irish people were in revolt against the Crown. “Irish Molly” was quoted again in the *Daily Sketch* saying:

“But I should be glad to see Ardfert for a while again and to try and tell the people all I have seen and how kind all the Londoners have been to us. You see Ardfert’s a nice little place. We don’t grow stones there any more than we produce Sinn Feiners. A lot of hot heads they are to be sure. And if London folk ever come to Ardfert the people there will be glad to see them and show them where Sergeant Hearn and Constable Reilly caught Sir Roger, where the boat came ashore and all the other places”.<sup>16</sup>

### **Significance of their evidence**

So what were the Ardfert witnesses doing there? What were the prosecution trying to prove with the evidence of the Ardfert witnesses? To untangle this we need to review the charges against Casement. It was alleged that he had committed six clear acts of treason. Five of those related to his activities in Germany; specifically, his attempts to create an Irish Brigade from among the Irish prisoners of war held at Limburg Camp.

The sixth act of treason was different, however, and it related directly to the events in Banna. The charge was that “the prisoner set out from

Germany as a member of a warlike and hostile expedition undertaken and equipped by the enemies of the King, having for its object the introduction into and landing on the coast of Ireland of arms and ammunition intended for use in the prosecution of the war by the enemies against the King".<sup>17</sup>

Herein lies the significance of the Ardfert witnesses' testimony: taken together, it provided the prosecution with a chain of evidence showing that the events of the 21 April in Banna were directly connected with Germany, and that it was proof of action committed in concert with Germany and in pursuance of a plan of operations formed in Germany.

The prosecution freely admitted that there was no evidence to show how Casement got to the Irish coast from Germany, but both defence and prosecution accepted that, as Ireland is an island, it was reasonable to infer that he came by sea. The prosecution's case was that the red light seen by Michael Hussey at 9.30 pm on Holy Thursday must have had something to do with the vessel that brought Casement from Germany. The finding of the boat by John McCarthy on Good Friday morning was proof of the means by which he landed.

Mary Gorman's evidence that she saw the three men coming on the road from the sea suggested that they had come from the boat. Furthermore, the significance of her description of them carrying overcoats related to the discovery of a train ticket in one of the coats – a train ticket dated 12 April from Berlin to Wilhelmshaven, which connected the three men back to Germany. (See Plate 4). The reasonable conclusion from these three pieces of evidence taken together was that the men had come on a boat that had originated in Germany.

However, it was the pieces of paper spotted by Martin Collins at the fort, picked up and handed by him to Constable Reilly, which proved to be one of the most damaging pieces of evidence. This was a fact recognised by Casement himself, his defence, the prosecution, and the judge. What Martin Collins did not know when he handed the papers to Reilly was that they were in fact a code supplied by the German General Staff to the three men before they left Germany.



PLATE 4: Train ticket found in one of the overcoats used as evidence  
(Source: Metropolitan Police Crime Museum)

Monteith describes it as follows:

“It was devised in order that we might communicate with the Germans should operations be prolonged which would necessitate further supplies of ammunition and material. It is self-explanatory. Certain numbers stood for complete messages. The word “Sectpol” was our calling up signal. Any message with this prefix, picked up by a German operator, would be transmitted at once to the General Staff in Berlin. Messages from us would be awaited after 2.00am Greenwich time from April 22<sup>nd</sup> to May 20<sup>th</sup> 1916. Should no communications be received between these dates, our lines would be considered closed”.<sup>18</sup> (See Plate 5).

While the prosecution case did not hinge solely on the code, it was the definitive piece of evidence that brought the sixth act of treason into play. It showed that Casement’s treachery was not confined to what he did *in* Germany, but that his betrayal extended beyond the German borders and constituted a direct threat to Britain. The sixth act of treason, therefore, was as important as the other five because it would demonstrate an absolutely iron clad case of proven high treason. The British government had a close eye on American political opinion, which was already very

uneasy about their handling of the Easter Rising and the executions of the leaders. They wanted to be seen to give Casement a fair trial during the course of which his guilt could be proven without any doubt.



