

RGINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 860

Witness

Mrs. Elizabeth MacGinley,  
(nee Brennan)  
Lisín,  
Finglas Bridge,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Secretary to

- (i) Art O'Briain, London, 1918-1921;
- (ii) Arthur Griffith, 1921 - .

Subject.

Art O'Briain and  
the Irish Delegation in London, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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# ORIGINAL

S T A T E M E N T

W S 860

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 860

by

Mrs. Elizabeth MacGinley (Lily Brennan),  
Lisín, Finglas Bridge,  
Dublin.

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I went to London about 1918 to an advertising firm to train for about two years. While there I was in the Gaelic League Central Branch which was in the neighbourhood of Blackfriars Bridge. I was also in a Sinn Féin Club near St. Paul's and in the Self-Determination League which generally met at the Gaelic League Headquarters. The same people were members of all three organisations, except that there were very few members in the Sinn Féin Club. In this way I got to know most of the prominent people in the Independence Movement in London.

About two to two and half years after I arrived in London Mrs. Eady, a sister of Seán Connolly who was killed at the gate of the Castle yard at the very beginning of the Rising, came and asked me would I undertake the work of Secretary to Art Ó'Briain. This meant resigning my position with the advertising firm of Bensons. I did not hesitate and I entered Art Ó'Briain's office in the house of Mrs. Newman, Roger Casement's sister in South Kensington. The British Home Secretary lived opposite her. I was supposed to come to that house every day by a different route. I think we worked about six months there. We then moved to the house of Mr. McDonnell, solicitor, who acted for the Self-Determination League. He lived in Battersea. Mr. McDonnell was called upon whenever anyone was

arrested for political offences and he took all the necessary steps in their interest.

Art's offices were chiefly a link in England for anybody in the movement who came to London on political business. Sam Maguire, who was the keyman in England for the purchase of arms for the Republican Army headquarters here, reported daily in person to the office. It was to him that the couriers from the various Republican government departments in Ireland reported. He was at Euston Station every morning to meet the couriers before he went to his own office. He was a Post Office employee and knew Michael Collins very well. It was he who moulded him and initiated him into the whole idea of military republicanism. He was a wonderful man. I don't think he took five minutes of the twenty-four hours for himself. He spent it all working in some way for Ireland. He was from West Cork somewhere near the Skibbereen area. He was a Protestant. Although I worked with him over a period of a couple of years I did not know that. He was transferred to Ireland after the Treaty and worked in the Post Office in the Castle. He was a devotee of Michael Collins and always dealt directly with him. He had a tragic close to his career. I think it was on the 11th November, 1923, I met him coming out from his job in the Castle and the whole city was decorated with Union Jacks. He said "Isn't this a dreadful sight. This is the result of all our hard work and sacrifices. This is the last time this will happen, I guarantee. This is not what the people who signed the Treaty intended. The Treaty is not being worked the way they expected. When I have a talk with the boys we'll see that the Treaty is properly enforced." He evidently got in touch with the group in the Army who were dissatisfied with the way

things were going and who afterwards mutinied. Sam told me that Kevin O'Higgins was informed of all this sort of work that was going on by a member of the Department of Defence who was placed there for the purpose. Sam was dismissed from his job and was left completely without resources. I heard at the time from the O'Kennedys of Lindsay Road that P. S. O'Hegarty, who was Secretary of the Post Office, told him to ignore the dismissal notice and come back to his job. He refused and for the remainder of his life he lived with the O'Kennedy family, who supported him and provided him with all his requirements until a few months before his death. It was then I discovered he was a Protestant. He went home to his relations to die. On his transfer he had refused the promotion to a higher position that Michael Collins had offered him. He always remained in the background, even at the social events, during the Treaty negotiations, although he held all the reins of the whole movement in England in his hand.

An occasional visitor to Art's office was Seán McGrath who was Secretary to the Self-Determination League. Seán's wife was a courier. She did not deliver her despatches to the office but to Sam Maguire who met her somewhere. Seán was a wonderful worker and organiser. He never spared himself. It took a very enthusiastic person to keep together that scattered organisation and he succeeded in rallying the various members whenever a public demonstration was needed. He worked indefatigably for the prisoners held in the various gaols. He made sure to publish and have remedied any of the prisoners' grievances. He, too, had a job to keep during the day at that time, so that his work for the Self-Determination League was done entirely in the evenings. C.B. Dutton was another quiet worker who ran the office in Adam Street off the Strand, which was the recognised

office of the Dáil Éireann representative. Of course Art Ó'Briain could not appear there because he was on the run and that is why he had a private office which was known to very few and which was where I worked. Fintan Murphy also used to work in the office in Adam Street.

