

**Professor Smiddy and the Development of the Irish Diplomatic Service
Response to Professor Bernadette Whelan - 7 October 2014.**

Embassy of Ireland, Washington DC, 7 October 2014

Dr Michael Kennedy, Royal Irish Academy

It is a pleasure to respond to Professor Whelan. Bernadette has provided a lucid and engaging account of the trials and tribulations leading to Professor Smiddy's appointment and fully explained its significance. In my response I want to build on Bernadette's paper and its Irish-American and Anglo-American perspective and pull the focus out to look at Smiddy's appointment in a wider context. The events of 90 years ago today, and it was also a Tuesday in 1924, so painstakingly achieved, are the crowning point of a critical 12 months in Ireland's immediate post-independence foreign policy that began in September 1923.

Ireland gained independence as a dominion in the British Commonwealth in December 1922. This was the result of a treaty signed with Britain in December 1921. Civil war broke out over the terms of the Treaty in summer 1922 and continued to summer 1923 with the pro-Treaty side emerging dominant. Bernadette has shown the indeterminate international position facing Ireland as a dominion as a result of the Treaty. Between September 1923 and October 1924, that critical year I referred to, Ireland, then known as the Irish Free State, joined the League of Nations, pointedly as an independent state, attended its first Imperial Conference as a Dominion, registered the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 at the League of Nations as an international document and, finally, appointed Smiddy as Minister to the United States as Ireland's first officially recognised diplomatic representative.

It was a busy year for the Department of External Affairs. On the one side it had to face ongoing anti-Treaty activists who sought to attack its new found international status as illegitimate and on the other it faced British opinion which wished to rein in Ireland's new international position firmly within the British Empire. As it turned out, Dominion status would be the means by which through the 1920s Ireland would free itself from the Commonwealth through carefully achieved diplomatic precedents, of which Smiddy's official appointment was one.

Ireland's September 1923 arrival at Geneva was the highlight of that year's League Assembly. It was the first time a new state that had gained independence from Britain joined the League. The League gave Ireland, which only had two overseas missions in 1923, access to the 50 or so members of the League. Immediately afterwards, at the October Imperial Conference in London, Ireland began to discover how with fellow-dominions, including Canada, it could push the Commonwealth towards a freely associated community of equal states. Britain felt that the Dominions should follow London's line on international affairs. Smiddy's subsequent appointment built upon these developments as a visible sign of Ireland's international independence. His presentation of credentials showed that Ireland would not see

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its membership of the Commonwealth, membership it had never sought or aspired to, as in any way restricting its international actions.

Canada began the process of asserting independent dominion representation in Washington, but Ireland executed that right. The two states would continue to work in such a manner through the 1920s. Ireland failed to get elected as a non-permanent member of the League Council in 1926. But Canada, in an election campaign run by Ireland, became the first Dominion to sit on the Council in 1927. It was a precedent Britain was uncomfortable with. So Smiddy's appointment emerges also as part of an ongoing Irish-Canadian connection to assert their independence from Britain.

The July 1924 registration of the Treaty with the League spanned both League and Commonwealth components of Ireland's foreign relations and, to quote a letter sent to Smiddy, Dublin was in 1924 growing out of any timidity it had previously shown in its conduct of foreign relations. Britain protested that the Treaty was not an international document and couldn't be registered as a dominion could not conclude a Treaty and certainly not conclude one with Britain. The League did not listen and Ireland scored a victory emphasising its independence.

Smiddy's appointment made that same point as the registration of the Treaty in crystal clear terms. An Irish diplomat would henceforth independently represent Ireland, the Irish-American community and Ireland's interests directly to the United States government. It showed that Ireland would and could act on the world stage, as Bernadette quoted head of the Irish Foreign Service Joe Walshe 'entirely free and independent from any outside control'.

In the aftermath of the Civil War Smiddy's appointment was quite an achievement. Some eighteen months previously the small Irish diplomatic service had been split and had almost collapsed because of the political divisions over the Treaty that led to civil war. In that split the Irish foreign service had lost some its most talented diplomats who were unable to support the Treaty. Split and shocked, the Department of External Affairs regrouped around a pro-Treaty core and Smiddy's appointment came out of that process.

