A reply to Professor David Fitzpatrick and to Dr Eve Morrison’s response to criticism of Terror in Ireland 1916-1923

(Plus a section omitted from my review, relating to Brian Hanley’s commentary on the 1985 Sinn Féin pamphlet, ‘The Good Old IRA’)

By Niall Meehan

I reviewed an edited collection, Terror in Ireland, 1916-23 (Lilliput, 2012) for Reviews in History (published 16 August 2012). The book was dedicated to the memory of the late Peter Hart who died in 2010. Hart had been a member of the Trinity History Workshop, under whose auspices the book was conceived and published. The review commented on:

• the book’s dismissive attitude to criticism of Hart’s research;
• a failure to include substantive criticism of Hart;
• a pejorative use of ‘terror’ terminology to describe Irish as distinct from British violence;
• a failure to explore pro-British unionist ‘terror’ in what is now Northern Ireland;
• Eve Morrison’s attempted vindication of Hart’s research on the 28 November 1920 Kilmichael Ambush.

The Editor Professor David Fitzpatrick and Dr Eve Morrison responded to my review. I think it would be of value to continue the discussion, not least since debate may clarify the wider issues surrounding approaches to and controversies in modern Irish history. Reviews in History does not permit continued discussion beyond review and response. That is why I am contributing it here.

I would also like to do something else. My original review was long. I cut out of it consideration of Brian Hanley’s discussion of a 1985 Sinn Féin pamphlet, The Good Old IRA. I include it here for two reasons. The first is that the pamphlet is important to historians like Paul Bew in establishing from a unionist perspective the methodological adequacy of Peter Hart’s approach to the history of the Irish War of Independence. This view is echoed, though from a different viewpoint, in Brian Hanley’s discussion. The second reason is that the pamphlet was introduced independently into discussion of the review on the Cedar Lounge Revolution website. I would like to explore why it is that Bew and Hanley both see the pamphlet as significant.

I should add that discussion of these issues by history enthusiasts on the web (dismissed by Professor Fitzpatrick as ‘bloggers’) has value. It reflects popular understanding of the state of Irish historiography and is usually a genuine attempt to come to grips with causation in Irish history, society and politics. I am happy to contribute to that understanding and also thereby to my own.

I will first discuss Professor Fitzpatrick’s response, Morrison’s and then introduce the discussion on Hanley’s contribution.

---

1 Available, with responses, at, http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers/1877653/

David Fitzpatrick’s response

Professor David Fitzpatrick’s response to my review of *Terror in Ireland*, accuses me of being ‘disingenuous’ for suggesting editorial bias in the edited collection’s use of the term ‘terrorist’ or ‘terrorists’. I asserted that whereas some contributors (including Professor Fitzpatrick) tagged Irish forces as ‘the terrorists’ or ‘Irish terrorists’, British forces escaped this description.

For instance, Fitzpatrick’s chapter, ‘The Price of Balbriggan’ at one point recognised southern unionist conferral of ‘moral legitimacy on the emerging republic’, because they viewed ‘Irish terrorists [as] less arbitrary and malign than British forces’. Note use of the terms ‘forces’ and ‘terrorists’ in the course of describing one episode of British state violence, the police (‘Black & Tan’) burning of Balbriggan in September 1920. Fitzpatrick does not cite a single sentence in which British forces were, to reverse his usual terminology, ‘British terrorists’. I presume, if he could he would. I cannot find evidence of the ‘ecumenism’ to which Fitzpatrick lays claim.

Fitzpatrick’s introduction to the *Terror* collection endorsed the late Peter Hart’s controversial assertion that the IRA targeted Protestants as ‘deviants’. He presented unproblematically Hart’s use of the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ in a 1996 essay, reissued in 2003, to describe alleged anti-Protestant IRA actions in the south. Fitzpatrick claims his presentation on this point was ‘guarded’. I invite readers to examine pages 4-5 of the introduction for evidence of this claim. I do not see it. Fitzpatrick failed, for instance, to mention that Hart reversed his ‘ethnic cleansing’ argument in 2003 (or that, peculiarly, in 2006 he denied ever using the term).

Fitzpatrick’s introduction, and his previous 2011 review of Gerard Murphy's *The Year of Disappearances*, expressed no reservation about Hart’s ethnic cleansing charge. Indeed, in *Terror in Ireland* Fitzpatrick’s discussion of the point is deployed as a stick to ward off allegedly personally offensive Hart critics. It is difficult to take Fitzpatrick seriously since he has expressed views similar to those professed by Hart. In 1998 in *The Two Irelands* (p. 95) Fitzpatrick observed, though entirely without evidence, that adulterer, homosexual, tinker, beggar, ex-serviceman and Protestant were in themselves ‘dangerous and potentially lethal labels’ during the revolutionary period.

