

## Conor Lehihan probes *'Anatomy of a Lie'* by Paul R Hyde

**S**ir Roger Casement was an icon for the British Empire in the Edwardian age. His two peripatetic reports on degradation of natives and exploitation in the Congo and the Amazon were truly ground-breaking in the evolution of human rights. They were also a solace for British people who had seen the imperial project discredited by the instigation of 'Concentration Camps' in the Second Boer War in South Africa.

Knighthed in 1911, Dublin-born Casement

began to become more sympathetic to Irish nationalism due to his disenchantment with colonialism and a growing love for the Irish language. Significantly he never bothered to open the box containing the CMG that had come with his knighthood. He joined the Irish Volunteers and became a member of its national committee. He helped organise the Howth gun run and found a friend to part finance it. He later travelled to Germany, now at war with England, to enlist German support for a rebellion in Ireland.

Before this he had been in the USA to discuss his mission to Germany with Irish-American Fenians like John Devoy.

Casement was caught landing arms at Banna Bay in Kerry and put on trial in London for treason.

In an effort to discredit Casement, British officials claimed that he kept what became known as the 'black diaries' for the years 1903, 1910 and 1911, now kept in the public archive in Kew (London). They depict Casement as a homosexual who had many partners, had a fondness for young men and mostly paid for sex.

The surreptitious campaign by the intelligence services was to frame

Sir Roger as a moral degenerate who was owed no debt of sympathy for his earlier work on behalf of the Empire. Little difference was attached to the fundamental difference

between homosexuality and paedophilia. Of course prejudice persists to this day: it was revealing the online vituperation that greeted the advertisement in June 2023 by Kilmainham Gaol of 'Pride Month Queer History tours of the Gaol', much of it presumably from so-called republicans. The specific goal of the British establishment was to taint Casement to deny him a pardon from the death sentence in his trial for Treason in 1916.

In his book, 'Anatomy of a Lie', Paul R Hyde shows that a British diplomat in Oslo fabricated a hasty report hinting that Casement enjoyed an "unnatural" relationship with his manservant. Hyde demonstrates through intense interrogation of the British documents the utter falsity of the original allegation. Furthermore he discredits the effort by two Scotland Yard detectives to beef up the original Oslo allegation and gather reliable evidence which none of the possible witnesses were prepared to sign.

Key figures from politics, the clergy, journalism and the administration were shown concocted details of Casement's predatory sexuality allegedly culled from an actual diary that was forged from his own disparate notebooks and writings.

Typed-up versions of the black diaries were circulated as the actual handwritten forged diaries had not yet been copied onto paper. The actual forged physical diaries were only produced after the smear campaign.

The sheer detail of Hyde's exegesis is impressive and reveals, point-by-point, the contradictions, factual errors and shoddy work the intelligence officers and policemen perpetrated in their effort to fit the spurious sexual allegations into the broader narrative of Casement's day-to-day routine.

Casement's supporters have maintained his innocence. It has become an article of faith, particularly among supportive nationalists that the forged diaries maliciously rigged-out a weakness for sex with young men, paedophila; but that he was nevertheless homosexual.

However, Hyde makes the point that none of the British and American surveillance threw up evidence of homosexual acts by Casement. In fairness to Hyde he chooses not to enter into the debate about Casement's sexuality but rather puts all his energy into proving that the black diaries are forgeries.

Jeffrey Dudgeon, himself a distinguished gay-rights campaigner who published an edition of the diaries has also been cautious but in the end definitive. Noting that there is an absence of any evidence of heterosexual activity on the part of Casement, he has claimed: "His homosexual life was almost entirely out of sight and disconnected from his career and political work".

For this author there is no evidence of

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When Casement heard of the rumours, he virulently denied they were in any way true; none of his close friends and colleagues ever apparently believed he was homosexual; and in the US and in Germany he was under intense surveillance yet allegations about his sexuality were never levelled

homosexuality. For a start when Casement heard of the rumours being circulated about him during his trial he virulently denied there was any truth whatsoever to them. None of his close friends, including those that had worked with him as a professional, ever claimed before his execution or afterwards that they believed he was homosexual. Both in the USA and in Germany he was under intense surveillance. In the USA both the Fenians and British intelligence kept a close eye on his activities. The Germans and the Fenians both shared suspicions that Casement with his impeccable establishment credentials might have been sent by the British to infiltrate them. No allegations about his sexuality were ever levelled.

Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive! . Inference rather than proof may continue to dominate the controversy surrounding Casement's sexuality and it has taken over one hundred years to disentangle the story to the point of informed and probable speculation.

Scholarly writers and academic authors for many years accepted the authenticity of these forged diaries. However this, as Hyde points out, should not surprise anyone. Significant historians and hand-writing experts were all fooled by the famous Hitler diaries, with the elaborate hoax completed in a period of two years. The forgers of the Casement diaries did not have as much work to complete. The actual completion of the false narrative in physical form was more to provide retrospective cover for those establishment figures participating in the monstrous smear campaign than to nail Casement as he faced his sentence.

Though Jeffrey Dudgeon strongly adumbrates the approach that time and distance means only a historical rather than a legal or probative approach can be taken in relation to both the authenticity of the diaries and Casement's sexuality, Paul R Hyde has soldiered hard in a sometimes bewildering documentary field to elicit facts and conclusions about the Casement diaries.

There has certainly been evidential progress. Historians move slowly and it has taken them as generation to accept the diaries

are forged.

Certainly Casement poses important issues of probative standard for history.

But deploying any credible standard it is now time to accept that not just the paedophila but the homosexuality was down to forgery and that there is no other evidence of either. Hyde's methodical research reveals the sheer perfidious mendacity of the British establishment faced by a formidable enemy. It is time to make his implicit findings explicit.

His sexuality should make no difference to the reputation of this remarkable hero. Sir Roger Casement's place in history, deriving initially from his pioneering campaigning and his revolutionism were long ago sealed in Irish hearts with his ringing declamation from the dock. ■

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**Roger Casement being escorted to the gallows at Pentonville Prison, London, having been found guilty of treason**