PLATE 5: Code given by Martin Collins to Constable Reilly  
(Source: Metropolitan Police Crime Museum)

Casement was fully aware of how damaging Martin Collins’s evidence was. He wrote to his defence team:

“The evidence is quite true as the boy gives it. This was the fatal paper. This boy has hanged me for sure! – and hanged old Ireland too – but it was my foolish act – I should have swallowed the paper”.<sup>19</sup>

At the age of only twelve and a half, it is unlikely that Martin Collins understood how significant his testimony was. Casement himself clearly felt that he did not have any malicious intent. In his notes to the defence team he wrote:

“This boy is probably very friendly to me at heart and sorry. He and all the people, Mary Gorman and others around the Fort, thought I was a German – that three Germans had landed”.<sup>20</sup>

The judge, Lord Reading, in his summing up, drew the jury’s attention

to the code and asked them to decide if the code could have had any innocent intention or whether “it can only have been done in concert with Germany, and that the object of the code, and of the carrying of this code by the prisoner, was to enable him to send messages somewhere to someone which could not be given openly”.<sup>21</sup> He asked them to consider why Casement was carrying it and more importantly, why did he drop it when the police arrested him.

The jury listened and clearly paid attention as the code was one of the few pieces of evidence that they requested to see during their short deliberations. In less than an hour they were back with a guilty verdict and Casement was sentenced to death by hanging. In the background of the trial was the orchestration of a smear campaign which involved the circulation of extracts from diaries appearing to record his homosexual activities. This ensured that there would be no reprieve. There was an appeal in the middle of July, which was rejected and he was hanged in Pentonville Prison just after 9.00am on 3 August 1916.

### **Return home**

By then the Ardfert witnesses had returned home, having been allowed to leave London finally at the end of June. However, it was to a changed Ireland that they returned and their involvement in the trial, with its widespread coverage in the newspapers, created problems for them.

Two letters written in the middle of June 1916 give us an indication of how things were changing locally in Kerry. On 13 June, the Kerry County Inspector of the RIC, Hugh Hill, wrote to Sir Neville Chamberlain, the RIC Inspector General, regarding the boat in which Casement, Monteith and Bailey landed on Banna. Hill was arranging to get the boat to London as Chamberlain wanted to present it to King George V as a trophy of war and as a record of the RIC’s exemplary behaviour in capturing Casement. On 21 April, when the boat was discovered on the strand, there had been no difficulty getting it transported by cart up to Ardfert. Now in June, however, Hill writes:

“I had to employ a carter in Tralee as no one in Ardfert would do the work and the carter from Tralee would only do the carting at night as they are all afraid of the Sinn Feiners”.<sup>22</sup>

Tom Nunan, the local schoolteacher, also gives us a good description of how unsettled things were at the time. In a letter dated 16 June 1916 to

his brother Peter in New York, he writes:

“We had terrible excitement over the landing of Casement...No-one knew what might happen for days. One saw points of rifles everywhere...Just imagine us for three weeks here – no paper, 800 soldiers rushed to Fenit, trenches dug etc. a girl shot who refused to halt for a sentry and then *rumours, rumours, rumours*. We are under martial law at present. Police everywhere are armed”.<sup>23</sup>

John McCarthy’s claim for loss of earnings in the aftermath of the trial reveals much about the situation that the witnesses faced at home. His lengthy absence from the farm had had a serious impact on his young family. In July, he submitted a claim for compensation for loss of income due to his compulsory attendance as a witness in London. According to his solicitor, McCarthy discovered that on his return home “he has become unpopular in his own district”.<sup>24</sup>

The claim was for £103 (approx €6,000 today) which included ‘loss on early potato crop, loss of mangold crop, loss of turnip crop, loss owing to inability to obtain turbarry, decrease in value of horse, loss through illness of child and amount paid in labour working on the farm in his absence’. McCarthy then went on to make some wilder claims for compensation. As the finder of the boat, he claimed that he was entitled to a reward of £100.