Of course, we must concede, Fitzpatrick once held a contrary view. In *The Oxford illustrated History of Ireland* (1989), he observed that during the War of Independence, ‘few attacks on southern Protestants [including ‘diehards’] were reported… though many vacant houses were burned’ (p. 246). In Fitzpatrick's response to my review, however, there is a concession. Peter Hart, we are now informed, realised eventually that the ethnic cleansing term was ‘hyperbolic’. It is not clear, given the above oscillations, whether Professor Fitzpatrick is entirely (or consistently) content with Hart’s reversal of view. The record betrays a sentimental attachment to a view that republicans targeted Protestants for sectarian reasons during the war of independence. It would be helpful if Professor Fitzpatrick could enlighten us as to how he came to his new view during the 1990s and whether Peter Hart’s findings were instrumental in that process.

If Hart stopped using the term ethnic cleansing to describe what happened to Protestants in the south, he started using it to describe unionists who attacked Catholics in the North. What is Professor Fitzpatrick’s view of Peter Hart’s 2002 reference to the sectarian B Special police in Belfast as

---

1 David Fitzpatrick, ‘History in a hurry’, Dublin Review of Books, issue 17, [http://www.drb.ie/more_details/11-03-17/History_In_A_Hurry.aspx](http://www.drb.ie/more_details/11-03-17/History_In_A_Hurry.aspx). See also, my comment on this point in, ‘Distorting Irish History Two, the road from Dunmanway: Peter Hart’s treatment of the 1922 ‘April killings’ in West Cork’, at [http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers/618347](http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers/618347).
‘ethnic cleansers’ of Roman Catholics? It appears the Professor of Modern Irish History in Trinity College Dublin does not feel qualified to express one. His excuse for Terror in Ireland not exploring the considerable violence directed at northern nationalists is an absence of ‘relevant [TCD Workshop] expertise’. Prospective TCD history students might therefore be advised, ‘go elsewhere if you wish to study the formation of the state of Northern Ireland’.

The Irish independence war was the extension of a conflict of legitimacy between a large majority of Irish people and the British government (plus its local allies). The British government was established but without a democratic mandate. An Irish government emerged after Sinn Féin won the November 1918 general election in Ireland with majority support. The British government attempted by force to suppress Irish self-determination. Both sets of opponents declared the other’s authority to be illegitimate and illegal. It was a situation of dual power. War ensued. This failure of political recognition is at the heart of Fitzpatrick’s excursion into the realm of terrorist tautology and explains the editorial weakness of Terror in Ireland. It was also, incidentally, the central weakness of Hart’s introductory chapter in The IRA and its Enemies, where Sinn Féin’s comprehensive 1918 election victory was ignored.

In his contribution to Terror Brian Hanley distanced himself, though without open engagement, from Fitzpatrick’s definition of terrorism. I noted this. Eve Morrison has distanced herself similarly in response to my review. The assertion might have been of value to the reader and reviewer had it been expressed in the Terror book.

**Eve Morrison’s response**

In her response to the review, Eve Morrison defended again Peter Hart’s 1998 analysis of the 28 November 1920 Kilmichael Ambush, but without fully understanding the new problems in Hart’s methodology she has uncovered. Her response continues a trend in which most old and some new problems are obscured. This clouds her attempt to reconstruct what exactly happened at Kilmichael (in so far as that can be done).

Morrison’s partial revelation of the content of ‘Chisholm tapes’, recorded interviews with War of Independence veterans that Hart cited anonymously, undermines not supports Hart’s methodology. Hart claimed access to five anonymous interview accounts of the Kilmichael Ambush, his two and three by Fr Chisholm. We are now informed that that there were not three but two Chisholm interviewee accounts of the ambush. How did Hart get this wrong? We also now know that Chisholm interviewed the last known surviving Kilmichael ambush veteran, Ned Young. Young was also, it is now confirmed, one of Hart’s two claimed interviewees. Hart was wrong not to inform us that he counted the same interviewee twice.

Five Kilmichael interviewees are immediately cut to three. No comment from Morrison in relation to these new anomalies.

However, in a sworn affidavit Ned Young’s son John stated in 2008 that his then 96 year old father, the sole reported ambush survivor during the period 1987-89, was incapable of being interviewed at the time Hart claimed to have spoken to two ambush veterans in 1988-89. John Young very recently
reiterated this point. This contradicted Morrison’s report (in her response) of what John Young allegedly said to her during a disputed telephone call.\

The claim that Hart interviewed an infirm 96 year-old Ned Young in 1988 therefore remains improbable. The decision to permit Hart while a PhD student to anonymise all veteran interviewees (including those who did not request anonymity) without apparent protocols is at the root of this problem. It is surprising that Morrison, a member of the Oral History Network of Ireland, has no view on it. It is unfortunate also that she is reluctant to adequately reflect other historian’s views on the subject. Morrison cited nine words underlined below from a paragraph on page 109 of W.H. Kautt’s *Ambushes and Armour, the Irish Rebellion 1919-21* (2010):

> ‘The argument against Hart’s witnesses are difficult to overcome but one should assume that Hart is telling the truth. One should not however accept his interpretation based on his evidence. Nor should Hart have introduced evidence that could not be verified or examined. Likewise he should not be expected to break his word, so the only reasonable course is to reject the anonymous witnesses altogether.’

