

Roger Casement- voice of the voiceless, National Museum of Ireland 3rd August 2016

Many people make an exhibition. From those who have the first idea to the people who organise the openings and all the stages in between. After the opening it takes on another life when the curators, Education staff and visitors make it a place of communication, reflection and thought. I hope this exhibition allows the visitor to reflect not just on the humanitarian work of Roger Casement and the lives of the people to whom he gave a voice but that it will also allow the visitor to become aware of the plight of modern day oppressed peoples across the world. We will be adding to the exhibition in the coming weeks with testimonials of the people Casement interviewed. We also hope to have a lecture series and a conference where people can learn more about Casement's pioneering work.

The exhibition focuses on Roger Casement's work investigating the atrocities in the Upper Congo area of present day Democratic Republic of Congo and the Putumayo area now in southern Colombia. He carried out this work from 1903 to 1910 and received a knighthood in 1911 in recognition of his work. The objects in this exhibition were chosen not only to tell the story of the rubber atrocities but also to highlight the skill and craftsmanship of the makers. Like all objects in exhibitions they represent the people who made them and the society they lived in and it is wonderful to see some of the ethnographic collection back on display again especially in the room next door to where it was originally displayed. The people who made these objects cannot be here today nor can their descendants but the objects are their representatives and remind us of the lives they led and the suffering they endured.

This exhibition was created by team work and the dedication of many people. I would like to thank firstly Lorraine Comer and Siobhan Pierce of the Education Department who came up with the initial idea of doing an exhibition on Casement's humanitarian work, our Director Ragnall Ó Floinn, Head of Collections, Rolly Read, who agreed the funding and Head of Operations Seamus Lynham. I would like to thank the Keeper of Irish Antiquities, Mary Cahill for her support and for having the confidence in me to do the job. Thank you Steven McNamara our architect- Steven designed the exhibition and we all think he did a wonderful job, John Murray our graphic designer who is equally patient and talented, the Conservation Department Paul Mullarkey, Nieves Fernandez and Patrick Boyle who conserved and mounted the objects, Karen Horton who did a fantastic job conserving the bark cloth hood and Lorna Barnes for her work with the ceramics. Thanks to the ever accurate and precise Denise and Joe Byrne for their beautiful mounts. Thanks to the National Botanic Gardens for loaning the rubber sample. Thanks to my colleagues Maeve Sikora, Andy Halpin and Nessa O'Connor for proof reading and giving advice and to Isabella Mulhall for taking on extra licence applications. Thanks to Margaret Lannin and Eamonn McLoughlin and all in Registration who helped to clean and move the cases. Thanks to the Photographic Department and Valerie Dowling for their lovely images of the objects, to the cleaning staff Kathy and Hazel and the attendants. Thank you to all in the OPW, Dick Brown, Clerk of Works, the carpenters, electricians and painters, especially to the electrician Noel Dunne who patiently redirected all the lights with Steven. Without the OPW this would not have been possible. Thanks to the Marketing Department – Ann Daly and Maureen Gaule. A big debt of gratitude is owed to Seamus Ó Siocháin and Angus Mitchel whose publications I used during the research stage. Also thanks to Anti-Slavery International for use of Alice Seeley

Harris's images from the Congo. She was a remarkable missionary lady who campaigned for an end to the atrocities being carried out in the Congo.

Finally I would like to remember Roger Casement himself and the people with whom and for whom he worked. The people of the Bakongo, the Mongo, the Bora, the Witoto, the Yagua, the Andoke and the many others who suffered then and those who continue to suffer today for the financial profit of another. Casement stated in an essay that "the rubber was there. How it was produced, out of what a hell of human suffering no one knew, no one asked, no one suspected. Can it be no one cared?" Sadly the issues Casement encountered 100 years ago; land rights, slavery, child labour, genocide, the treatment of indigenous people and the prioritisation of business over human rights are still relevant. Today we can easily replace the word 'rubber' with a modern day commodity. I hope the exhibition will stimulate people to think more about the supply chain of goods we buy today and to question disrespectful treatment of others and invite us to ask ourselves "Do we care?"

Thank you for coming today and I hope you enjoy the exhibition.

Fiona Reilly

Curator

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