

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 897

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 897

Witness

Patrick Sarsfield (P.S.) O'Hegarty,
Highfield House,
Highfield Road,
Rathgar,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Supreme Council of I.R.B., 1910 - ;
Secretary, Department of Posts and Telegraphs,
1922-1944.

Subject.

Shooting of Sir Henry Wilson in London,
22nd June, 1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

File No. S.49

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

The Shooting of Sir Henry Wilson

When Sir Henry Wilson was shot, on 22nd June, 1922, the atmosphere here was so tense with our local troubles that very little attention was paid to it. I thought it was either one of the "groups" who wanted to "bring the British back", in the foolish hope that that would solve our own difficulties, or else a Belfast group created by the propagandists there. But when, in the course of a week, every group here who might conceivably have been responsible had categorically repudiated it, I was puzzled. I wondered whether it might have been a strictly London affair. And I resolved to myself that when I saw Sam Maguire I would ask him: "Sam, who knew?", I said to myself.

Sam was - London Sother. He and his two brothers, Dick and Jack, ^{also Sother} were amongst the foremost workers in London in the S.A.A. and in the I.R.B. They did not head the Gaelic League in Sinn Féin. Sam had been Secretary to the Divisional Executive of the I.R.B. from the time I joined it, and I felt fairly certain - though I had not seen him for years - that after Dick Connolly's leaving London in 1918 Sam would have been the main force in the I.R.B.

The three brothers

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was a phenomenon. They were from Drummanaway, were Protestants, and Nationalists, i.e. they were not devotees of Nationalism but, like Romey, they were "fishmen since they were born". The two brothers died in London of consumption, and it also killed Sam after he came home.

Some time late in 1922 it was conveyed to me that it would be a good thing to transfer Sam to Dublin. There were then a number of vacancies in the Dublin Sorting Office, due to men who preferred to go to England, and there were of course large numbers of applicants from the other side. The general arrangements had not been settled, but I arranged for Sam's transfer specially, and I heard afterwards that the Bishop was looking for him a week after he left. But it was sometime in 1923, when he was working as an acting clerical officer in my office, that I got an opportunity to speak to him about the Limerick business.

He had come in to see me about something official in connection with his transfer, and when that had been disposed of, I said to him

"Sam, do you know anything about the Limerick business?"

(3)
He said

"What do you want to know about?"

I said

"Who did it?"

He said

"He did it."

That made me stiffen up in horrified
incredulity. Saw as I worked in the closest
annuaries for 1903 to 1913, and he spoke the
same language. When he said "he" I took
him to mean the PRB. I said

"Surely to God there were authorized
that?"

He was silent for a minute and then
he said

"Collins knew about it."

I pressed him. I said

"Did he authorize it?"

He would not say that, but he repeated

"He knew about it."

and nothing else could he say.

I had to leave it like that, but
I said to myself that some time later I
would come back on it. But I got
no other opportunity. Saw was dismissed

(18)

from the PO for complicity in the Army Meeting - I was out of Dublin on official business at the time so that I was spared having to convey it to him - and the very time I saw him after that ~~was~~ was when I asked the Government to reconsider this decision in the light of his lifetime of work for the Cause and, before I did so, asked him about the charge. He assured me most solemnly that he had been in association with the mechanicians but only trying to prevent them from going ahead with their plans. After the decision was confirmed he left Dublin and I never saw him again.

Then I thought me of Ben Kennedy. Ben was a member of the Organisation, a member of the Intelligence Section inside the PO which did such good work, in touch with Mick, and a great friend of Sam's. I knew that Sam used to stay with him whenever he was in Dublin, and that he had stayed with him, after his decision, until he went home. He was a clerical officer now in my own office and one day that he came to me on some official business, I asked him about the Loran affair.

I told him exactly what Sam had said to me, and asked him whether he knew anything that could explain Sam's refusal to say that Mick "authorized" it with his equally emphatic statement that Mick "knew" about it.

After some pressure, he said to me

"I can tell you what happened, but only for your own private information. You must promise me neither to print it nor use it"

I gave the required promise, and he said

"For a long time Sam was used to short-
hairs, because of the Belfast Post, and
every time he came over he would come
for authority and Mick invariably refused.
But Sam persisted. The last time he
saw him they had high words about
it and Mick lost his temper and
flared up and said 'God bless you, get
away to hell out of that and
don't bother me and do, whatever
you like' Sam left him without
a word and, although he was in Dublin
several times afterwards he never went
near Mick again. When the thing
happened Mick was in an awful state"

This, I thought to ask Kennedy to allow me to record his statement to me but, on enquiry, I found he died in February 1952, so that I feel I should put the statement on record now.

Sam's own statement to me is ~~proof of one~~
 thing, that it was he who carried it out.
 Kennedy's further statement explains what puzzled me
 about Sam's statement, and makes the tragical
 sequence entirely credible. Anybody who saw
 Mike in the late Spring and early Summer of 1922,
 tired out, irritable, overwhelmed with work
 and responsibility, some new worry every day,
 and all the time brooding over the taunts that
 were freely thrown at him of being a traitor and
 so on (he was extremely sensitive on that point)
 can see the thing happening just as Kennedy
 described it. I believe that what I have
 recorded does constitute the truth about this
 wretched business. It does not, it cannot,
 remove from Mike the responsibility for it,
 but it does explain it. It is a sort of
 Greek Tragedy.

I have seen it stated that Sam
 was "of Britain". I don't believe that at all.
 He was almost certainly the head of the London I.R.B.,
 and would have been instructed to keep out
 of publicity as strict to his own job, which
 was vital. I believe that Dunne and
 O'Mullivan acted under his instructions as
 members of the Organization, and not as members
 of the Irish Volunteers.