Notwithstanding Morrison’s concession that Kautt was ‘not uncritical of Hart’, I leave it to readers to assess whether Morrison’s citation adequately summarizes Kautt’s view. Morrison asserts, ‘Meehan has responded with an aggressive restatement of his long held contention that Hart invented some of [his] interviewees’. I think it more likely he invented interviews with real people, Ned Young and, possibly, Jack Hennessy (I pointed out on a number of occasions, Hart was in possession of their BMH Witness Statements). It is possible that Hart was convinced of certain information, possibly from Fr Chisholm, but possessed no orthodox manner of presenting it. He may have been mission driven to publish this information of which he was personally convinced in an unorthodox manner. On the basis of, ‘Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive’, the threads of this effort began to unpick in the period between 1993 PhD thesis and 1998 book publication, and then also slowly afterwards. It is one of the reasons we still discuss this fascinating work.

However, whatever about Hart, at least we are certain that Fr Chisholm interviewed Ned Young. Chisholm gave to Eve Morrison a recording of this interview. This is a taped interview that for some reason Chisholm denied existed in a 2008 letter to John Young.

We must therefore delve further into the interviewee problem. The three remaining interviewees should perhaps be cut solely to Chisholm’s two, one with Young and another with ambush veteran Jack O’Sullivan. This is because Hart claimed to have interviewed an ambush ‘scout’ on 19 November 1989, six days after Ned Young died.

Morrison's answer to this ghostly apparition is in two parts. The first is that she is on the trail of the mysterious ‘scout’ and at some point hopes to confirm his existence. Apart from wishing her well in this venture, there is little at this juncture to add.

The second part of Morrison’s approach to Hart’s ‘unarmed scout’ (which ignores the considerable fact that the same person was not a scout in Hart’s 1993 PhD thesis) is to suggest that there were

---

4 ‘Why Spinwatch is Publishing John Young’s Statement’, at [http://www.spinwatch.org/-articles-by-category-mainmenu-8/52-northern-ireland/5516-why-spinwatch-is-publishing-john-youngs-statement](http://www.spinwatch.org/-articles-by-category-mainmenu-8/52-northern-ireland/5516-why-spinwatch-is-publishing-john-youngs-statement). In future Morrison might consider confirming contentious claims in writing, especially when, as in this case, there was ample time in which to do so.

5 In addition Hart’s 1993 thesis reported this interviewee conducting a tour of the ambush site, information withdrawn from the 1998 book.
additional unknown ambush veterans alive after Ned Young died. Morrison presented two reportedly ‘previously unknown’ Kilmichael veterans in her text, though both died many years before Hart appeared in West Cork.⁶ Morrison also mentioned a third unknown, Michael O’Dwyer, in a footnote. I ignored the footnoted O’Dwyer in my rather long review. In her response Morrison fore grounded O’Dwyer’s importance to her argument. I am happy to consider him.

Morrison’s questioning of the view that Young was the last surviving participant is undermined by the fact that one of her ‘previously unknown’ veterans, Timothy Keohane, is not unknown and because another, Cornelius Kelleher, is not (except by means of an elastic definition of ambush participation) a Kilmichael veteran. Kelleher never thought of claiming to have been one.

According to his BMH Witness Statement (n. 1,654), Cornelius Kelleher, a member of the local Kilmichael IRA company, saw from the vantage point of his house flames from burning Auxiliary lorries in the distance at Kilmichael, in other words when the ambush was over. He set off with a companion to examine the scene. He never arrived because he reportedly became embroiled after encountering an ambush scout, in obtaining a priest for the mortally wounded Pat Deasy who lay dying some miles from the ambush site. This point is concluded.

On the other hand, Morrison’s other ‘unknown’ Timothy Keohane did claim to have been an ambush participant. This was discussed publicly in 1973, a year after his death. He is not therefore a ‘previously unknown’ Kilmichael Ambush witness. His claim to participation was known by Meda Ryan, who discussed him in the latest printing of her Tom Barry IRA Freedom Fighter (published prior to Terror in Ireland). He was also known to local historian Flor Crowley and readers of the Southern Star newspaper (the main publication in West Cork). He was included in a list of Kilmichael participants published by Crowley in a full-page Southern Star story on 27 October 1973, together with an acknowledgement that his participation was disputed.

