

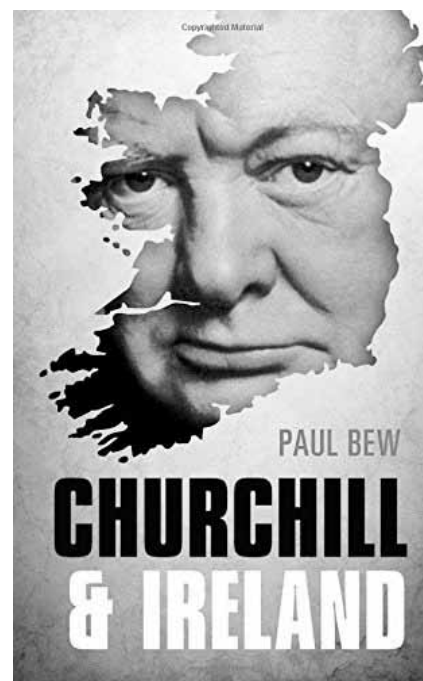
anti-war movement. Ponsonby is absent from large sections of the book and other Radical Liberals such as Charles Trevelyan and Phillip Morrell seem at least as important. Thus the subject of this biography is not quite as central to the surrounding story as Marlor might wish. Indeed, Trevelyan, after he resigned as a junior minister following Britain's declaration of war, assumed the leadership of the backbench committee.

The author is not afraid of making controversial or counterfactual claims. In the event of a German victory in a war where Britain had remained neutral, Marlor claims that 'An un-weakened Britain would have been well off in comparison' (pp. 88, 209). Just what the Kaiser's Europe would have looked like or what Britain's relationship with a German-dominated continent would have been is unclear. But few in 1914 relished such a prospect. More speculation occurs with parallels being drawn between British intervention in 1914 and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. While tenuous similarities may be found between the expectations created through the Triple Entente before the First World War and Britain's recent relationship with the USA, there is enough interesting and original material in the study for superfluous claims to be avoided. Another moot point concerns whether

or not Ponsonby was a pacifist (p. 158). Marlor claims that he was not for peace at any price. But as a neutralist in 1914, an advocate of Britain's unilateral disarmament, active participant in the 'no more war' movement, founder of the Peace Pledge Union and chairman of War Resisters International, Ponsonby consistently displayed pacifist traits.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of British intervention or the practicalities of remaining aloof in 1914, a number of anti-war MPs found themselves castigated for their principled stance. Derided as a 'peace crank', Ponsonby was not the only Liberal MP de-selected by his constituency. During the war he was twice attacked and Trevelyan was condemned to be shot! Marlor shows that there was nothing easy about what Ponsonby and his fellow neutralists championed. Despite the unpopularity of their approach, they, along with some elements of the liberal press, provided a largely forgotten alternative reading to the grim days of July and August 1914. This is the chief value of Marlor's informative study.

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diehard imperialist opponent of the Irish nation – as witnessed respectively by his conversion to the home rule cause after switching loyalties from the Conservatives to the Liberals in 1904 and his later hostility to Irish republicanism. Bew argues, by contrast, that there was an essential consistency in Churchill's thinking and actions on Irish policy, one that combined genuine sympathy for Irish self-government with a belief that this must be within the framework of the United Kingdom and the British Empire.

He supported Irish home rule before the First World War because he was convinced that gaining Irish goodwill through a concession of self-government would make Britain stronger by making Ireland a contented member of the English-speaking world. At the same time, he was opposed to coercing Ulster into a home rule Ireland, and one of the first members of Asquith's cabinet to argue in favour of special treatment for the predominantly protestant counties in the north of Ireland. In the aftermath of the Easter Rising of 1916, Churchill, by now out of office, encouraged the ultimately unsuccessful attempts to achieve agreement home rule settlement between Redmond and Carson, the leaders of Irish nationalism and unionism.

Yet as war secretary in Lloyd George's coalition government from 1919, Churchill was a hawk in the cabinet, during the war of independence, proposing in 1920 the creation of the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary (Auxies) who became notorious for their use of reprisals against the Irish

Churchill's attitude to Ireland

Paul Bew, *Churchill and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

Review by Dr Iain Sharpe

GIVEN THE SHEER range and number of thematic studies of aspects of Winston Churchill's career that have been published in recent years, it is surprising that his relationship with Ireland and the Irish has not had more attention. While Churchill's name is not bound up with Irish affairs in the way that Gladstone's is, nonetheless he and Ireland played significant roles in one another's histories. With the exception of his final premiership, each of his periods in office coincided with defining moments in the relationship between Britain and Ireland – from the crisis over the third home rule bill before the First World War to the controversy over Irish neutrality in the Second.

