

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 475

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 475

Witness

Mrs. Julia A. O'Donovan,
10 Garville Avenue,
Rathgar, Dublin.

Identity

Close friend of Michael Collins

Subject

Meetings held in her home
by Michael Collins and his colleagues, 1920.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S. 327

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

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

No. W.S. 475

Statement of Mrs. Julia O'Donovan,
10 Garville Avenue, Rathgar, Dublin.

I lived in 16 Airfield Road, Rathgar, and on the 1st January, 1920, Mick Collins came to the house. It was through Gearóid O'Sullivan who was my cousin that I first made Mick's acquaintance. I had previously left a key for him at Mrs. O'Keefe's in Camden Street. He said he had arranged to meet Gearóid O'Sullivan who was to bring him to the house, but Gearóid had not turned up. He could not, he said, remember my address, so he had to look up the Dáil Loan list to find it. He knew I had subscribed £10 to the loan for which, incidently, I have the receipt. I should also mention that, some short time after, he deposited £4,000 of Loan money in the Munster and Leinster Bank in my name, and I still have a notification from Mick with a personal note at the end informing me that he had withdrawn the money and thanking me for my co-operation. I'll look it up and lend it to the Bureau to have it copied.

Mick and Gearoid stayed with us that time for a month or more. They were both in great anxiety about Barton's arrest which took place then. We were startled one night about 12 o'clock, in February 1920, by a knock at the door. Gearóid opened it and found Tom Cullen who had brought some very important Castle documents which probably had been procured by one or other of their agents at the Castle. When the knock came Gearóid and Mick had been going through Dáil Loan papers - I think from Sligo - and hearing the knock they thought it was a raid and they burned the papers. Unfortunately, although I knew that the Castle documents contained important information and learned afterwards what it was, I cannot now remember it.

/Shortly

Shortly after that they left the house but they came back to lunch every Sunday without exception until the Truce. Usually they brought somebody with them, but very often the people came early and waited for them. During this time guns were sent in egg-cases to the house or to our shop in Rathgar Road. I remember one such parcel came from Tom Hales from Cork and another from Neil Kerr. I also had a shop in Mespil Road which was a covering address for Volunteer letters. It was raided one Sunday morning but fortunately no letters were there.

One day we got several 'phone messages from an apparently friendly official at Kingsbridge to go up there at once, that six boxes of butter had arrived and that one of them was broken. In the last message the official said he could not trust the man that was coming on later, so we guessed what the boxes contained as we would not normally get less than forty boxes of butter at that time of the year. We did not know what to do and my daughter, Eileen, aged fourteen, set out to get in touch with Mick or Gearóid. She knew that Gearóid went under the name of George Doyle and had his office in Eustace Street. She succeeded in locating him, to his great consternation, and told him about the butter boxes. He said he would have them collected, but as nothing was done and we got another urgent call my daughter went to Vaughan's Hotel but failed to find him or Mick. Then I sent my vanman and my son, aged twelve or thirteen, to Kingsbridge to collect the broken butter box - the Railway had delivered the other five in the meantime. The box was filled with bomb cases sent - I think - by either Neil Kerr or Tom Hales, and I kept it in the stable where I had the pony until the following day when Tom Cullen came to collect it. This incident took place on the day, 30th July, 1920, that Frank Brooke, an important official of the Dublin

/South

South-Eastern Railway, was killed at Westland Row.

One Sunday when Dick Mulcahy and 'Ginger' O'Connell were at my house waiting for Mick, Stephen O'Mara, Mayor of Limerick, and his wife came to see Mick. Unfortunately, I turned him in to Dick who was furious at O'Mara having the address where Mick could be located. When Mick came, he too was angry; in fact it was the only time I ever saw him in a temper. They transacted their business and Stephen O'Mara, who was on his way to America, went away. When he came to the house then he presented a card of introduction - which I still have - from Mrs. O'Donovan of Limerick, my brother-in-law's wife. who was then Acting Mayor during the absence of Stephen O'Mara in America.