The time Art moved his office from South Kensington to McDonnell's I must have been tracked by the police because they called at my digs in Westbourne Grove to make inquiries about me, because I got notice to leave immediately. Of course it is possible that my attendance at the Gaelic League was responsible for the attentions of the police.

It was on me that most of the work connected with the World Conference of the Irish Race in Paris fell. We were in correspondence with practically every Irish organisation throughout the whole world. Evidently it was not found possible either for censorship reasons or through stress of other work to organise the affair from Dublin. We started it in the early Spring of 1921. I know nothing of how it turned out eventually because I had resigned my position with Art Ó'Briain immediately after the Treaty was signed. Art was a very difficult person and had a very different outlook from that of the people who were working for the cause in Ireland. He was more concerned with the official dignity attached to his position than with the national cause. I had many examples of this. When De Valera came over in July, 1921, for the meeting with Lloyd George he stayed in an upper suite at the Victoria Hotel. After the departure of the delegation, Art moved from the official offices in Victoria Square into the suite in that hotel that the King of the

Belgians usually occupied, although he had living quarters in the office in Victoria Square. He never left the Hotel until after the Treaty was signed. This struck me as being very much at variance with the sacrifices and privations that many of the Ministers were enduring at the time in Ireland. In fact, it struck me as an unjustifiable waste of Dáil funds, which I knew to be very scarce. Similarly, when the second delegation came over he arranged for two expensive cars to remain constantly at the hotel door, ticking away, in case they would be required. When this was discovered by the Treasurers of the delegation, it was instantly stopped. He was constantly applying under various headings for increases in salary and expenses. It did not seem to me that the reasons put forward by him were well founded.

The tension between Art and the second delegation was apparent from the time of their arrival. He was still at the Victoria. I know that he attended the introductory meeting between the two sides, but I also know that he was dropped from all subsequent discussions of importance. I would say that it was evident to the delegates that he would want to dictate to them. Their attitude towards him and their clear determination not to include him as a participator in any of the discussions enraged him. I would not hesitate to say that if he had been included in the negotiations he would have raised no objection to approving of the Treaty. During the course of the negotiations he was active in intriguing against the proposed articles of the Treaty. I know that Mary McSwiney spent several hours with him and I would imagine that he had poisoned her mind against it. Seán T. O'Kelly

also called upon him on his way home from Paris and no doubt Art presented his point of view about the Treaty to him. When the terms of the Treaty had been accepted Mick Collins called at Art's office in Victoria Hotel to show them to him. I don't know what was Art's reaction because I did not see him again. I had made up my mind some time before that to resign. The immediate cause of my hurried resignation was a row I had with him.

Art had arranged for two couriers to be in constant attendance on him at the Victoria Hotel. One of them was a young London-Irish chap of about sixteen called Paddy. I don't remember his surname. He never left his post until Art dismissed him at the end of the day. Most days he got no time off for meals. I went out to lunch and had tea sent up to me by the hotel which was, of course, included in the 'expenses'. One afternoon I took pity on Paddy who had not had a meal all day and asked the waiter to bring a cup for him. While we were having our tea Art opened the door of the office and, seeing Paddy drinking tea, he said angrily to me "Who gave you authority to order tea here at my expense for this messenger?" I lost my temper and told him that it was not at his expense and reminded him of the many friends and relatives he had entertained sumptuously at the expense of Dáil Éireann. As he continued to abuse me, I took the tea-tray and threw it at him. The contents were spilled all over the floor but he wasn't touched, because Paddy made an effort to prevent me from throwing the tray at him.

Long before the Treaty negotiations, as early as October, 1920, when Terence McSwiney lay dying, Eamonn

Duggan, who was afterwards one of the delegates, had reason to form an unfavourable impression of Art and of his value as an Ambassador. When he arrived in London, having been sent over by Dáil Éireann, he had difficulty in locating Mrs. McSwiney. He wanted to interview her and gave her the necessary legal advice in connection with the inquest that would inevitably follow her husband's death. After some difficulty he eventually found her at the Jermyn Court Hotel where Art Ó'Briain was giving a hectic birthday party where the champagne flowed. He was disgusted at what he saw. He afterwards told me that he had the greatest difficulty in drilling her in the proper line she had to take in answering the questions that would be put to her. He said she was too much under the influence of Art at this time when it was important for her and for Ireland that she should maintain her dignity before the world.