Smiddy's appointment fits into post civil war rebirth of Irish foreign policy and his tenure in Washington was integral to confirming internationally the stability of the Irish Free State after the civil war. The Irish community in the United States was itself split over the Civil War and the legitimacy of the Free State. Smiddy's formal arrival was a clear sign that the United States officially accepted the Irish Free State and placed its faith in the stability of the young state. He emphasised to President Coolidge on presenting his

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credentials Ireland's 'evolution toward ordered liberty and constitutional life, enshrining and hallowing the principles of democracy'. That 1920s Ireland was not a failed state was an important message to get to Irish-America.

In an age of ambassadors one might be inclined to dismiss what in the 1920s a post like Minister meant to Ireland. This would also miss the significance of Smiddy's arrival in Washington. Ireland did not appoint its first Ambassador until 1946. Ireland had only two other formally acknowledged overseas representatives in 1924 - a High Commissioner in London and a Permanent Delegate to the League of Nations. High Commissioner as part of the Commonwealth lacked the independence of action of a Minister Plenipotentiary and the Permanent Delegate position still lacked full diplomatic rank. So Smiddy's appointment in Washington was Ireland's first real diplomatic post. That simple point is worth emphasising on this 90th anniversary.

That an academic, a professor of economics, would be sent to take on the political and financial task facing Smiddy was a sign of the personnel shortages facing External Affairs in its early years. Ireland had not a pre-independence tradition of a diplomatic service to call upon and trusted personnel were thin on the ground. Smiddy's immediate connection with government was through fellow Corkman Michael Collins and, though significantly senior to him, this age difference may have been significant. Sinn Fein diplomats, representatives of the unofficial pre-Independence Irish Foreign service, sent to Washington - Sean T O'Ceallaigh, Harry Boland, even de Valera, were younger men. Their reports show them visibly in awe of American life. Smiddy had the gravitas that comes with age, and the guile to take on those who sought to destabilise him and the state he represented in Washington.

If I can move briefly through Smiddy's activities in his early years it strikes me that he had an array of work laid out for him similar to today's concerns. The material published in DIFP II shows Smiddy dealing, from an early stage, with Irish emigration to the United States, with the promotion of Ireland as open for business as a stable independent state, in other words as a state that has emerged from a period of crisis. He promoted commerce, trade and tourism. His political concerns, and those of his successors to 1945 were focussed tightly on the Irish-American community and they developed few wider connections on Capitol Hill and within the administrations of the inter-war years. This was a result of the reverberations of the birth pangs of the Irish Free State within a divided Irish-America.

A final significance of Smiddy's appointment that I would like to flag before concluding is that as a result of Smiddy's appointment there were significant knock-on

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developments in Irish-American relations. The reciprocal appointment of Frederick Sterling to Dublin in 1927 as United States Minister Plenipotentiary began the elevation of the Dublin diplomatic corps above ranks of Consuls General. Irish Prime Minister Cosgrave visited the United States on his first overseas visit in 1928. The reciprocal visit of Secretary of State Kellogg to Ireland and Ireland's signature of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928 in its own right separate from Britain further emphasised that Ireland was an independent entity on the world stage. As a result of Smiddy's appointment and subsequent developments in Irish-American relations Dublin exercised the power to sign an international treaty in its own right.

The significance of these early achievements in respect of the development of Ireland's future foreign relations is worth emphasising. Smiddy's appointment and its legacy are directly related to Ireland's gaining independence from Britain in 1922. Had the state not entered the international milieu in 1922 and not begun to develop its place amongst the nations between the wars it is no stretch of imagination to suggest that the great developments of post-1945 Irish foreign policy would never have occurred? I make these points in the context of recent discussions on the impact of the 1916 Rising. To say that without a Rising a 'Home Rule' Ireland would have got independence from Britain anyway in the decades following World War One allows one to interrogate what independent Ireland achieved between 1922 and 1945. The state's achievements in the international milieu stand out. When your main international 'interest' is dealing direct with a neighbour who is one of the great imperial, military and industrial powers of the age you learn fast. The result was a skilled small diplomatic service which would lead Ireland not only through a period of substantial achievement at the UN, but also ultimately into the EEC, heralding the most significant change to Ireland's international position since the 1921 Treaty.

So I hope what I have done in this brief reply is show how Smiddy's appointment was the culmination of a critical year in immediate post-independence Irish foreign policy, a key moment in the development of independent Ireland's place amongst the nations and between Ireland and the United States. Receiving Professor Smiddy 90 years ago today President Coolidge emphasised 'the closest ties of relationship and sentiment' between Ireland and the United States; Smiddy's arrival was a milestone in that 'unique relationship' between our two peoples and our two countries.