Contrary to what Morrison asserts, I did not discount Keohane’s claim. I suggested that it was problematic. This is given:

- Keohane's once-off inclusion as an ambush participant, ‘after much discussion’, in the 1973 Southern Star report;
- his exclusion from Kilmichael Commemoration Committee lists (originally compiled by veterans themselves);
- the failure of Bureau of Military History statements about Kilmichael to list or mention him, except in his own contribution
- Meda Ryan’s research suggesting that he was not at the ambush proper but at the ‘far away camp’ at Granure afterwards.

I argued, and this is my main point, that the public manner in which Keohane's claim of participation was debated made improbable a still alive Kilmichael veteran hiding his light under a bushel until PhD student Peter Hart appeared, speaking anonymously, before again disappearing. Keohane’s publicised claim undermines not supports the assertion that there are unknown veterans. When veterans gathered in 1938 at Kilmichael they endeavoured to list everyone present in 1920. They published their first list of veterans.⁷ They continued to do so and further lists were published occasionally. The Ballineen Enniskeane Heritage Group thoroughly researched the issue and published in 1995 The Wild Heather Glen, the Kilmichael Story in Grief and in Glory. Peter Hart

---

⁷ Southern Star, 3 December1938.
recognized it as a definitive list of those who fought at the ambush that contained ‘valuable biographical details’.

Morrison could be right, however. There may have been an additional elderly ambush veteran out there in the ether alive in 1988-89 about whom no one knows. However unlikely the prospect, who is to say? However, she is definitively wrong in suggesting that Peter Hart interviewed him. Peter Hart denied this with his assertion that _The Wild heather Glen_ booklet contained a list of all ambush veterans. That admission rules out Peter Hart’s claim that he interviewed an ambush ‘scout’ on 19 November 1989. All those listed in the booklet were dead after whatever hour on 13 November 1989 Ned Young expired. Possibly, in recognising this problem, Hart changed the status of his 19 November 1989 interviewee into a ‘scout’ in his 1998 book, a designation the ‘scout’ did not have in Hart’s 1993 PhD thesis. Morrison ignores the point.

The scout’s existence is in any case compromised by Morrison's revelation that his utterance in _The IRA and its Enemies_ was actually said by Chisholm interviewee Jack O’Sullivan. Morrison might concede that conjoined with Hart’s ‘muddled... citations’ in relation to this ‘scout’ must be the individual’s somewhat muddled existence. He still looks like Jack Hennessey to me, a rifleman who died in 1970, whose war of Independence witness statement Hart cited later in _The IRA and its Enemies_. That statement was also, as I suspected and noted, the unnamed statement mentioned (but not cited) by Hart in his Kilmichael Ambush chapter.

However, back to Timothy Keohane. Morrison first ignored, and now in her response to me, rejects Keohane’s Witness Statement account of Auxiliaries firing again, after they seemed to surrender at Kilmichael, as Keohane’s perception of a ‘false surrender’. It is difficult to counter eccentric arguments and I will not try.

The third ‘previously unknown’ participant is Michael O’Dwyer (as footnoted by Morrison, p. 177, n. 22), who died in 1956. He was named once by Tom Barry in a robust 60-page 1974 polemic that exposed sharp differences between Barry and Fr John Chisholm, entitled, _The Reality of the Anglo Irish War 1920-21 in West Cork, Refutations, Corrections and Comments on Liam Deasy’s Towards Ireland Free_. Barry wrote, ‘three men had the rank of section commander at Kilmichael. They were Battalion Vice Commandant Michael McCarthy, Stephen O’Neill and Mick Dwyer’ (p. 14). In his 1949 _Guerilla Days_ account Barry lists three men in a Command Post and riflemen positioned in Sections 1, 2 and 3. He named Michael McCarthy as head of Section 2 that attacked the second Auxiliary lorry. He named Stephen O’Neill in charge of Section 3, occupying a high position on the far side of the road (and expected to fire on Auxiliaries should they take up position there). In _Guerilla Days_ Barry did not name the No 1 Section Commander. It was supposed to have been Michael O’Dwyer who, according to Meda Ryan ( _Southern Star_ , 8 January 2011) was ill disposed on 28 November 1920 and did not take part in the ambush. This is plausible. It is highly unlikely that veterans would fail in their participant listings to include the name of a Section Commander. They would have been guilty of this had O’Dwyer actually been present. It appears Barry made a mistake in 1974.8

---

8 Morrison also noted that two interviewee utterances are not accounted for, without telling us which ones.
10 Ryan was responding to Don Wood (27 November 2011) who wrote an article based on spotting Barry’s reference to Dwyer in 1974.
11 Writing on 1 October 1973, Barry wrote, ‘My booklet will take me more time than I would wish due to fairly serious physical handicaps from which I now suffer’, _The Reality of the Anglo Irish War_ [etc], 1974, p. 6.
I think it may fairly be said that in Michael O'Dwyer Morrison appears to have hit on a previously unknown (to her, but not Meda Ryan) non-participant. It is ironic that Morrison’s evidence for O'Dwyer being present is that Tom Barry named him once as a section commander. It appears that Barry’s claims are correct when it suits Morrison’s argument, but not otherwise.