I was not closely connected in any way with the delegates or their followers. I got a couple of invitations to parties in Hans Place which they gave for the benefit of their own group. Art was invited to these, too. To the best of my knowledge nobody else but those who accompanied the delegation were present on those occasions. They did not entertain any English people nor even the members of the Irish organisations in London. I have heard it said that there was a lot of drinking at Hans Place and Grosvenor House. Certainly on none of the occasions that I was present at Hans Place did I see anything of that. I never remember having seen Childers or Barton at any of these social functions.

I came back to Ireland almost directly after the Treaty was signed and became Secretary to Arthur Griffith.



I was already in touch with him in London. I rang up Hans Place after the row with Art Ó'Briain and I heard that Griffith said at once, "She is in trouble with Art Ó'Briain". Griffith was a very astute man and he had seen during the first negotiations in July what sort of a man Art Ó'Briain was and that he would not be pleasant or easy to work with. After my phone call he sent me word by Dan McCarthy that I was to hang on until the negotiations were over and he would look after me. I had not met him at all before July.

When the delegates were leaving after signing the Treaty, I was instructed to follow them to Ireland. I went to work shortly after arriving in Dublin, that is, in the beginning of January. Arthur's office was in the Billiard Room in the Mansion House. Rory O'Connor had his office for a while in the other end of the Billiard Room, in a space which was screened off. I think De Valera must have vacated his Mansion House office when he yielded the Presidency of the Cabinet to Griffith. We stayed there until the Civil War broke out.

The only clear recollection I have of any feeling shown by Griffith was when Collins agreed to the Pact election. Griffith was totally against it and I was present when he tried to prevail on Michael Collins to abandon the idea. But Collins had given his word and believed the arrangement would be successful and would bring about a reconciliation between the parties. Therefore, in spite of his eloquent pleading Griffith failed to divert Collins from his purposes. I was not present at any other discussion on the question of the Pact election so I do not know what other influence, if any, was brought to bear on Michael Collins.

I did not, of course, attend any of the Cabinet

meetings held during this period. Colm Ó'Murchadha seemed to be acting as Secretary to the Cabinet at the time. He was a lot around the Mansion House.

The political situation in Ireland after the Treaty was, of course, a source of great worry to Griffith. His silences were the most expressive evidence of it. I rarely heard him discuss the situation with anybody. Mick Collins very seldom came to see him and the only discussion between them that I listened to was the one on the Pact election that I have mentioned already. There were always a lot of men in and out to see him, but nothing of any importance was ever discussed, at least while I was present. He wrote a considerable amount and when he was worked up about anything he would dash off pages and pages of material which he published mostly in Nationality. I am giving the Bureau a pencil draft of part of one of these articles. I had three or four others but I gave them away to various people who were anxious to have them. I never heard him, as far as my recollection goes, discuss the situation created by the outbreak of the Civil War or the attack on the Four Courts.

I was in the Mansion House waiting for him to come to the office on the morning I heard of his death. He had been in Vincent's Nursing Home for a few days before. He had written me a note instructing me to get together some papers that he had about Erskine Childers. Some of these were extracts from Childers' earlier writings. I think his intention was to publish them. Previously he had given me a bundle of stuff on the subject, which I had filed and put away and now he evidently intended to use them. His purpose would have been to show from Childers' earlier writings what a good Englishman he was and to endeavour to prove that he was still working in the

interest of England. Griffith had an insane hatred of Childers and never could believe that he was a true convert to the Irish cause. I had got ready the papers which I had already typed when the news came in that he was dead. I never knew what became of those papers afterwards. I was very upset at this news because I was fond of Griffith. My feeling was changed to indignation by a remark of Colm Ó'Murchadha who came into the office. "It is the best thing that ever happened. There won't be any more trouble now as to who will be President. Mick Collins is the man for that job."

Signature

*Elizabeth McGinley*  
 (Elizabeth McGinley)

Date

*11<sup>th</sup> June 1953.*

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Witness

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