J. S. H. G. J. G.
 16 Oct 53

STATEMENT BY P.S. O'HEGARTY
Highfield House, Highfield Road, Rathgar, Dublin.

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The Shooting Of Sir Henry Wilson.

When Sir Henry Wilson was shot, on 22nd June, 1922, the atmosphere here was so tense with our local troubles that very little attention was paid to it. I thought it was either one of the groups who wanted to "bring the British back", in the foolish hope that that would solve our own dissensions, or else a Belfast group crazed by the pogroms there. But when, in the course of a week, every group here who might conceivably have been responsible had categorically repudiated it, I was puzzled. I wondered whether it might have been a strictly London affair, and I resolved to myself that, when I saw Sam Maguire, I would ask him. "Sam will know", I said to myself.

Sam was a London Sorter. He and his two brothers, Dick and Jack, - also Sorters - were amongst the foremost workers in London in the G.A.A. and in the I.R.B. They did not touch the Gaelic League or Sinn Féin. Sam had been Secretary to the Divisional Executive of the I.R.B. from the time I joined it, and I felt fairly certain - though I had not seen him for years - that, after Dick Connolly's leaving London in 1918, Sam would have been the main force in the I.R.B. The three brothers were a phenomenon. They were from Dunmanway, were Protestants, and Nationalists, i.e., they were not converts to nationalism but, like Rooney, they were "Irishmen since they were born". The two brothers died in London of consumption, and it also

killed Sam after he came home.

Some time later in 1922 it was conveyed to me that it would be a good thing to transfer Sam to Dublin. There were then a number of vacancies in the Dublin Sorting Office, due to men who preferred to go to England, and there were, of course, large numbers of applicants from the other side. The general arrangements had not been settled, but I arranged for Sam's transfer specially, and I heard afterwards that the British were looking for him a week after he left. But it was sometime in 1923, when he was working as an acting Clerical Officer in my own office, that I got an opportunity to speak to him about the Wilson business.

He had come in to see me about something official in connection with his transfer and, when that had been disposed of, I said to him -

"Sam, do you know anything about the Wilson business?"

He said -

"What do you want to know about it?"

I said -

"Who did it?"

He said -

"We did it."

That made me stiffen up in horrified incredulity. Sam and I worked in the closest association from 1903 to 1913, and we spoke the same language. When he said "we", I took him to mean the I.R.B. I said -

"Surely to God, Mick never authorized that?"

He was silent for a minute and then he said -

"Collins knew about it."

I pressed him. I said -

"Did he authorize it?"

He would not say that, but he repeated -

"He knew about it." -

and nothing else would he say.

I had to leave it like that, but I said to myself that some time later I would come back on it. But I got no other opportunity. Sam was dismissed from the P.O. for complicity in the Army Mutiny - I was out of Dublin on official business at the time so that I was spared having to convey it to him - and the only time I saw him after that was when I asked the Government to reconsider his dismissal in the light of his lifetime of work for the Cause and, before I did so, asked him about the charge. He assured me most solemnly that he had been in association with the mutineers but only trying to prevent them from going ahead with their plans. After the dismissal was confirmed, he left Dublin and I never saw him again.

Then I bethought me of Ben Kennedy. Ben was a member of the Organisation, a member of the Intelligence Section inside the P.O. which did such good work, in touch with Mick, and a great friend of Sam's. I knew that Sam used to stay with him whenever he was in Dublin, and that he had stayed with him, after his

dismissal, until he went home. He was a Clerical Officer now in my own office and one day that he came to me on some official business I asked him about the Wilson affair.

I told him exactly what Sam had said to me, and asked him whether he knew anything that would reconcile Sam's refusal to say that Mick "authorized" it with his equally emphatic statement that Mick "knew" about it.

After some pressure, he said to me -

"I can tell you what happened, but only for your own private information. You must promise me neither to print it nor use it."

I gave the required promise, and he said -

"For a long time Sam was mad to shoot Wilson, because of the Belfast pogroms, and every time he came over he pressed Mick for authority and Mick invariably refused. But Sam persisted. The last time he saw him they had high words about it and Mick lost his temper and flared up and said, 'God blast you! Get away to hell out of that and don't bother me, and do whatever you like!'. Sam left him without a word and, although he was in Dublin several times afterwards, he never went near Mick again. When the thing happened, Mick was in an awful state."

Recently, owing to the current correspondence in the papers about this, I thought to ask Kennedy to allow me to record his statement to me but, on enquiry, I found he died in February, 1952, so that I feel I should put the statement on record now.

Sam's own statement to me is proof of one thing, that it was he who carried it out. Kennedy's further statement explains what puzzled me about Sam's statement, and makes the tragical sequence entirely credible. Anybody who saw Mick in the late Spring and early Summer of 1922, tired out, irritable, overburthened with work and responsibility, some new worry every day, and all the time brooding over the taunts that were freely thrown at him of being a traitor and so on (he was extremely sensitive on that point) can see the thing happening just as Kennedy described it. I believe that what I have recorded does constitute the truth about this wretched business. It does not, it cannot, remove from Mick the responsibility for it, but it does explain it. It is a sort of Greek tragedy.

I have seen it stated that Sam was "O.C., Britain". I don't believe that at all. He was almost certainly the head of the London I.R.B. and would have been instructed to keep out of publicity and stick to his own job, which was vital. I believe that Dunne and O'Sullivan acted under his instructions as members of the Organization, and not as members of the Irish Volunteers.

SIGNED: P.S. O'HEGARTY

DATE: 16th October, 1953.

