

## London 1921: The men and women behind the Plenipotentiaries.

### *Introduction*

In August 2020 a group of descendants decided to find a way to commemorate i.e., remember and reflect the contribution of the men and women, who formed the Irish Delegation sent by Dail Eireann to negotiate peace in London in 1921, and to do so in an inclusive, apolitical, and person-centred way. Eavan Boland once said “Our present will become the past of other men and women.” Thus, ethical remembering is critical. The personal stories are equally valid as the event remembered. Past lives and stories matter and do influence future generations. It is so important the way we remember and, particularly historical events. We owe it to these men and women not to forget what they accomplished for us in their lifetime. Our project set out to find their personal stories, especially of those lesser well-known, who worked behind the scenes, the backroom men, and women, who aspired to make their mission from Dail Eireann succeed. These individuals formed the ‘engine room’ of the negotiations over the two-month period in London leading up to the signing of the first Anglo-Irish Treaty in the early hours of the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1921. They remain largely unrecognised and unacknowledged heroes.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1921 the Prime Minister of Britain, David Lloyd George, wrote to Eamon de Valera issuing “a fresh invitation to a conference in London on October 11<sup>th</sup>, where we can meet your delegates as spokesmen of the people whom you represent with a view to ascertaining how the association of Ireland with the community of nations known as the British Empire may best be

reconciled with Irish national aspirations.” De Valera accepted the invitation, the agenda was set, and with Dail Eireann having already ratified the plenipotentiaries on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, the rest of the Irish Delegation was selected.

Following extensive research, we have discovered that around 70 Irish personnel (men and women) were sent to London, involved either in major or minor roles, for the peace conference negotiations, which commenced on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1921, and led to the signing of the first Anglo-Irish Treaty. There were 5 plenipotentiaries, 4 secretaries, 28 advisers, secretarial assistants, and staff, 13 security and/or bodyguards, 7 couriers, 2 chaperones, and 12 key members of the household staffs working between 22 Hans Place and 15 Cadogan Gardens. In addition, at least 5 wives and sisters accompanied their relatives. Apart from Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Robert Barton, and Erskine Childers, most of these remarkable men and women were hitherto virtually unknown to the Irish public. Their stories have never been told, although a small number have had biographies or memoirs published. The Dail Eireann list of Delegation members and support staff, dated the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1921, had 43 names on it. Even then, the names of George Gavan Duffy, one of the five plenipotentiaries, and John Chartres one of the four secretaries, were omitted. The other four plenipotentiaries were Griffith, Collins, Barton, and Eamon Duggan. This paper, however, is focussing on the Secretariat and Ancillary staff. It is noteworthy that, even in recent commemorative materials of the Treaty, no reference is made to the team behind the plenipotentiaries, the men, and the women, neither their public service nor life stories.

Many of these men and women were in effect the forerunners of the modern Irish Civil Service and leaders of our Public Service. What an example they led, and the service they gave to the establishment of this fledgling State, and how as a team, they dealt professionally and courageously with the challenges they faced.

Treaties are agreed by politicians, but the details are written by the public and civil servants. In 1921, this group of inexperienced Irish delegates were pitted against the most powerful government in the world, the British Government, and the Great British Empire. There was enormous disparity between the two sides in terms of age, education, and social class. The British Government was served by highly experienced politicians and civil servants. Four of the former, David Lloyd George (Chairman), F.E. Smith (now Lord Birkenhead and Lord Chancellor), Austen Chamberlain (Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House), and Sir Winston Churchill (Secretary of State for the Colonies) were probably the most formidable political team facing the Irish. In addition, they had Sir Gordon Hewart (Lord Chief Justice), Sir Lamington Worthington-Evans, (Conservative Secretary of State for War), and Sir Hamar Greenwood (Chief Secretary for Ireland). This British team had, in addition, two of the most brilliant public servants of the century, Lionel Curtis, and Tom Jones who had all the resources of the Imperial civil service at their disposal, and as Tim Pat Coogan said, taking all together they “presented an obstacle of Himalayan proportions to Irish Republican aspirations”.