So it is welcome that a historian should decide to tackle this subject, and

even more so that it should be Paul Bew. A crossbench peer, Bew has already made a distinguished contribution to the study of Irish history through his many publications. He has also been an adviser to the Bloody Sunday Commission and to David Trimble during the peace process negotiations. Perhaps these varied roles and his own apparent political sympathies (at once left-wing and unionist) make him better placed than most to bring out the nuances and paradoxes of Churchill's engagement with Irish affairs. Certainly this is neither hagiography nor hatchet job.

There have been two essential criticisms of Churchill's attitude towards Ireland – either that he was an opportunist who took whatever view best suited his career at the time or that he was a

The Leadership of Charles Kennedy

Under Charles Kennedy's leadership, from 1999 to 2006, the Liberal Democrats won a record number of seats in the Commons – but in January 2006 he was forced to resign by the party's MPs. When he died, in June 2015, he was mourned deeply by the party he once led. This meeting will assess Kennedy's achievements as Liberal Democrat leader and his strengths and weaknesses.

Speakers: **Greg Hurst** (author, *Charles Kennedy: A Tragic Flaw*) and **Lord Dick Newby** (former Chief of Staff to Charles Kennedy). Chair: **Baroness Lindsay Northover**.

6.30pm, Monday 3 July 2017

Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

civilian population in response to IRA killings. Even then there was an element of pragmatism behind the policy – Churchill hoped that the impact of reprisals would be severe enough to bring Sinn Féin to the negotiating table. He supported 'back channel' discussions to make this happen, making it clear that a positive offer of self-government would be made if violence ended. He was equally adamant, however, that this would not be an Irish republic. After the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, Churchill defended the government's approach against Asquith's criticism that it betrayed traditional Liberal commitment to justice for Ireland, pointing out that:

For the best part of five years, Mr Gladstone pursued a regime of coercion in Ireland and it was only at the end of that period that he turned round and offered a home rule solution to the men he had previously described as marching through rapine to the dismemberment of the empire.

Once the treaty was signed, Churchill showed a fierce determination to make sure it succeeded, giving strong support to Michael Collins and the pro-treaty forces in southern Ireland and to Sir James Craig and the Northern Ireland government, overlooking minor breaches of the

treaty in order to achieve its overall success. As chancellor of the exchequer in Baldwin's Conservative government in 1925 Churchill agreed a relatively generous financial settlement for Ireland, to sugar the pill of the boundary commission's failure to lead to progress towards a united Ireland. The resulting intergovernmental agreement appeared to offer a future for Ireland in line with Churchill's wishes – all of Ireland had some form of self-government within the British Empire, the Dublin government accepted the legitimacy of Northern Ireland, and the way appeared open for friendly cooperation between the two parts of the island, with the possibility of unity being achieved at some point in the future by consent rather than coercion.

This was not to last. De Valera's new Irish constitution of 1937 withdrew Dublin's recognition of Northern Ireland, with Articles 2 and 3 effectively making a territorial claim on the six counties. Churchill was further dismayed by Neville Chamberlain's agreement on the eve of the Second World War to give up the so-called treaty ports in the Irish Free State, the loss of which was to harm Britain during the second world war. During the war Churchill was angered by Irish neutrality and willing to concede a united Ireland in exchange for Irish Free State participation in the war on the Allies' side, but there was little appetite

from De Valera or the population of the Free State for such an agreement. In 1948 Costello's coalition government in Ireland severed the last link between southern Ireland and Britain by declaring a republic. This completed the defeat of Churchill's vision of the relationship between the two islands. Speaking in parliament he said:

I may cherish the hope that some day all Ireland will be loyal, will be loyal because it is free, will be united because it is loyal and will be united within itself and united to the British Empire.

He added wistfully: 'Strange as it may seem, I still cherish that dream'. Such a comment might just as easily have dated from Churchill's period as a member of a home rule cabinet before the First World War, and supports Bew's argument, which overall I find persuasive. Of course it is possible to identify moments of opportunism and contradiction in the course of Churchill's long involvement with Irish affairs, but for the most part this was in pursuit of an overriding aim. This short and engaging book therefore makes an important contribution to Churchill (and Irish) studies.

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