



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Education Secretary's Co. Fermanagh and IRA roots!!



Education Secretary, Ruth Kelly.

The grandfather of Ruth Kelly, the troubled Education Secretary, was an Enniskillen man and an IRA man. He was interned by the Northern Ireland Government 80 years ago on a prison ship, during a terror campaign in the fledgling state.

Philip Murphy is described as quartermaster of the West Fermanagh IRA Battalion in a handwritten note in his file, held by the Northern Ireland Public Records Office.

The Education Secretary's spokesperson yesterday confirmed that Mr. Murphy was the Education Secretary's grandfather, but declined to comment on private family matters. However, she would be interested to see the documents, which are new to her, the spokesperson said. She would doubtless find the story of her grandfather illuminating in relation to the War on Terror.

Mr. Murphy, a railway porter, was one of 700 suspects arrested in May 1922 during an IRA bombing and shooting campaign, orchestrated by Michael Collins along the newly defined border separating Northern Ireland from the Irish Free State.

An Internment Order signed by Richard Dawson Bates, the hardline Northern Ireland Home Affairs Minister, states that Mr. Murphy was arrested "on the recommendation of the Inspector-General RUC."

The document continues: "It is expedient that Phil (sic) Murphy of Castlecoole, Enniskillen, in the County Fermanagh, who is suspected of being about to act in a manner prejudicial to the preservation of the peace and the maintenance of order in Northern Ireland, should be interned."

In his role as quartermaster, Mr. Murphy would have been responsible for the distribution and safe-keeping of all IRA weapons in his brigade area.

He was taken to Londonderry and from there to the workhouse in Larne, Co. Antrim, before being transferred to the prison ship SS Argenta, a leaky barge moored at the mouth of Belfast Lough.

He was released unconditionally in June 1924 after a fellow prisoner, Cahir Healy, was elected to the House of Commons as MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone.

Mr. Murphy married after his release, fathering a son and two daughters, who all became school teachers. One of them, Gertrude, is Ruth Kelly's mother.