Who were the men and women of the Irish Delegation, where did they come from, what were their influences, their backgrounds, their passions? Why were they chosen to participate in such an important mission?

When they set off on those early autumnal days in October, they were united in aim, albeit that underneath there were some concerning ideological differences. However, that did not deter their focus on departure for London. They sought, as a team, to address Ireland's future relationship with Britain and to reach an agreement which would result in the establishment of a free and independent Irish Free State.

Following a tsunami of terrifying events including the intensification of British military aggression against the civilian population arising from the success of Sinn Fein in the local elections of 1920, the sacking of Cork City, the Croke Park atrocities, a bitterly fought War of Independence, the Reign of Terror by the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries, and the very recent, and fragile, Truce which had come into force on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, they travelled with the expectations and hopes of the people on their shoulders. At that time Irish people were perceived as enemies of the Empire, or in modern parlance disrupters, even terrorists. With such atrocities having occurred and with the continuation of "breaches of the Truce and provocative British military acts", these men and women were travelling into the 'lair of the lion's den'.

Whilst there was no officially recognised departure from Ireland on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, newspaper accounts published at the time describe in detail the Delegation's arrival in London. The sense of anticipation, excitement at seeing the Delegates and fear for their mission was palpable from the pages. Crowds lined the streets in London wearing "little button-hole 'flags' of green with a white harp", pipers played, and police had to hold back the public. The newspapers also published on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October a proclamation to the people of Ireland by Eamon de Valera, who had decided not to

be a member of this Delegation, in which he states that “the Conference in London may determine the whole course of our country’s future” and speaks of the Delegates’ understanding the enormous responsibility which lay before them, all of which emphasised the significant burden on their shoulders to succeed.

### ***The influences***

These individuals came from varied and diverse backgrounds, with experience in social, cultural, economic, financial, and political areas of endeavour. Some had been interned in Britain and Ireland between 1918 and July 1921 for lengthy periods arising from their involvement in guerrilla warfare and Sinn Fein activity, including membership of the unrecognised First Dail Eireann. Common influences on members of the Delegation included the Irish Literary Theatre, the Cork Literary Theatre, the Celtic Revival, the Celtic Literary Society, Cumann na mBan, the Gaelic League, the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and many more including the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The Gaelic League had cycling clubs and branches throughout the country and the GAA was well established having been founded in 1884.

The Celtic Revival was huge. Arthur Griffith’s formation of Sinn Fein in 1905 caught the imagination of many. Folklore formed many perspectives like the tales of the Fianna of Erin, of Fionn MacCumhail, of Oisín son of Fionn, Deirdre of the Sorrows, Diarmuid and Grainne and many more. People like Kathleen McKenna were ‘inculcated with the patriotic ideals of her parents and Arthur Griffith’. She had dreamt of an ‘Ireland Gaelic and free from shore to shore’. The childhood she experienced ‘moulded her views drawing her into the

Irish Revolutionary Movement'. She was not alone. All were certainly children of their time. The members of the Delegation had determination and courage in abundance, believing that the time was right for a new independent Ireland (as evidenced by the electoral success of Sinn Fein), paying meticulous attention to their roles and responsibilities, and putting their own lives on hold, and indeed at risk, to deliver the mission demanded by Dail Eireann.

As Teresa Napoli McKenna wrote in the Foreword to her mother's "A Dail Girl's Revolutionary Recollections", Kathleen "wanted the point of view of her time to be maintained exactly as she had experienced it herself and sensed it in others." Accordingly, we are indebted to McKenna for her records and insightful observations especially during the challenging two-month period of the Treaty negotiations. It is a treasure trove, an invaluable and authentic source of a contemporary perspective, uncontaminated by the passage of time or third parties.