The big question is Hart’s contention that Barry lied about a false surrender by Auxiliaries at Kilmichael. Claiming there was a false surrender was Barry's justification for killing all Auxiliaries at the ambush (one was left for dead, while one injured who escaped was shot dead later by other IRA volunteers). Claiming there was not a false surrender and that Barry was a liar was Peter Hart’s basis for terming Barry a lying political serial killer who massacred defenceless Auxiliaries.12

As with his ethnic cleansing claim, Hart later also withdrew the ‘serial killer’ allegation. Hart set up his Kilmichael account as a basis for viewing IRA volunteers as seething with barely controlled ethnic hatreds that culminated in an allegedly sectarian killing of Protestant civilians in the Bandon Valley in April 1922. Morrison wonders in her response why I brought up this connection. I did because Hart did. It explains the ideological imperative behind Hart’s Kilmichael and then Bandon Valley accounts and the connection he, not I, made between them. Incidentally, this answers the often asked question, why was Kilmichael important to Hart. It was integral to setting up his narrative account of the IRA’s alleged attitude to ‘deviants’. It is why Hart also distorted Barry’s general attitude toward taking prisoners and why he glossed over the counter insurgency behaviour of the Auxiliaries. Hart attempted to reverse the previously held perception of differences between Irish and British forces. It masqueraded as a peeling away of layers of nationalist obfuscation of the actuality of war. It was in essence an exercise in propaganda.

However, in relation to the false surrender controversy, in addition to muddling interviewees and what they said, Hart also was unaware of published accounts of the false surrender before Guerilla Days in Ireland was published in 1949. This included one by Barry (as ‘Eyewitness’) in the Irish army magazine, An Cosantóir, in 1941 (one was also edited out of a 1932 Irish Press account by Barry). However, many more appeared. Seven months after the ambush, Lloyd George's imperial adviser, Lionel Curtis, published one in the June 1921 edition of Round Table. Piaras Beaslaí published the second in 1926. The third was in 1932 from former Auxiliary Commander, FP Crozier. Fourth was Ernie O'Malley in 1936. The first published veteran account of a false surrender was by Stephan O'Neill in The Kerryman in 1937, reproduced in the first edition of Rebel Cork's Fighting Story in 1947 (currently available from Mercier Press). McCann’s War by the Irish published one also in 1946. Finally, Barry's appeared in 1949 in his internationally celebrated Guerilla Days in Ireland. That is seven published accounts (counting Stephen O'Neill's twice). Hart attempted to undermine Crozier and ignored the rest (though he footnoted O'Neill's highly significant 1937 account). As I observed, why pick on Tom Barry? Is it merely because Barry wrote a well-received book still in print? Is it because in The IRA and its Enemies (p. 24) Hart asserted that Barry’s account ‘has come to be accepted as authoritative and has been retold as such by other authors’. Hart cited in this connection McCann’s War by the Irish, failing to note that it was published three years before Barry's ‘authoritative’ version appeared in 1949.

It appears as though the allegation of a false surrender hung around the battlefield as soon as the smoke cleared. The allegation was made by fellow participants to Ned Young immediately

---

12 Morrison writes, ‘contrary to what Meehan asserts, I did not suggest that Barry necessarily invented the false surrender. I do not know whether Barry actively invented the story, or simply could not bear to acknowledge that he might have mistaken what he saw in darkness and rain’. Those words convey to me Morrison’s belief in a process of invention by Barry.
afterwards, according to Young's interview on the Chisholm tapes (as reported by Morrison). Morrison makes much of Ned Young not himself witnessing a false surrender. It should be clear to Morrison why not. Young reported in his witness statement that during the fight he chased an escaping Auxiliary, briefly leaving the ambush site. When he returned his comrades told him of a false surrender. Young is a witness to what he did at the ambush, which did not reportedly involve engagement with Auxiliaries at the second lorry, where the false surrender event took place.

It seems to me that we must add the unnamed veterans reporting it to Young, as asserting that there was a perception of a false surrender. On this basis, John Lordon’s reported claim to other volunteers that he bayoneted an Auxiliary who had surrendered falsely (again according to Morrison’s report of Young on the Chisholm tapes), means he should be added too. In addition, in my view Jack Hennessy’s BMH statement acknowledges his experience of a false surrender event. Morrison disagrees. I am happy to let the reader judge whether Hennessy stating he exposed his position by standing and shouting ‘hands up’ to an enemy who had thrown down his rifle, followed by the same enemy soldier reaching for and loosing off rounds with his revolver, constitutes the perception of a false surrender event. Morrison speculating ninety years later that the Auxiliary was out of ammunition is a weak basis for categorically dismissing alternative views. We are dealing with a force of less than nine Auxiliaries (as some were already out of action) in a confined area. Morrison’s suggestion that some surrendered while others fought on seems to me on its own a recipe for the perception that the Auxiliaries were surrendering falsely, whether or not they were. Either Barry, Young, Lordon, O’Neill and other volunteers who reported a false surrender were all lying, or else an event took place that gave rise to the story of the false surrender when the action was completed.

