

Papers of Dr Robert Farnan

P342



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CONTEXT

Biographical History

Farnan, Robert Patrick (1873 - 1962), gynaecologist, farmer, and Senator, was born 18 June 1873, at Bolton Castle, Moone, County Kildare. Eldest son of Patrick Farnan, farmer and Justice of the Peace, and his wife Ellen (née O'Neill). Patrick Farnan had been a friend of, and a regular visitor at the home of Charles Stewart Parnell.

Robert was educated at CBS Athy, during this time he lived with Dr Patrick L. O'Neill, Coroner for South Kildare, who was a maternal uncle. He went on to the Royal University of Ireland and graduated from the Catholic University Medical School in 1897. As part of his medical training, Robert studied gynaecology at Vienna with Dr Rudolf Chrobak, a colleague of Dr Sigmund Freud.

Appointed as gynaecologist of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in 1902, he was the youngest person appointed to the position. From 1925 - 1943 he was also Professor of Midwifery and Gynaecology in UCD and was the chairperson of the Medical Research Council of Ireland upon its establishment in 1937 until he retired in 1955.

A nationalist and close friend of Eamon de Valera, Farnan provided de Valera with financial support and accompanied him on his mission to meet Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister. Farnan's home at 5 Merrion Square was de Valera's first hideout in 1919 after his escape from Lincoln Gaol, and was also the venue for several meetings, such as de Valera's meeting with general Jan Smuts, Prime Minister for South Africa, for talks before the 1921 Truce.

It is possible that Farnan learnt the "cathartic method" of psychoanalysis during his time in Vienna and used this skill to treat IRA and Cumann na mBan members. According to the witness statement of Eamon Broy "anyone who was anyway low in health or injured was sent to him [Dr Robert Farnan], with a note from Mick [Michael Collins]."

In 1926 he became a founder member of the Fianna Fáil party and in 1938 de Valera nominated him to the newly formed Seanad Éireann as one of his eleven Taoiseach's nominees to the Seanad. He was appointed Senator by each subsequent Fianna Fáil Taoiseach until 1961 when he retired from politics. De Valera also made him a director of the *Irish Press* newspaper from its foundation in 1932. President Douglas Hyde appointed Farnan as a member of the first Council of State in 1938. In 1953 he was appointed to the Council of State by President Seán T. O'Kelly and served on the Council until his death. He mentored Éamon de Valera, Jnr, who also became a gynaecologist.

Farming was Dr Farnan's recreation and hobby, and he bred Aberdeen Angus bulls at his farm in Kildare. He won various prizes and was President of the National Aberdeen Angus Association from 1946 to 1960.

He married Laura Macken in 1906, she died in 1940; they had no children. He married again in 1941 to Brigid Healy; they had one child, Patrick, who became a Catholic priest.

Robert Farnan died on 7 January 1962 at his home in Howth and was interred in the family plot in Moone Cemetery. Included in the funeral procession were the President and Mrs De Valera; the Taoiseach, Mr. Sean Lemass; members of the Government and of the Oireachtas, the judiciary and representatives of the medical associations. The coffin, draped in the Tri-colour, was carried from the church by members of the medical staff of the Mater Hospital. The nursing staff formed a guard of honour. He bequeathed Bolton Castle to the Archdiocese of Dublin to establish a monastic community, which was done by Mount St. Joseph Abbey, Roscrea after 1965.

Sources:

Mary Heffernan

County Has Lost an Illustrious Son, by J. Durney on January 26, 2012

<https://kildare.ie/ehistory/index.php/county-has-lost-an-illustrious-son/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Farnan_\(physician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Farnan_(physician))

Bureau of Military History, WS Ref #: 1280 , Witness: Eamon Broy, IRA Intelligence Agent in British Police, Dublin Castle. BMH.WS1280.pdf, page 87

Saturday 17 May 1902, "The Mater Hospital" Carlow Nationalist, Carlow, Republic of Ireland.

Archival History

These papers were deposited by his son Patrick Farnan, in February 2022.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

Scope and Content

Letters and messages to Dr Robert Farnan and Mrs Laura Farnan, mainly from Michael Collins, and Eamon de Valera. Other correspondence includes messages and letters from Robert Barton, Sinead de Valera, and General Jan Smuts. There are also invitations for official events from Dáil Éireann and University College Dublin. A file of nineteen *Daily Bulletin* publications. There is a small amount of material relating to the 1916 rising including the accidental shooting of Tom Clarke in January 1916. There is also some dissociated material consisting of correspondence, and household accounts.

System of Arrangement

1	Material Relating to the 1916 Rising	1
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CONDITIONS OF ACCESS AND USE

Access

Available by appointment to holders of a UCDA reader's ticket. Produced for consultation in digital format.