### ***The men***

The four secretaries to the plenipotentiaries were Erskine Childers, Fionan Lynch, Diarmuid O'Hegarty and John Chartres. Childers was appointed Chief Secretary on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September by the Cabinet. He was a former civil servant and soldier and trusted by de Valera. Childers was born in England, with family in Wicklow. A barrister, he was in favour of Irish independence. From the outset he considered any sit-down with the British a trap. McKenna observes in her book that he was opposed by Griffith as the latter 'had a deep-rooted aversion to all Englishness but was overruled.' Childers was seen as

the expert on Ulster and with diplomacy skills. McKenna describes him as ‘an upright, well intentioned English Gentleman of outstanding intellectual ability, sincerely anxious to help Ireland’s cause.’

A few weeks later, Lynch was appointed Assistant Secretary to Childers. He was involved in the Easter Rising in 1916 and had spent many years in British prisons up to the Truce. His duties as Assistant Secretary were in logistics: organising meetings, accommodation, and transport. His interests were in education. O’Hegarty too was involved in the Easter Rising and in 1921 he resigned his militia duties and concentrated on his work in the Dail Secretariat. He was Cabinet Secretary to the Delegation. McKenna worked with O’Hegarty and wrote that ‘Beyond all shadow of doubt he was one of the most competent and intelligent men in our ranks. His gentle manner and low voice, pale blue eyes and quiet manner were disarming and well concealed his striking force and ability’. The last Secretary was John Chartres, an Englishman with Irish roots, also a barrister who had served in the Intelligence Branch of the British Ministry of Munitions. He became involved in Irish politics contributing articles to Griffith’s newspaper *Nationality*, gunrunning for Collins and becoming the Republican envoy to Berlin. He contributed to the Delegation attending all but one of the plenary sessions, writing five memoranda, and drafting the constitutional terms of Ireland’s future relationship with Britain.

Inevitably, internal tensions in the team occurred over the two-month period. It is of course a by-product of our humanity. McKenna observed that the ‘Childers phobia, which Griffith took no pains to cover up increased out of all bounds.’ She commented that Collins and Griffith “saw Childers as a fanatical opponent of any settlement

along Dominion lines and a 'renegade Englishman'." Again, according to McKenna, "Griffith's distrust became contagious,....it had a detrimental psychological effect and tended to widen a rift in what could have been a completely united group of men." These are remarkably held views from the woman who was present and who had the highest regard for Griffith, her hero. Undoubtedly, there were other strains of a personal nature amongst the team. Notwithstanding, and despite such strains, a culture of teamwork and public service permeated the Delegation and they remained determinedly focussed to make the unlikely prospect of an agreement in October into a reality on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December.

Desmond FitzGerald, Joseph McGrath, and Daniel McCarthy were directed to accompany the Delegation. FitzGerald was appointed Publicity Director. A writer and poet, he had launched the successful *Irish Bulletin* in 1919, using his literary contacts in London and abroad to influence press coverage of Ireland. He had been involved in the July Delegation. McGrath had fought in the Easter Rising, been interned, and deployed in August 1921 as a courier by de Valera to bring communications to Lloyd George. He served on Collins' personal staff. McCarthy was a Dubliner and very involved in the GAA. Injured in the Easter Rising, he later became the national director for elections for Sinn Fein. On the night it was signed McCarthy was handed the Treaty and asked by Collins would he accept the oath of allegiance. McCarthy replied that he certainly would, that his allegiance was to the Irish Free State. A Press Intelligence Officer was also appointed to the Delegation. Michael Knightley, a journalist, was engaged, but as Lloyd George precluded journalists from sitting in on the negotiations, Griffith sent Knightley to the House of Commons to take comprehensive notes.



To underscore the seriousness of the mission and the focus on Ireland's independence, the Delegation brought its own staff and household staff. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October the Dail Cabinet had directed McGrath to go to London and meet with Art O'Brien, its representative in London, to arrange accommodation for the whole Delegation. McGrath was accompanied by McCarthy and the premises at 22 Hans Place and 15 Cadogan Gardens were acquired, with both men responsible for all arrangements to do with the households, transport, and payment of the staff. The two premises were chosen as they were in quiet residential locations and close by, fitting for an independent State meeting with the British Government.