Morrison contends that because BMH statements (aside from Hennessy’s and ignoring Young’s) do not address the false surrender issue it is a coded refutation of Barry’s account. However, they also fail to register the shooting of disarmed Auxiliaries, either as a consequence of the false surrender or simply the shooting of unarmed prisoners. In an unsuccessful false surrender involving life threatening treachery the taking of prisoners does not arise. It becomes a fight to the finish in the literal sense of that term, until all of the enemy are ‘finished’. Barry reported (p. 45) not accepting a second surrender attempt in this context. This particular, albeit chilling, aspect is not understood by a fair-minded assessor of Hart controversies, John Dorney, writing on the excellent Irish Story website.13

Speaking of the false surrender also implies speaking of the consequent executions. Paddy O’Brien, Jim ‘Spud’ Murphy, and Michael O’Driscoll not addressing the false surrender in their BMH statements may be related to discomfort at speaking of shooting remaining disarmed or already wounded Auxiliaries at the finish of the fight. Barry referred to it as the bloodiest fight in Ireland and wrote of how traumatically disorientated his troops were afterwards. It was a baptism of fire unlikely ever to be recounted in its full gory detail. We should not consider that unusual. Perhaps that is why accounts of the battle, forming part of volunteer’s re-telling of their entire War of Independence experiences, are rather perfunctory.14

Barry on two or three false surrender fatalities

Morrison is locked into a scenario in which Tom Barry’s account is untrustworthy, so much so she must force what he wrote, and what she falsely claims Barry wrote, into a rigid straitjacket.

Here is an example of Morrison misreading Barry, following Hart. To counter the clear assertion by Barry that two of three IRA fatalities occurred due to the false surrender episode Morrison cites in her response footnote 11 on page 16 of Barry’s *The Reality of the Anglo Irish War in West Cork* (1974). It is indeed ambiguous in stating, ‘of the three two at least had fallen for the bogus surrender trick’. However, Barry did not write it. A prominent ‘Publisher’s Notice’ on page 4 concludes, ‘Footnotes which will be found on various pages have been drafted and inserted by us, as publishers’. Barry’s text is crystal clear: ‘the Auxiliaries were firing again with their revolvers and rifles and two Volunteers fell’ (p. 16); ‘there was hardly a Volunteer in West Cork who did not know of the false surrender and the killing of two volunteers after it’ (p. 17). A basis for the misreading possibly arises due to Barry asserting beforehand, ‘three volunteers stood up – probably to accept the surrender’. But Barry was always clear, three stood, two were shot. Morrison discusses reported false surrender fatality Pat Deasy dying some hours afterwards. She suggests, Barry might have implied three fatalities, while explicitly stating two. The point is demolished in Barry’s 1949 *Guerilla Days* account where he unambiguously states, ‘One of our three men spun around before he fell, and Pat Deasy staggered before he, too, went down’ (p. 44).15

Why is this otherwise perplexing misreading of Barry important to Morrison and why was it important to Hart? Because Jack O’Sullivan on the Chisholm tapes asserted that it was wrong to say that IRA fatality Michael McCarthy died during the false surrender, when he was killed beforehand. If Barry asserted that all three were killed during the false surrender this would contradict another veteran account. However, in 1941 Barry also stated (for the first time of many) that two fatalities resulted from the false surrender and on this occasion named McCarthy as being killed before it. There is therefore no contradiction. What is of interest, though unnoticed, is that since O’Sullivan asserted (alongside Barry) that McCarthy was killed before what Father Chisholm referred to as ‘a bogus surrender’, then both are also in agreement that a false surrender took place afterwards (despite Fr Chisholm’s later attempt to undermine this point):

O’Sullivan - I know, I know, that [Chisholm’s reference to ‘a bogus surrender’] covers my story, but ah then I, I always say that Michael McCarthy was even dead before …
Chisholm - was dead before the Auxiliaries surrendered.
O’Sullivan - Before they surrendered.
Chisholm - Yes.
O’Sullivan - Yes.