This was a reward available during wartime for information leading to “the capture and destruction of an enemy vessel”. It was stretching it just a little to construe this tiny 12-foot long boat as an enemy vessel. He then submitted a salvage claim for the boat itself and capped it off with a claim for the large reward of many thousands offered for the capture of Casement.<sup>25</sup>

It is not clear if McCarthy was chancing his luck or whether he seriously thought his claims would be accepted. It is possible that these outrageous claims were also a form of protest at having been treated as a pawn in a much bigger game. Ultimately, he was awarded compensation of £50 but only after a considerable file of correspondence had accumulated on the matter: starting with his solicitor in Tralee and making its way through to the County Inspector of the RIC in Kerry, the Assistant Commissioner in Scotland Yard, and the Director of Public Prosecutions in Whitehall.<sup>26</sup>



PLATE 6: Witnesses at King George V Military Hospital: standing (l-r) Maurice Moriarty, Martin Collins, and Mary Gorman. Seated, Pte William Egan (Source: The National Archives, UK)

As a mature adult, John McCarthy might have been better able to withstand any negative comment arising for his involvement in the trial, and the same could be said for Michael Hussey. However, it was a different story for the two younger ones. Both of them had attracted quite a lot of the press attention – Martin Collins because of his age and Mary Gorman because she was the only female.

Martin Collins was a focus of interest for the popular press, which described him as having the time of his life, a depiction at odds with the solemnity of the occasion and one that did him no favours on his return home. But, he probably was having the time of his life – he was a young boy away from home for the first time in his life and in one of the biggest cities in the world, so this would have been an exciting time. He was taken on some sightseeing visits, one of which was to the King George V Military Hospital, beside Waterloo Bridge in London, perhaps the biggest military hospital in city. Private Egan, one of the captured POWs who gave evidence against Casement, had been a patient there, and he brought Maurice Moriarty, Mary Gorman and Martin Collins on a visit. An orderly, Benjamin Margerison, was also an amateur photographer who compiled an album of images taken while he served in the hospital, among them the images reproduced here at Plates 6, 7 and 8, recording the visit.<sup>27</sup>

After the trial and once the summer was over Martin Collins returned to school in Ardfert. The trial had not gone away, however, and he was still being linked to it in November of 1916. The previous year Martin's father John had invested £1,600 in building a small hotel in the village. He had now added the required amount of bedrooms to the premises sufficient to apply for a hotel licence.<sup>28</sup> This routine licensing application, however, became headline news for the local papers because of the connection with Roger Casement. During the course of it one of the solicitors present wisecracked that Collins's hotel should be called the Casement Arms. This throwaway remark was taken up by the local press, which reported the hearing in full, and "The Casement Arms Hotel" became the front-page headline for *The Kerryman*.<sup>29</sup> It reverberated for many years and contributed to a perception about Ardfert that there had been a naked attempt to make financial gain out of the Casement landing. (Plate 7).

In 1920 Martin's first cousin, Michael Brosnan, was a member of a mobilised IRA column awaiting orders for an attack when they were surprised by a large contingent of Black and Tans in Ardfert. Brosnan and his comrade, John Cantillon, were shot and killed while escaping through the fields adjacent to the hotel. Shortly after this, Martin emigrated to New Zealand. It is unclear if his decision was influenced by a combination of the shooting and the ongoing negative impact of the trial. As the third son in the middle of a large family he may well have emigrated in any case regardless of the trial. He married an Irish woman, Nellie O'Connor, and they settled in Takomaru Bay with their three children before moving to New Plymouth in the early 1960s. Martin never returned to Ireland and he never spoke about his involvement in the trial.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Kerry Colleen**