As well as the four secretaries, on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of September the Cabinet had established Commissions, or Committees, with panels of advisors to assist the work of the Delegation. The members of the Commissions would advise but not travel to London.

Throughout late September and early October advisors and experts were appointed to the Delegation. The economic advisers were Diarmaid Fawsitt, Charles Oldham, and Lionel Smith-Gordon. Fawsitt was an industrial development expert. He had been a founder member of the Cork IDA, and its secretary from 1911 to 1919 when he was then appointed as the Republic's first Consul General to the US. Recalled to Ireland in August 1921, he was appointed Technical Adviser to Robert Barton. Fawsitt was sent to the North on several missions to report back to the plenipotentiaries. Oldham, although not openly identified with Sinn Fein, sympathised with its civic, republican, and economic nationalist ideals, and admired Griffith. He had completed a report on behalf of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce in 1920 on the implications of the Government of Ireland

Bill. His experience and expertise in economics were essential. Smith-Gordon was invited by Barton to assist in understanding what the British suggestions on trade meant in practice. A champion of co-operatives, he had been appointed by the Dail in 1919 to head the recently founded National Land Bank. The financial advisers were Henry Connell Mangan, John J Murphy, Timothy Smiddy and Joseph Brennan. Mangan was City Accountant at Dublin Corporation, and as a member of the Financial Relations Committee, he helped draft proposals on taxation and tax refunds. Murphy also came from Dublin Corporation and in early 1921 he was appointed Town Clerk, effectively CEO of the Corporation. Smiddy provided Collins with a key briefing document on the issue of Irish debt to Britain. At the time, he was the founding Professor of Economics and Commerce in UCC. Brennan, who had worked in the finance division of the Chief Secretary's office in Dublin Castle, rising to private secretary of the Chief Secretary, was asked to assist by drawing up the financial clauses of the Treaty. He produced eight memoranda which enabled the Irish Delegates to counter the British claims, thereby suspending the settlement of financial matters until after the establishment of the Irish Free State. Sean Milroy was secretary to the Ulster Committee and an advisor on Ulster. He had been involved in the Easter Rising, served in prison and was the artist who drew the key on a Christmas card that enabled a replica to be made to spring himself, de Valera, and Sean McGarry from the Lincoln Jail in Britain, in February 1919. George Murnaghan was a Legal adviser.

Concerns for safety always remained high as the premises at Cadogan Gardens was in a secluded area with a back garden that accessed quiet streets making it a perfect get away for any assassin. Anonymous threatening letters arrived daily addressed to "the leader of the Irish Murder Gang" depicting coffins, death heads and crossbones. Childers occupied a room on the first floor whilst Collins'

personal office was in another reception area. Bedrooms were assigned to FitzGerald, Milroy, O'Hegarty, McCarthy, McGrath, and Collins together with the latter's own special group of security. Ned Broy also resided there. When the Delegation was formed Collins wanted Broy to assist him as his personal advisor, typist, and general factotum. From Kildare, Broy had been the G-man in Dublin Castle who provided information to Collins during the War of Independence, was eventually discovered, arrested, and imprisoned in solitary confinement. Collins also appointed Emmet Dalton as his Military adviser. Described as handsome as "a wild west cinema star" Dalton would keep high alert on all Collins' movements throughout the negotiations. Also appointed by Collins were Eoin O'Duffy and J.J. (Ginger) O'Connell. Along with Collins, Gavan Duffy, Childers, and Dalton, these two were part of the Defence Committee. Meanwhile, back home, Cathal Brugha complained that as Minister for Defence, the military advisers had not been chosen by him. Indeed, Dan McCarthy believed the bitterness between Brugha and Collins stemmed from prominent IRA officers coming up from the country looking for Collins rather than Brugha, the Minister. Lastly, Collins' own personal security team included Tom Cullen, Liam Tobin, Joe Guilfoyle, Jim Leonard, and Joe Dolan. These five "young and devoted gunmen" were known as "the squad" and were assigned to "mind" him. Tobin was chief of the Intelligence squad. McKenna described the bodyguards as "jovial boisterous men who preferred horseplay to formalities". Security functions were also provided for the two houses by William Ahern, Francis Carey, John Dillon, Frank Mahony, Bernard Rowe, Tom Barry, and Frank Thornton.