Language

English and Irish

Finding Aid

Descriptive catalogue

DESCRIPTION CONTROL

Archivist's Note

This descriptive catalogue was prepared by Selina Collard in July 2023

1. Material Relating to the 1916 Rising

P342/1 February 1916

3 items

Items relating to the accidental shooting of Tom Clarke by Seán McGarry

Bullet (overall dimensions: 11 mm x 6 mm) wrapped in a printed leaflet entitled "Irish Emigrants and English Mobs. Letter from the Bishop of Limerick." The reverse side bears a handwritten note "Bullet removed from neck of Right Radius of Tom Clarke (Feb 1916) first President Irish Republic." Both items were removed from the original envelope which bears the same inscription. The name "Dr Farnan" is included on the envelope, this refers to Dr Denis Farnan, brother of Robert, who performed the surgery at the Mater hospital.

P342/2 2 - 3 May 1916

1 item

Dublin Metropolitan Police Pass for Mrs Laura Farnan

A pass issued by the Dublin Metropolitan Police on 2nd May 1916 allowing Mrs Laura Farnan of 5 Merrion Square to pass through the streets of the city and D.M.P area, signed by W. Edgeworth Johnstone, Commissioner. The reverse side bears a handwritten note "The within pass is valid for the district outside the D.M.P area" signed by Neville Chamberlain (1856-1944), Inspector General, dated 3 May 1916. Stamped with the official R.I Constabulary Office stamp.

2. Letters, Messages, and Invitations, 1919 - 21

P342/3 [c. 1919]

2 items

Handwritten messages from Robert Barton

- "Please send up your car for a friend of mine".
- "To messenger. Return to officer who sent you and report that I shall not require you"

P342/4 1919 – 21

7 items

Items from Michael Collins

File of letters, notes, and other items, mostly to Dr Farnan, from Michael Collins. Requests books to send to Eamon de Valera (13 March 1919); asks if he can put a deposit with the Land Bank in the name of Dr Farnan or his wife (25 November 1920); and a letter of introduction “the bearer is another of our friends, please have a look at him. Send him to the Mater for a week or something like that” (8 April 1921).

There are also two undated notes and a draft election speech possibly written by Michael Collins. The notes discuss a cablegram sent by President de Valera to the Chairman of the National Convention of the American Association for the Recognition of the Republic of Ireland, and arrangements to meet “the general” at Dun Laoghaire.

Includes:

- Letter to Mrs Farnan informing her that Dr Fogerty would be calling to her (no date).
- Receipt for £100 received from Dr Robert P Farnan of Bolton Castle, Moone. From Michael O Coileain, Minister of Finance (1 January 1920).

P342/5 July 1921

2 items

Items relating to Jan Smuts' visit to Dr Farnan's house

Holograph letter to Mrs Laura Farnan from General Jan Smuts, Prime Minister, Union of South Africa, thanking her for her hospitality: “My experiences of yesterday are an unforgettable memory, the Doctor's kindness I shall never forget.” The letter is written on headed paper from the Savoy Hotel, London (6 July 1921). Includes a handwritten explanatory note: “General Smuts, during his visit to Dublin, was the guest of Dr and Mrs Farnan, whose brother holds an official position in South Africa.”

P342/6 16 August 1921

2 items

Dáil Eireann passes

Passes, in Irish, allowing Dr and Mrs Farnan to attend the Public Session in Dáil Éireann on 16 August 1921. Issued by Diarmuid O’Hegarty and signed by Eamon de Valera.

P342/7 November 1921

3 items

Invitation cards

Invitation card written in Irish for Dr and Mrs Farnan to attend the University College, Dublin at 12:00pm, Saturday the 19th of November to welcome Éamonn de Valéra University Chancellor. Signed by Eamon de Valera (2 blank invitations included).

P342/8 [December] 1921

3 items

Invitation cards

Invitation card from the Minister of Fine Arts to the "Irish Celebration of the 6th Centenary of the Death of Dante" in the Round Room of the Mansion House at 7.30pm on Tuesday 6th December 1921. Signed L. Walsh, Secretary. Two Irish versions of the invitation are included.

P342/9 December 1921

1 item

Christmas card

Christmas greeting written in Irish, "Merry Christmas and happy new year wishes to you" Christmas 1921. The Mansion House, Dublin. Signed by Eamon de Valera.

3. *Daily Bulletin* Publications, 1923

P342/10 16 March - 20 June 1923

19 items

***Daily Bulletin*, issued by anti-treaty forces**

- No.142. Provides a copy of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Regulation (16 March 1923)
- No.144. Entitled "New Use for the Informer." Regards false captured republican documents that have been written by paid informers and gives an example of one recently published in the Press. The end of the bulletin gives details

P342/10 contd.

of the informer who was responsible for at least twenty arrests. (2 copies) (19 March 1923).