Mary Gorman perhaps had the hardest time of the four. She seems to have borne the brunt of the negative comment on her return to the village. But in fact, this had already started even before she came home. After the *Daily Sketch* depiction of her as "Irish Molly", an open letter to her was printed in the *Kerry Sentinel* on 20 May, written by someone who called himself 'Periscope', which gives us some idea of what might have been facing her when she got back:<sup>31</sup>



PLATE 7: Martin Collins at King George V Military Hospital  
(Source: The National Archives, UK)

“Your stay in the English capital has been a comparatively short one but Mary it has been eventful and indeed memorable. No Irish girl who visited London to my knowledge has created as much history and discussion as you have. You have been awarded a prominent place in the English journals... You are now generally known Mary as the ‘Irish Mollie’. I have detailed this in order that you may be better able to become conscious of yourself... I do not know you personally Mary but I have a firm belief that you are an honest, innocent Irish country girl no different from the other girls of our county. But I also believe that you have been duped. You have been ridiculed. You are unconsciously ‘perked up in a glistening grief’. Be careful you do not ‘wear a golden sorrow’” – a reference here to the words of Anne Boleyn in Shakespeare’s Henry VIII: “Verily I swear tis better to be lowly born and [live] in content than to be perked up in a glistening grief and wear a golden sorrow”.

Some of this might well have been motivated by begrudgery as much as by patriotic fervour. Having been singled out for attention by the newspapers, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to imagine that a small community would want to bring her down a peg or two and remind her of her place as a servant girl on a farm. However, when she did come home it looks like she no longer had a job to return to on the Allman farm. (See Plate 8)

On 2 June John Allman, through his solicitor, John O'Connell, had written to the District Inspector of the RIC in Tralee seeking compensation for the loss of her services on the farm.<sup>32</sup> He stated that she had been taken from his employment without notice. He had been told that she would not be taken beyond Ardfert so that he was expecting her back almost daily. She was his principal servant and he now had forty cows calved and seventy pigs and no help on the farm. Whether he received compensation is not yet clear, but it is likely that he found someone to replace her. In Mary's own account, two years later, she said "I was put out of my good wages with a good man and sent to London", which indicates that perhaps that her job was indeed gone by the time she returned.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible also that her sojourn in London unsettled her, opening up possibilities of a life she could not have imagined before. She was given expenses of £1 per day, unimaginable riches for a farm servant. She was taken under the wing of Lady Limerick who gave her clothes and took an interest in her.<sup>34</sup> Added to this was all the press attention. For a 19-year-old girl this was all heady stuff and it would have been very difficult to come back down to earth to the hard labour of working on a farm. In any case, she returned to London some months later where she found work as a munitions worker.

In London, she met a soldier whom she described as an Australian officer, and from him she contracted syphilis. She returned to her grandmother in Ardfert at the end of November 1917.<sup>35</sup> At this stage the political atmosphere was much more highly charged – only that August thousands of people had gathered at McKenna's Fort to hear Thomas Ashe give an oration on the anniversary of Casement's execution. Within weeks, he was under arrest and was dead by the end of September after an attempt to force-feed him while he was on hunger strike in Mountjoy. His was the first public funeral after the Rising and 30,000 people followed the coffin to Glasnevin where Michael Collins delivered the oration.



PLATE 8: Mary Gorman at King George V Military Hospital  
(Source: The National Archives, UK)

The manner of Ashe's death and his funeral created a surge of support for the Republican movement. In this atmosphere Mary Gorman's notoriety as a witness in the Casement trial stood out like a sore thumb and to this was now added a further damaging reputation as a fallen woman.