One night in the autumn of 1920 - my daughter thinks it was the night Seán Tracy was killed, 14th October - I came home and was told by her that a messenger - probably Joe O'Reilly - called to ask permission for a meeting to be held that evening in the house. She gave permission and placed the usual refreshments in the drawing-room. She was rather indignant to find that one of those at the meeting - Frank Thornton or Tom Cullen - sent out for more refreshments. She had not expected so many visitors to come. She does not remember whether Gearóid or Mick were there or how many visitors came as she only let in about the first half-dozen, some of whom were strangers to her. Frank Thornton or Tom Cullen let in all the others. We heard afterwards that Brody of the Detective Branch was there and that he brought a lot of others. The meeting, which lasted a couple of hours, was over when I returned from the Opera. We never knew what the meeting was about. We always refrained from showing any curiosity in such matters.

/From

From time to time most of the prominent Volunteers in Dublin and County Cork came to our house which Mick had made a rendezvous for such meetings. Dick McKee dined with us on the Sunday before he was arrested. Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Fionán Lynch, Eoin O'Duffy, Sam Maguire and Neil Kerr came often. Kevin O'Higgins, Dick Barrett, Charley Hurley, Liam Deasy, Tom Barry and many others came. Cathal Brugha never came.

One of the most interesting episodes that I remember concerning Mick occurred on Christmas Eve 1920. That was the day De Valera returned to Ireland from America. Mick, who was staying in the house, left at 6 in the morning to walk to the boat to meet him - I think at the North Wall. He told us afterwards he picked up a policeman who walked part of the way with him. He took De Valera to where he was to stay. Later that evening he and some others, including Rory O'Connor, Tom Cullen and Liam Tobin, went to the Gresham Hotel to have a meal. While they were at table the Auxiliaries raided the premises - to look for Mick. The Auxiliaries went straight to the table at which he was seated and one of them drew a photo out of his pocket, looked at it and said, "You are Michael Collins". Mick said, "No, I am John (or Joe) Grace from Craig, Gardners" and produced papers from his pocket to confirm his statement. He must have convinced them because the Auxiliaries left the hotel without arresting him or any of the others. When he came back that evening he told me all about his lucky escape which I think he must have been celebrating, for that was the only occasion I saw he had intoxicating drink taken. I never saw him take anything except occasionally a glass of Sherry with his lunch.

I have a distinct recollection of Mick Collins's excitement at the time Archbishop Clune was over in connection with the Peace negotiations. He did not usually talk about his business to us - in fact he was very close; but that time he was bubbling over with the excitement which he could not keep altogether to himself. He was making a lot of jokes about the matter such as, "I must be in the state of grace now that I am going to see his Grace", but at the same time I could see that he was very serious about it. He went to see him on a Sunday to a house in Merrion Square - probably Dr. Farnan's. He was very wroth with Father O'Flanagan for sending about that time the wire to Lloyd George. He said, "That ruins things for us," and he was not surprised when the negotiations broke down.

Our shop in Rathgar Road was raided on Saturday night about 12 o'clock. There was nobody there and the Auxiliaries and Military, who came in an armoured car, entered through the fanlight of the shop next door. The owners of that shop lived over our premises and they sent the Auxiliaries - who found nothing there to incriminate us - to our private house. Their inquiries did not concern Mick Collins but somebody called Donovan - we concluded it was Dan Donovan who, at the time, was working in Austin Stack's office which had been raided. Our name being Donovan they may have thought he was a relative. The raiders were very courteous: they did not go through the whole house. My brother, Patrick Barry, who was 'on the run', was in bed, and they asked him his name, which he gave; but it evidently meant nothing to them; so they departed.

I cannot remember any other incident that would be of interest. I consider that we were very lucky to have escaped so well that nobody was caught in the house. I often felt very nervous when there was a number of important people at a meeting here.

Name: Julia A. O'Donovan

Date: 15/2/51

Witness: St. Ciarán

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

No. W.S. 475