The extensive citation of part of O’Sullivan’s Chisholm interview in my review makes this point clearer still.16 I demonstrate (not ‘suggest’), that Chisholm pressed his own view, as interviewer, that there was no false surrender. Another Roman Catholic priest who wrote on the War of Independence was acutely aware of IRA leaders who ‘favoured the church’ (Fr Patrick J Twohig, *Green Tears for Hecuba*, 2004, p. 364). It is possible that, for good reason, Fr Chisholm placed the non-deferential...
iconoclastic Barry outside of this group (despite Twohig placing him in it) and this may have influenced his approach.¹⁷

Whatever ambiguities there may be surrounding the false surrender event at Kilmichael there is none concerning Barry asserting that it killed two of three IRA volunteers who died there. Morrison cannot cite a single sentence from Barry stating that Michael McCarthy was a false surrender victim. As with the earlier point concerning Fitzpatrick and ‘British terrorism’, if she could she would. She is reduced to rejecting Barry’s assertion that McCarthy died prior to the false surrender. The discussion on this point, akin to picking holes in a string vest, is concluded.

Encountering Fr John Chisholm has convinced Peter Hart and Eve Morrison that no false surrender took place at Kilmichael. That case has not been established using robust historical arguments and evidence. Hart used problematical unverified anonymous sources that he ‘muddled’. The case against such an approach being again adopted or (more to the point) accepted has, I think, been established.

Morrison has presented arguments based on sources Hart obscured. She has demonstrated, though she may disagree, that Hart used unacceptable methods in pursuing his argument. Morrison’s sources may be checked, a welcome advance. I disagree with the categorical conclusions she draws from her sources of information. The reader is free judge our contrasting viewpoints, and to check our sources of information.

[Discussion of The Good Old IRA Sinn Féin pamphlet, overleaf]

¹⁷ Barry criticised Deasy’s Toward Ireland Free for ignoring the highly significant Roman Catholic Bishop of Cork Daniel Cohalan’s excommunication of IRA volunteers after the Kilmichael ambush (Reality, p. 19). Barry also dismissed as inaccurate the book’s depiction of him attending and ‘assisting at’ religious services at regular intervals (ibid). In addition to his editorial introduction in Towards Ireland Free (cited in my review), Fr Chisholm reportedly also claimed to Fr Twohig that Mercier Press ‘underrated’ his contribution (Green Tears, 2004, p. 376).
Brian Hanley, Paul Bew, and ‘The Good Old IRA’

I left out of my original review a section on Brian Hanley’s discussion of The Good Old IRA, a 1985 Sinn Féin pamphlet produced to counter assertions by then Minister for justice Michael Noonan that the IRA of the War of Independence period behaved in a qualitatively different and more noble manner than its latter day counterparts.

Just as our perceptions of the Provisional IRA are largely driven by dominant media representations, so it was also during the 1919-21 period. The pamphlet, somewhat tongue in cheek, reproduced contemporary newspaper reports of IRA actions. How is this related to Peter Hart’s interpretation of Irish history in that period? Largely because historians Paul Bew and Brian Hanley say it is. Peter Hart’s analysis looked, from a certain perspective, like a means of linking the War of Independence with the post 1968 conflict in Northern Ireland.

Two posters on the Cedar Lounge Revolution website introduced a discussion of the Good Old IRA pamphlet largely in these terms. That The Good Old IRA pamphlet is an important aspect of the genesis of a certain type of revisionist thinking was revealed on 23 June at a conference in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, ‘Historians and Public History, Reflecting on a Decade of War and Revolution’. Paul Bew (Baron Bew of Donegore) from Queens concluded proceedings in a surprising manner by seeking to put to bed the Peter Hart problem, that had been mentioned from the platform by Emmet O’Connor (UofU) and Anne Dolan (TCD).

Bew launched into a discussion which began, “It’s not Peter Hart …. It’s the Sinn Féin Publicity Bureau in Belfast, its Danny Morrison when they brought out The Good Old IRA pamphlet... nothing at all to do with Peter Hart”. There then followed a verbal interlude in which the word sectarian was mentioned. Most of this passed over the heads of the audience. Nevertheless, it was illustrative of an attempt to transform republican into unionist propaganda and to view Hart’s work as fulfilling this requirement.

I mentioned to Brian Hanley who was part of the audience for Bew’s observations that I had taken out of my Terror in Ireland review a discussion on The Good Old IRA, but was thinking of putting it back in. I decided in the end not to as the review was already long.

Here, belatedly, it is.

---

also, remarkably, members of her cabinet. To pressure from Dublin and due to the IRA bomb at the Grand Hotel, Brighton, in October 1984 that almost killed British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and members of her cabinet. 19

19 Patrick Magee: The IRA Brighton bomber, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/301223.stm. See also, remarkably, ‘Brighton bombing 25 years on: Making friends with my father’s killer’, The Good Old IRA. He does not deal with the political context in which it appeared, which is essential to understanding its origin and unusual impact on revisionist historiography.