Seeking treatment for her condition, she entered Tralee Workhouse Infirmary in November 1917, under the name of Mary Danielson and claiming to be married.<sup>36</sup> Word soon leaked out as to her identity and in January 1918 she was called before the Board of Guardians and publicly humiliated, with her participation in the Casement trial forming a central part of it as well as being censured for her loose morals. At the behest of Dr Coffey, Infirmary Medical Officer, and Alfred Delany, a Local Government Inspector, she was sent to Dr Steeven's Hospital in Dublin for specialist treatment and to get her away from the poisonous atmosphere in which she found herself.<sup>37</sup>

On her admittance to Dr Steeven's Hospital in April 1918, she assumed her maternal grandmother's maiden surname and became known as Julia

Quinlan to disguise her identity.<sup>38</sup> Her treatment was paid for by Dublin Castle and she remained there until passed fit to leave at the end of 1919. Julia Quinlan sailed from Liverpool for New York on 14 January 1920 on the *Baltic*, intending to join her uncle, Timothy Gorman, who lived in 206 West 19<sup>th</sup> St, New York. There, the trail has gone cold and her subsequent life in America has so far eluded discovery.

### **Reluctant witnesses**

The backdrop to Casement's trial was the build-up to the Battle of the Somme, which started on 1 July 1916. In this context, Roger Casement was hanged, not as an Irish rebel, but as a traitor because he was found guilty of adhering to the King's enemies, namely the German Empire. In Britain, he was a traitor who had gone over to the enemy, Germany. In Ireland, however, he was now amongst the patriot dead. Moreover, unfortunately for the Ardfert witnesses, the perception in Ireland was that Casement had been offered into the hands of a vengeful John Bull by his fellow countrymen.

Could they have refused to give evidence? In 1918 Alfred Delany, the local government official who arranged to have Mary Gorman sent to hospital in Dublin, wrote of her:

“If she had declined to give evidence, she would have become a heroine, and the popular hunger strike would have secured her release and a musical procession to her home”.<sup>39</sup>

But Delany was writing in the spring of 1918 when the Conscription Crisis was galvanising public opinion in support of the nationalist cause. In early May 1916, however, the situation was not so clear-cut. If Casement's trial had taken a lot longer to put together and with the hardening of nationalist support, perhaps they might have been in a position to refuse to go to London if they had been subpoenaed later in the year.

Perhaps, if they were more politicised this may have helped. But they were not - these were very ordinary country folk. They were not political people, used to challenging authority in the political sphere – there is no evidence that the two adults, John McCarthy or Michael Hussey, were in any way involved in the nationalist cause as members of any of the relevant organisations. Mary Gorman would hardly have had the time to become involved in anything like Cumann Na mBan and there is no

evidence that Martin Collins was a member of Na Fianna. Therefore, to say that they could have refused to give evidence is to impose sensibilities and standards that were not available to them at the time.

Casement himself was extremely aware of their predicament and expressed the view that they were reluctant witnesses. He was distressed by the press coverage particularly during the Bow St hearing and he wrote to his defence team:

“They are all at heart, I am sure, unwilling witnesses and not proud of their position at all, as the London press pretended at Bow St – I don’t want the English newspapers to be gloating over Irish witnesses giving away an Irishman”.<sup>40</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The perception that Casement was betrayed and let down in Kerry was one that lingered long after the trial was over.<sup>41</sup> The failure to rescue him was compounded by the fact that five Kerry people gave evidence for the prosecution in his trial. In the court of popular opinion, this made them informers and traitors. This attitude was very much alive in 1965 at the time of the return of Casement’s remains for burial in a state funeral in Dublin. A headline in the *Irish Times* over an article about the role the Ardfert witnesses had played in the trial read: “Betrayal of Casement through Ignorance”<sup>42</sup>

To counter-balance this, an article appeared in the *Kerryman* the following year during the fiftieth anniversary of the events in Banna. Under the banner headline “Ardfert is Defended”, John Blackwell attempted to set the record straight, arguing that the witnesses from Ardfert were ordinary people caught up in events over which they had no control.<sup>43</sup> However, people were not yet quite ready to hear this side of the story and the article brought him a good deal of criticism for defending them. (Plate 9).

