

W. S. 1,083

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1083

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,083.....

Witness

Stephen Scally,
Cloonfree,
Strokestown,
Co. Roscommon.

Identity.

Member of Cloonfree Company
3rd Battalion, North Roscommon
Brigade, 1920.

Subject.

Attempt to burn the Bridewell Prison,
Strokestown, July 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2359.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

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BURO STAIRE MILITAIRA 1910-21
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STATEMENT BY MR. STEPHEN SCALLY

Cloonfree, Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.

Mr. Mullooly of Kiltrustan has asked me to record my experiences of the attempt to burn down the Bridewell at Strokestown and I agreed to do so.

Towards the end of 1916 and early in 1917, Cloonfree Coy. 3rd Battalion, North Roscommon Brigade, consisted of 15 members of the I.R.B. who met and drilled secretly with such weapons as they had - a few shotguns and even sticks. Drilling, dodging the R.I.C. and helping at elections were the only activities up to 1920.

In July 1920 Lieutenant John Hunt received a dispatch from Strokestown with orders for J. Company, Cloonfree, to burn down the Bridewell at the rear of Strokestown Courthouse which was about to be occupied by British Crown forces. He at once left his work and took the dispatch to Company Captain Peter Flanagan, who came to me with orders to go to Strokestown and make all the necessary arrangements to carry out the job that night.

As I had been working in the town previous to that I was familiar with the place and the easiest way to get in. I, accordingly, made contact with Tom Shevlin (who was in charge during the absence of Seamus Ryan, the Brigade O/C.) and was told that petrol and paraffin would be left for us at the back of Brennan's garage, which adjoined the Courthouse. The Brennans were going away for the night so that they might not be charged with complicity.

When night came, Captain P. Flanagan, Lieutenant J. Hunt, Tom Dolan and I met and went on foot to

Strokestown and met M.R. O'Connor (present Court Clerk), Frank Treacy (since dead) and Jimmie Beirne. By this time it had begun to rain heavily and we were all travelling light. I don't think any of us had an overcoat and so we were soon soaked to the skin. This was rather uncomfortable at the time but later was to save the lives of some of us.

The Bridewell was surrounded by a wall about nine feet high, so we commandeered a ladder to get over. Jimmie Beirne, Tom Dolan and Frank Treacy were posted outside to give warning of the approach of the R.I.C., who were patrolling the town in strength. Jimmie Beirne busied himself stuffing pebbles into the locks of the outer doors to prevent surprise. The other four of us were to carry out the burning.

Having found the petrol and oil as arranged we got armfuls of hay from a nearby rick and three of us sat on the top of the wall and took up the "ammunition" from the fourth, and we then put the ladder across and down on the other side so that we could get out again. With a short crowbar, which we had taken with us, we forced the door and we thought the noise we made could be heard a mile off. We then had a look round by the light of the stump of a candle and saw that the place was practically non inflammable.

There were stone staircases and arched ceilings which supported the upper floors of flag-stones. Someone said that it could not be burned, and another said "If we don't do something no one will believe that we were here at all". The youths of 1920 were not so familiar with petrol as the youths of to-day - in fact

some of us had never seen it before. We set to work, however, and piled hay against the doors and gave it a liberal soaking with paraffin and petrol, with never a thought of such a thing as evaporation.

Those outside were told that we were ready to set fire so that they could be gone away. Through some mischance the whole thing went off prematurely with a loud explosion, and we four were trapped in the flames and severely burned before we could get out, only our wet clothes saving us from being roasted. We got out under our own "steam" and some of us collapsed afterwards and had to be carried on stretchers to medical aid and safety.

John Hunt has checked this over for me and the foregoing are the truthful details as far as we can remember

Signed: Stephen Scally
(Stephen Scally)

Date: 2-2-55

Witness: Matthew Barry
(Investigator)
(Matthew Barry)

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BURO STAIRE MILITAIRE
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