Captain David Robinson, a cousin of Childers, was the member of staff responsible for the summoning and disposal of the fleet of Rolls Royce limousines for the Delegation during the negotiations, whenever was required. Robinson was a member of the Irish White

Cross, which had donated aid to Ireland during the War of Independence. Easy and safe access between the two houses was important. Indeed, a plane had been purchased by Charles Russell with money from the Self Determination League to lift the plenipotentiaries to immediate safety should they need to exit London quickly in the event of an acrimonious breakdown in the negotiations. The plane was named "The Big Fella".

### ***The women***

Whilst no delegate on either the Irish or the British side was a female member of the Dail or the British Parliament, significant contributions were made by five women appointed by Dail Eireann to the Delegation. In addition to Kathleen McKenna, they included Elizabeth (Lily) O'Brennan, Gerty Conry, and the Lyons sisters, Ellie, and Alice. These women were trusted members of the Secretariat, trusted by the leaders, and the cornerstone of the engine room in Cadogan Gardens. They resided throughout the two months in Hans Place. They were the administrative wing of the secretariat, involved in and responsible for the typing of communications for the delegates, between them and the Cabinet, together with the creation and amendment of all documents required during the negotiations. Their efficiency, literacy, and typing skills were critical, as well as their duties of fidelity and confidentiality.

Ellie and Alice Lyons were from Swords, Co Dublin, and stenographers. They were also clerical assistants on Collins' staff in the Finance office. They had both worked beside Collins throughout the Black and Tan terror. Alice was known for her coolness under

pressure, a valuable characteristic in those turbulent times. This attribute arose because of a raid by the British army at 22 Mary Street: Alice was working in the inner office when the military arrived, she simply took her coat and hat from the coat rack, put them on and quietly walked out past the British and into the street before they realised what was happening. When a soldier asked Alice's colleagues about her identity, one of them replied that she was Michael Collins disguised as a lady, a story which the British apparently believed. Ellie and Alice worked in the General Secretariat in Cadogan Gardens. McKenna describes the two women, herself and Gerty Conry getting together in one of the bedrooms in Hans Place after a strenuous day's work to discuss the day's events and the possible outcomes. She describes the sisters as "dear colleagues, lovable, sincere, brave girls".

Conry from Mayo had commenced working for O'Hegarty in the Secretariat of the Dail in the Summer of 1921. O'Hegarty, who felt unsure about the outcome of the negotiations, chose Conry as his private secretary over his current secretary Molly Ryan, preferring to leave the latter in the Dail office as she was unknown to the authorities and had custody of the Dail papers. Conry shared a room with McKenna who wrote of the two women "in bed repeatedly reciting the rosary with 'special trimmings' for our plenipotentiaries and the success of their endeavours". She referred to the "need to do so to counter their anxiety and lack of repose during the last stressful weeks".

O'Brennan was private secretary to Childers. She had been part of the first Delegation led by de Valera to London in July. A Dubliner, schoolteacher, and later writer, both she and her sister Aine, who had married Eamonn Ceannt, one of the leaders in the Easter Rising,

carried dispatches for him, and participated in the Rising. O'Brennan was imprisoned for her activities. It was said of her that she was indispensable during the Treaty negotiations.

McKenna's role in the secretariat was as Private Secretary to Griffith, Chairman of the Delegation, giving her unique access to the most significant documents and correspondence of Irish history at that time, and to the people ultimately responsible for the negotiations, including insights into their personalities and characters. At 24 years of age, she was the youngest woman on the Delegation.