The article has a number of factual inaccuracies: John Blackwell was a creamery manager, not a journalist or a historian. Furthermore, he did not have access to the wide range of sources available today. But as a creamery manager in a small village he knew everyone and so he had access to sources that are no longer available now – the voices of the people of Ardfert who lived through this period. And those sources give the essence of truth to his article, a truth which is confirmed in the historical record – that these were indeed very ordinary people caught up

in extraordinary events over which they had no control. Now, perhaps there is enough distance from the events to enlist some sympathy for the situation thrust upon these people.



PLATE 9: John Blackwell's article in the *Kerryman* 9 Apr 1966  
(Source: Author)

I am going to leave the last words to three of the witnesses themselves. In John Blackwell's account, upon being told by a Scotland Yard Inspector that it might be dangerous for him to return home after the trial, John McCarthy responded:

“We are the innocent victims in this misfortune and you only brought us here to throw the blame down on us. All I want is to be left out of this wretched place, and when I go home I will not be afraid of anyone as I never harmed any person during my lifetime”.<sup>44</sup>

Defending herself before the Board of Guardians in Tralee in 1918, Mary Gorman protested:

“I only said I saw three strangers passing down the road...The police came and said I would go off to England. I knew nothing about Sir

Roger Casement. They sent me off to England where anyone is not safe”.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Martin Collins: according to his daughter, Martin only ever received two letters from home. The first was in 1941 to inform him of his mother’s death. The second was in 1966 when he was sent a newspaper from home. I think it was more than likely the *Kerryman* with the “Ardfert is Defended” article. We’ll never know however, because, fearing that it had something to do with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rising and that it would contain yet more negative coverage of his role in the Casement trial, Martin wouldn’t look at it but told his wife to burn it, commenting:

“It’s all hearsay for they were never there but are masters at turning the truth to their own gain”.<sup>46</sup>

### **Note about Author**

Helen O’Carroll is a native of Tralee, Co. Kerry. A graduate of University College Dublin, she holds an MA in History (1990) and a Diploma in Arts Administration (1991). She has been involved in heritage projects in Kerry for nearly twenty-five years and has been Curator of Kerry County Museum since 2000. In 2016 she produced ‘Casement in Kerry: A Revolutionary Journey’, a major exhibition marking the centenary of the Easter Rising in 1916 and making an important contribution to the national commemoration. The exhibition was officially opened by President Michael D. Higgins on 21 April 2016.

### **References**

<sup>1</sup> It is officially named after the townland in which it is located – Rathcrihane Fort

<sup>2</sup> The National Archives of the UK (TNA), MEPO 2/10667, D.I. O’Donnell to Superintendent Quinn 8 May 1916

<sup>3</sup> The photographer’s name was William B McCarthy. TNA, MEPO 2/10671, 6 July 1916

<sup>4</sup> TNA, MEPO 2/10667, O’Donnell to Quinn, 8 May 1916

<sup>5</sup> For the trial proceedings I have used Knott, G. H., *Trial of Sir Roger Casement* (Toronto, 1917) which is a report based on the trial transcript

