Police and the activities of Extremists: the funeral of O’Donovan Rossa

Senior Cycle Lessons

This section contains work on three separate documents associated with funeral of O’Donovan Rossa in 1915. The first document is an intelligence report from the Dublin Metropolitan Police. (Note: it is a different document to that used for the Junior Cycle activity). The second document is a newspaper report of the O’Donovan Rossa funeral, from the Irish Times, 7 August 1915. The third activity deals with the speech made by Patrick Pearse at the graveside of O’Donovan Rossa.

Activity One

Special report on the preparations for the funeral procession of the Fenian leader Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa. (30 July 1915)

[Source: National Archives, file number CSO/JD/2/49 (2)]

O’Donovan Rossa Intelligence report, 30 September 1915

This report is interesting as it shows the level of organisation of the funeral procession by the Republican movement in order to maximise the propaganda value of O’Donovan Rossa’s funeral.

1. This report was written by Owen Brien, a superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police. What branch of the Dublin Metropolitan Police did he work in?
2. What evidence is there that this document was not intended for public circulation?
3. What was the title of the report?

In his report, Superintendent Brien outlined the arrangements for O’Donovan Rossa’s funeral.

Read the report, and answer the following questions.

Paragraph one (page one): the route of the procession.

What was the route to be followed by O’Donovan Rossa’s funeral? Look up the route of the procession on a mapping web site, or using a map of Dublin. Why did the procession not proceed directly to Glasnevin cemetery from Dame Street?

Paragraph two (page one): a list of some of the groups who will march in the procession.

How many of the those in the list are the names of official organisations, and how many just refer to groups of individuals? How can you distinguish between the two? The report refers to the “Sinn Fein Volunteers”. What is the name usually applied to this group?
Paragraph three (page one): the arrangements for the Dublin contingents and their bands

Paragraphs four, five, six (page two): the arrangements for the “provincial contingents”.

Why did the Dublin and Provincial groups have to assemble at different points?
How important was the rail system in bringing groups to Dublin?
List the names of the stations. What names are they known by today?

Paragraph seven (page two): What two groups organised the funeral procession?

Paragraph eight (page two):

What indication is given that the National Volunteers did not organise the procession?

Paragraph nine (page two):

What evidence is there that the organisers wanted to have a peaceful demonstration?
Why does the superintendent suggest that the police should be concerned about the funeral procession?

Paragraph ten (page three):

O’Brien was concerned what might happen after the funeral. What was he afraid might happen? What building at Beresford Place is linked with the 1916 Rising?

The document would have gone from Superintendent Brien to other police officials, to the British Under-Secretary, then on to the Chief Secretary (Augustine Birrell). Birrell worked at Dublin Castle, the centre of British administration in Ireland.

This official police report includes a number of hand-written annotations on page one.
Who read and commented on the document?
Birrell did not sign the document. How do we know that he actually saw it?
Look at the third hand-written paragraph on page one. What assurance did MN [Matthew Nathan] give to Birrell?

Activities:

Select an item of information given in the report that could have been selected from a newspaper.
Select another statement that was most likely given to the police by a special source, often known as an “informer”.
Research the life of O’Donovan Rossa in the Dictionary of Irish Biography. This website is available online and free of charge in most schools through the Schools Broadband Network. It is also available in public libraries.
Activity Two

A newspaper report of the O'Donovan Rossa funeral, the Irish Times, 7 August 1915

The funeral was reported in the Irish Times, 7 August 1915, p4.

Read paragraph one.

What opinion from the police report is proven in this paragraph?

Read paragraph two:

What statement from the police report about the organisation of the funeral is indicated here?
What new information in this paragraph would prove to be of interest and of concern to the police?
Many people who took part in the O'Donovan Rossa funeral ceremonies also fought in the 1916 Rising. Four men are named in this paragraph. How many of them survived the Rising? Does it justify the concerns police surveillance on “extremists”?

Paragraph three:

This paragraph describes the funeral procession from City Hall to Glasnevin cemetery. How many people lined the streets of Dublin as the funeral passed?

Paragraph four:

The DMP report has drawn attention to the desire of the organisers that the “greatest harmony should prevail”. What evidence is there that the funeral passed off peacefully? What was the role of the police on the day of the funeral?

Paragraph five:

A description of the arrival of the procession at Glasnevin, and the saying of prayers in the mortuary chapel and at the graveside.

Paragraph six:

This paragraph describes the journalist’s account of the speech delivered at the graveside by “Mr P H Pearse”; see the next activity.

Paragraph seven:

What evidence is there to show that the funeral had the trappings of a military funeral?
Paragraph eight:

Why would the police have been very interested in and concerned about the information reported by the journalist?

Activity Three

*Patrick Pearse’s speech by the graveside of O’Donovan Rossa, August 1915.*

The *Irish Times* report included references to a speech made by Patrick Pearse at the graveside of O’Donovan Rossa.

a) Read the speech made by Pearse as noted by the reporter beginning, “The seeds were sown by the young men of ’65 and ’67” (paragraph six of the *Irish Times* report).

b) Read the script of the actual speech as delivered by Pearse: “And the seeds sown by the young men of ’65 and ’67 are coming to their miraculous ripening to-day. Rulers and Defenders of Realms had need to be wary if they would guard against such processes. Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations. The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! - they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.”


c) Identify one difference between the two speeches that shows how the recording of political speeches at large public gatherings can be a difficult task!

d) Why would this speech have been of interest to the police intelligence gatherers in 1915?

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