From Meath, McKenna's skills had been honed working with FitzGerald, the Director of Propaganda in Dail Eireann on the *Irish Bulletin*. This newsletter was founded in November 1919 by Griffith, FitzGerald, and Robert Brennan, then Director of the Sinn Fein Press Bureau. McKenna was involved in its first edition, and her work entailed typing up volumes of information and after stencilling the editions, its distribution. This was dangerous work, and she was also responsible for safeguarding the publishing equipment which often meant moving from one hiding place to another so that it would not be captured by the Crown forces. Every day she risked imprisonment, torture and worse, if she was ever caught, because the newsletter was seen as such a powerful propaganda tool to the British, and of course, the Irish. The *Irish Bulletin* passed news about the political situation in Ireland and had a diverse and international audience. No mistakes or embellishments were permitted, honesty and facts only. According to McKenna, The *Irish Bulletin* was regarded as a "weapon so detrimental to British prestige that the Intelligence Service made the most elaborate efforts to locate our office and suppress our publication". The Truce in July had been greeted with relief in the expectation that negotiations could

procure peace. The *Irish Bulletin* continued publication until mid-December. It conveyed information on official statements and copied the correspondence between de Valera and Lloyd George. Not only was McKenna chosen by Griffith to accompany him to London as his private secretary, the latter having told FitzGerald that she was “the most reliable person he had ever met”, but she was also obliged to continue fulfilling her duties as secretary to FitzGerald in the publicity department.

The appointment of a housekeeper and chaperones for the single women of the Delegation was also discussed at a Cabinet meeting. Mrs Eamon (May) Duggan was identified as a chaperone and Mrs Fionan (Bridget) Lynch, was the second one. Unmarried women could not stay in the same house as men, unless chaperoned, such were the social mores of the time. May befriended Lady Hazel Lavery who, whilst not a member of either Delegation, helped both sides enormously by making her salon available for informal gatherings and discussions. In Dublin, May had hosted several Cabinet meetings in her home until her husband’s arrest in January 1921. Bridget, whose father Tom Slattery was imprisoned after attempting to assist Roger Casement after his arrival in Kerry via ‘The Aud’, carried messages for the freedom cause locally, and to Dublin.

### ***Ancillary***

Mrs Mary Folkard, an Irish London exile from Oldcastle, County Meath, was installed as cook in Hans Place. She had previously been employed in the Gresham Hotel in Dublin. Lunches would not be served in 10 Downing Street. British hospitality, whilst offered, was declined lest it be thought to compromise the Delegation. The house

staff in Hans Place and Cadogan Gardens included Miss O'Donohue (housekeeper and manageress at Hans Place), and the Misses Flynn, Maloney, Nealon, Hoey, McCormick, and Dowling. Miss Hoey may have been the republican activist known as Patricia Hoey. Four waiters were appointed including Messrs Thomas Kavanagh, John O'Brien, Edward O'Brien, and Micheal Markey. It seems that most of the waiters came from the Gresham Hotel. The O'Briens were brothers and whilst working in the Gresham, were asked specifically by Collins, when he was lunching there one day, to come to London as "he could trust them". Indeed, some of the others mentioned were requested by Collins as they had rendered him invaluable assistance when he was subjected to a recent manhunt by the British and on the run. Collins wanted trustworthy people about him on the team.

Messengers and dispatchers were also used as opposed to using the British postal service. The seven carrying out these roles were Edward (Ned) Kelliher, Patrick Kennedy (Official Courier-London and de Valera), John (Sean) Mc Bride, Patrick Joseph McBride, Micheal Markey, Maureen (Tuomey) Woods, and Molly (Flannery) Woods. Maureen was 15 years old, and her mother was a well-known revolutionary. Maureen allegedly carried dispatches stitched into her fur collar from Dublin to London. Art O'Brien had also sourced other household staff from the Irish Clubs and the Self Determination League in London. All were installed prior to the arrival of the first contingent of the Delegation.

Other members appointed to the Delegation staff were Joe Gill, Joseph Foran, Jim Morgan, and Ed Troy but their precise roles are unknown.



## ***Conclusion***

Whilst this paper is focussed on those behind the plenipotentiaries, I cannot ignore the human toll of the intense and “logistical” pressures placed on the latter in the final days. I am referring to the exhausting round trip they made over land and sea on the weekend of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> of December, from London to Dublin and back again, to update the Cabinet, with Collins, Gavan Duffy and Childers experiencing a fatal shipping accident at sea whilst crossing. That accident must have had an impact. Human tiredness was no stranger to them.