<sup>6</sup> Witness statements can be found in TNA, MEPO 2/10667

- <sup>7</sup> TNA, MEPO 2/10667, D.I. Britten to Basil Thomson, Assistant Commissioner Scotland Yard, 23 June 1916
- <sup>8</sup> TNA, MEPO 2/10667, D.I. Britten to Supt Quinn, 30 May 1916
- <sup>9</sup> TNA, MEPO 2/10667, D.I. Parker to Supt Quinn, 7 May 1916
- <sup>10</sup> *Daily Sketch* 17 May 1916
- <sup>11</sup> *Daily Sketch* 17 May 1916
- <sup>12</sup> *Daily Mirror* 17 May 1916
- <sup>13</sup> *Daily Mirror* 17 May 1916
- <sup>14</sup> Recounted in Hyde, H.M., *Famous Trials 9: Roger Casement* (London, 1964), p.62
- <sup>15</sup> *Irish Times* 17 May 1916
- <sup>16</sup> *Daily Sketch* 17 May 1916
- <sup>17</sup> Knott, *Trial of Sir Roger Casement*, p.184
- <sup>18</sup> Monteith, R., *Casement's Last Adventure* (Chicago, 1932), p.120
- <sup>19</sup> National Library of Ireland (NLI), MS 10764/1A, Points for Counsel, 23 May 1916
- <sup>20</sup> NLI, MS 10764/3A, Points for Counsel, 23 May 1916
- <sup>21</sup> Knott, *Trial of Sir Roger Casement*, p.193
- <sup>22</sup> Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, RA MRH/MRH/GV/MAIN/169/02
- <sup>23</sup> National Museum of Ireland, HE/EW/1832/001-002
- <sup>24</sup> TNA, MEPO 2/10671, Henry Walsh to Inspector Parker, CID, Scotland Yard, 15 July 1916
- <sup>25</sup> TNA, MEPO 2/10671, Henry Walsh to Assistant Commissioner, Scotland Yard, 19 Aug 1916
- <sup>26</sup> A total of thirty-one documents in TNA, MEPO 2/10671 relate to McCarthy's claim for compensation
- <sup>27</sup> TNA, HO 144/23461. Margerison sent these images to the Home Secretary in 1956 after reading articles in the press about the Casement trial. He donated his entire album to the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1969 and it can be viewed at the Army Medical Services Museum, Keogh Barracks, Ash Vale, Aldershot, England. A digitised version can be viewed online at the Wellcome Library website, [www.wellcomelibrary.org](http://www.wellcomelibrary.org).
- <sup>28</sup> *Kerry Sentinel* 4 Nov 1916
- <sup>29</sup> *Kerryman* 4 Nov 1916
- <sup>30</sup> Author correspondence with Mrs Norah O'Sullivan, daughter of Martin Collins, 20 Jan 2016
- <sup>31</sup> *Kerry Sentinel* 20 May 1916
- <sup>32</sup> Kerry County Library, John O'Connell Letter Book, 2 June 1916
- <sup>33</sup> *Kerryman* 12 Jan 1918
- <sup>34</sup> TNA, MEPO 2/10667, 16 Jan 1918
- <sup>35</sup> TNA, CO 904/213/364 10 Apr 1918
- <sup>36</sup> TNA, CO 904/213/364, 127-28, unsigned report of Mary Gorman's entry to the Workhouse

<sup>37</sup> The full file on Mary Gorman/Julia Quinlan can be found at TNA, CO/904/213/364

<sup>38</sup> Her real name was in fact Mary Lawlor. She was the daughter of Thomas Lawlor and his wife Mary, *née* Gorman. Her mother died when she was three and she was reared by her maternal grandparents, John and Catherine Gorman, which is presumably why she became known as Mary Gorman as opposed to Mary Lawlor.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, CO 904/213/364, Alfred Delany to H.A.Wynne, Chief Crown Solicitor, Dublin Castle, 10 Apr 1918

<sup>40</sup> NLI, MS 10764/3A, Points for Counsel, 23 May 1916

<sup>41</sup> An absorbing discussion of how the resulting sense of guilt manifested itself in Kerry can be found in McDiarmid, L., 'Secular relics: Casement's boat, Casement's dish', *Textual Practice* 16(2), 2002, pp. 277-302

<sup>42</sup> *Irish Times* 24 February 1965

<sup>43</sup> *Kerryman* 9 April 1966. In the interests of full disclosure I must point out that John Blackwell was my grandfather

<sup>44</sup> *Kerryman* 9 April 1966

<sup>45</sup> *Kerryman* 12 Jan 1918

<sup>46</sup> Author correspondence with Mrs Norah O'Sullivan, daughter of Martin Collins, 20 Jan 2016

