

Legal Action Planned to Rebury Roger Casement in Co. Antrim

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A group campaigning to see the remains of Roger Casement returned to Co Antrim has announced plans for legal action, aiming to fulfil the Easter Rising organiser's long-standing wish to be laid to rest on the north coast of Northern Ireland.

The announcement coincides with the 109th anniversary of Casement's execution, marked this year with commemorative events at key locations connected to his life and death,

including Pentonville Prison in London and Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery. Casement, a diplomat and human rights campaigner, was hanged in 1916 following his failed attempt to import arms from Germany to support the Easter Rising. His initial burial was at Pentonville Prison, in an unmarked grave covered with quicklime. In 1965, his remains were repatriated to Ireland and interred at Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin.

Despite these relocations, one of Casement's final wishes, expressed in a letter to his cousin Elizabeth Bannister just days before his execution, was to be buried at Murlough Bay in Co. Antrim. The location, where he spent part of his childhood following the death of his father, was described by Casement as offering a "great panorama of island and hill and swirling waters" that "made me realise what Ireland was to me."

This year, the Roger Casement Commemoration & Reinterment Association, which organises annual events to honour his legacy, confirmed it is intensifying efforts to see Casement's remains reburied for a third and final time. Speaking at a wreath-laying ceremony at Casement Park in west Belfast, the association's chair, Alan Daly, said: "The association is calling for Casement to be brought home. We have instructed a leading human rights law firm to act on our behalf and are also in talks with a local funeral director who has previous experience in this field. Both parties are on board, and we have initiated legal correspondence with Glasnevin Cemetery."

Glasnevin Cemetery, managed by the Dublin Cemeteries Trust, is the resting place of many prominent figures in Irish history, including Michael Collins, poet Brendan Behan, and the late Dubliners singer Luke Kelly. Earlier this month, the association held a wreath-laying ceremony at Glasnevin to honour Casement, whose humanitarian work earned him recognition for exposing abuses in the Congo Free State and the Amazon region.

The commemorations also included a visit to Pentonville Prison, where a new plaque was unveiled to mark the site where Casement's life ended at the age of 51. The prison, where his remains were initially interred unceremoniously, is now recognised as a site of historical significance connected to Casement's life and execution.

The annual gatherings concluded with a planned wreath-laying at Murlough Bay, the site Casement identified in his letter as his desired resting place. Supporters argue that moving his remains to Co Antrim would not only fulfil his wishes but also provide a symbolic link to his formative years in Northern Ireland.

Legal experts involved in the campaign emphasise that the process will require careful negotiation with Dublin Cemeteries Trust and adherence to both Irish and UK legal frameworks governing exhumation and reburial. The association has indicated that it intends to pursue all available avenues to ensure Casement's wishes are respected.

Observers note that the campaign touches on broader issues of historical justice and human rights. Casement's life reflected a commitment to defending the dignity of those subjected to exploitation, and advocates argue that honouring his burial request is consistent with the principles he championed.

The Roger Casement Commemoration & Reinterment Association has called for public support and awareness of the campaign, highlighting the importance of remembering the human rights legacy of one of Ireland's most prominent historical figures. The legal proceedings are expected to unfold over the coming months, with the association expressing hope that a resolution will allow Casement to finally rest in his wishes.

The Dublin Cemeteries Trust has been approached for comment on the proposed legal action and has confirmed it is reviewing the matter. Meanwhile, the association continues its preparations for ceremonies that mark the enduring significance of Casement's life, from his humanitarian work to his role in the Easter Rising, ensuring his contributions to human rights and Irish history remain recognised.