McKenna’s chapter on Signing the Anglo-Irish Treaty, makes for compelling reading from the human perspective. She gives a first-hand account of the enormous levels of stress amongst the secretariat in the days leading up to the final proposals. The “sense of responsibility, fatality, suspense, doubt, fear, uncertainty and anxiety” leap from the pages. She notes the demeanour of Collins pacing the room “like a wild beast in a cage”, having made his decision and made it considering the ultimatum placed on the delegates’ shoulders earlier that day by Lloyd George, whereby Ireland would be plunged back into immediate war, if the Treaty was unsigned, and denying them the right to refer to Dublin. Collins had made his decision to sign and awaited the decision of the other four. He wanted, in McKenna’s view “...to avoid his own decision having an influence... on those wavering...”

McKenna describes the female secretaries as being “agitated with taut-drawn nerves”. The women had in her words “worked with our chiefs on the document, word after word, phrase after phrase, clause after clause, alternatives following alternatives: we had seen it take form from the beginning and knew it by memory”. They had

“watched by the cradle of the Treaty”. McKenna wrote of the secretaries’ regarding “themselves as soldiers whose lives are pledged to Ireland”. She observed that they were “soldiers who had worked for almost two months in close alliance with the warriors who at that very moment were engaged in the final decisive battle in Ireland’s cause.” Having been requested by O’Hegarty to remain up to await the return of the delegates from Downing Street on that fateful night of the 5<sup>th</sup>, McKenna describes the moment at 2.45 am on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December when they returned to Hans Place. The moment is heavy with silent emotion and physical exhaustion. Collins and FitzGerald had returned to Cadogan Gardens, where later that same day Collins would write, that in signing the Treaty, he had signed his death warrant. This letter gives a contemporaneous insight into the human toll on the man.

O’Hegarty rolled out the Treaty. Duggan and Gavan Duffy signed. Griffith seemed to McKenna in that moment as “grave and decisive, neither joyful nor depressed”. She noted Childers and his “exhausted, pain filled eyes, and pale haggard cheeks..... Nobody talked..... all retired to their respective rooms”.

According to McKenna, Griffith did what he did “because he was convinced in his soul that it was the right thing, the only thing to do. They did their best, all of them.”

The Treaty, signed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1921, authorised the creation of the Irish Free State. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland lost a third of its state. A new international border was created. Ireland gained its independence. Henceforth, British, and Irish history was radically altered.

Lloyd George commended the Irish Delegation in the House of Commons on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1921 when he said of the British Delegation that - "Every one of them worked hard: each of them contributed from his mind and from his resource. The same thing applies.....to the part played by the representatives of Ireland. They sought peace and they ensued it. .... There were men on the other side who took risks. The risks they took are only becoming too manifest in the conflict that is "raging at this hour in Ireland, and all honour to them. Not a word will I say.....to make their task more difficult. They are fighting to make peace between two great races designed by Providence to work together in partnership and friendship." Within a year, Lloyd George was out of office as Prime Minister.

Because of subsequent events, particularly the bitter and divisive Irish Civil War, the contributions of all these men and women have been largely ignored and forgotten.

In conclusion, bearing in mind that McKenna was present and participated in these historical events and has given us a most insightful, humane, and compassionate as well as contemporary account of her experiences, that changed the course of Irish history, I feel compelled to quote one final time from her wonderful memoir. She wrote "The Treaty itself, the events and circumstances that led up to drafting and signing, will interest historians to the end of time. What is truth? Even contemporary with, or immediately following the negotiating, or now, after the lapse of nearly sixty years, how can the entire and exact story be truthfully set down? Much must forever remain conjecture, supposition, and at worst invention."

That being so, we must remember the lives of the men and women behind the plenipotentiaries, together with their lives, and the human cost to all of them.

Carol Fawsitt

Granddaughter of Diarmaid Fawsitt - an Adviser

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