- No.145. Entitled “President de Valera's Message to the Irish Race on St. Patrick's Day” (20 March 1923).
- No.146. Entitled “Wholesale Slaughter of Prisoners in Kerry. Prisoners tied together and blown up by Mines” (21 March 1923).
- No.147. Entitled “The Kerry Massacre. Statement of a Survivor”. (2 copies) (22 March 1923).
- No. 153. Entitled “How John Walsh was Murdered in Kilkenny Jail. Names of the Murderers.” Includes a statement made by the prisoners in Kilkenny Jail (30 March 1923).
- No. 154. Entitled “Mr Cosgrave and the Kerry Murders” (31 March 1923).
- No. 155. Includes the Proclamation of the Republic to mark the seven-year anniversary of the Easter Rising (1 April 1923).
- No. [?] Entitled “England can have a New Treaty or an Old War” (4 April 1923).
- No. 159. Entitled “Government by Murder” (6 April 1923).
- No. 216. Entitled “Mr O'Higgins Cannot Have It Both Ways”, commenting on statements made by Mr O'Higgins when he was speaking at Bray the previous Sunday (13 June 1923).
- No. 219. Entitled “Horrors of the Curragh Camp.” Includes extracts from a diary of a prisoner in Tintown Camp (14 June 1923).
- No. 220. Entitled “The Truth About the Prisons” includes an extract from a letter written by a female prisoner in the North Dublin Union (15 June 1923).
- No. 221. Entitled “Mulcahy Takes Responsibility”, comments on Mulcahy's statement in the Free Parliament on June 12th (16 June 1923).
- No. 222. Statement by President De Valera (18 June 1923).
- No. 223 Includes “Miss Mary Comerford's Hungerstrike” and “Mr O'Sullivan's Lying Affidavit” (19 June 1923).
- No. 224. “Miss Maire Comerford's Condition” and “Sectional Interests” (20 June 1923).

4. Letters from Sinead and Eamon de Valera, 1923 - 30

P342/11 31 January - 26 August 1923

2 items

Holograph letters to Mrs Farnan, 18 Claremount Rd, Sandymount, from Sinéad de Valera

- Asks her to send an enclosed letter to Miss Macken (not included). She refers to a raid carried out on Dr Farnan's house "poor dev feels terribly about you being put to so much trouble and inconvenience. He was forever talking about all your goodness to him" (31 January 1923).
- Expresses regret that she did not see Mrs Farnan when she called as she had gone to Arbour Hill to deliver a parcel of clothes to Dev. She describes her visit to the prison and thanks her for the sweets she left (26 August 1923).

P342/12 5 February 1925

1p

Holograph letter to Mrs Farnan from Eamon de Valera

Asks her to give the bearer R. O Breandain cash to the amount of £1100. He also requests that she arrange for the exchange of notes to the value of £1200 and refers to the telephone conversation they had the previous night.

P342/13 1 Jan 1930

2pp

Holograph letter to Dr Farnan from Eamon de Valera

Sending New Year wishes to Dr and Mrs Farnan, and the whole household. Signs off with "I hope to be able to get what I came for done - but it will be hard work. Our friend Smuts is in town!" This letter is written on headed paper from Hotel Pennsylvania, NY.

5. Dissociated Material, 1919 - 1966

P342/14 July 1921

3 items

Household accounts

Handwritten notes of household expenses and an invoice with receipt from Harrods Ltd. London, addressed to Mrs Farnham C/o Mrs Loftus 5 West Halkin Street, S.W, listing goods purchased between 13 - 20 July 1921. Items listed include "1dz Parchment" sent to Mount Loftus, Goresbridge, Kilkenny.

P342/15 1902 [?]

1 item

Printed photograph

Printed photograph (possibly cut from a publication) of Thomas More Madden (1839-1902), former Gynaecologist of the Mater Hospital, Dublin.

P342/16 Undated

1p

Typescript letter

To "My dear hostess" asks after the family's health and mentions phonograph records that a friend sent. The letter is signed: "Your gynaecological friend. MacC".

P342/17 Undated

1p

Handwritten letter

To [Sily] from "The Shirtmaker" expressing thanks for the enjoyable evening.

P342/18 1945

1 item

Souvenir circular

Souvenir circular of an article reprinted from *The Irish Press*, Thursday 17th May 1945. Entitled "Mr. de Valera's Reply to Mr. Churchill. Why Ireland was Neutral" (8pp).

P342/19 26 October 1946

2 items

Letter and receipt

Typed and signed letter with receipt to Dr Farnan, Bolton Castle, Moone, Co. Kildare, from G.A Hayes-McCoy, Art Division National Museum of Ireland, Kildare Street, Dublin C.17. Thanking him for the presentation of six items of arms, the receipt for items donated to the museum includes: swords, remains of a rifle and bayonet, and a pikehead with axe blade and hook.

P342/20 1919 - 1966

26 items

A collection of postage stamps

A variety of postage stamps torn from envelopes (from Ireland, Great Britain, France, and the USA). Most have been date stamped but not all are legible. With the original envelope.