In the post 1981 hunger strikes period, pre 1985 Anglo Irish Agreement, constitutional politicians were on the ropes. IRA Hunger striker Bobby Sands had won the April 1981 Fermanagh South Tyrone by-election and Gerry Adams defeated Gerry Fitt in West Belfast in the 1983 British general election. Sinn Féin was winning and the ‘respectable’ nationalist SDLP losing. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, post Falklands victory, was largely indifferent until a bomb went off beneath her Brighton hotel room late in 1984.

The minds of politicians in Dublin were concentrated mainly by ballots, not bombs and bullets. The consequence of political drift was increased support for militant republicanism in 26 not just 6 counties. That might undo all that had been achieved at great cost since the early 1970s in isolating the conflict over the border. It created the (however remote) prospect of a conventional democratic mandate for war in the Six Counties. That was, from a certain perspective, unthinkable. It was imperative that the only thinking political constituency in the Six Counties, the nationalist minority, be encouraged to think SDLP again. That task required political reform.

During that period in the 1980s southern politicians upped the ante by subjecting the northern state to a relentless critique aimed at winning back support for the SDLP, by pushing the British government towards a reform agenda that was in the social, political and economic interests of nationalists. That was the reason for the Irish government setting up of the New Ireland Forum, which reported in 1984, from which Sinn Féin had been excluded. After initial resistance, some of it belligerent, the British moved because they eventually realised what Irish Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald knew, if the SDLP was eroded politically the conflict might become an all island and not merely a Six County problem. British movement occurred due to pressure from Dublin and due to the IRA bomb at the Grand Hotel, Brighton, in October 1984 that almost killed British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and members of her cabinet.
Prior to this, on 27 August 1984 at a Michael Collins commemoration Justice minister Michael Noonan echoed Foreign Minister Peter Barry’s reference to the ‘nationalist nightmare’ and nationalist ‘misery’ in Northern Ireland. Barry was reported on the same day asserting that ‘the real substance’ of democracy was non-existent in the North. That day’s Irish Times also warned in the main headline article of ‘constitutional nationalists los[ing] support massively’ in local elections.

The Sinn Féin Good Old IRA Pamphlet was produced in response to a simultaneous southern political offensive against Sinn Féin, in particular in the same August 1984 Noonan speech. That speech attempted, in addition to trying to shift British political inertia and win back SDLP support, to eviscerate a connection between the old ‘good’ Michael Collins IRA and the new ‘Provo’ IRA. It produced foolish distinctions, which Hanley punctures with ease, not least in mentioning UCC historian John A Murphy’s 1982 claim that Michael Collins ‘ruled out the coercion of the unionists in the north-east’. In fact, Michael Collins ruled it in, on the basis of being against sectarianism where it was practised, in Northern Ireland. However, instead of fighting against unionism, his preferred option, Collins ended up fighting his erstwhile friends over the Treaty. They fought, lost, and killed Collins, but knocked the stuffing out of Irish nationalism for a long period by knocking it out of each other. A case of divide and divide and rule. Partition established an irrefutable Protestant sectarian state in Northern Ireland under British jurisdiction and a deeply conservative Roman Catholic dominated state in the South. The northern nationalist minority were cast adrift in a sea of sectarian oppression until they went into open revolt in the late 1960s. It was clear by the 1980s (as it was in 1969) that reform in the North was viable to the extent that it bypassed unionism, the majority political tradition there.

In 1985 this was accomplished through the Anglo Irish Agreement, signed by Fitzgerald and Thatcher at Hillsborough Castle on 15 November 1985, at the expense of unionist alienation. However, the latter’s sectarian military and also political opposition to the Agreement (and the appearance of British political opposition) became an essential pre-requisite for SDLP recovery. The political advance of Sinn Féin was stalled, but not reversed. However, the Anglo Irish Agreement meant that the north now had a majority that was not only not allowed to rule but was ruled in opposition to itself, and with increased Dublin involvement. Northern Ireland’s status as, in the words of former Taoiseach Charles J Haughey, a failed political entity was confirmed. The road was paved toward the Good Friday Agreement.

There are real distinctions between the two periods, 1918-21 and post 1968 in Northern Ireland. It was and is possible for republicans to conceive of majority support within the island as a whole or even within the confines of the Republic. That was impossible in the context of Northern Ireland, a failed state in which sectarian privilege (that is culturally racist) and its effects were locked in. So, when in answer to Noonan’s speech, the Good Old IRA pamphlet addressed the authoritarian nature of war in both periods, its pitiless pursuit, the requirement of military necessity, there was no difference to speak of. However, the pamphlet, that


was constructed very much tongue in cheek, did not address the right of an oppressed minority to revolt in a society where democracy did not work. Instead, it wrote the predicament of northern nationalists backwards into the earlier period. Elections in 1918 and 1920 granted the IRA a democratic mandate. Ulster unionists opted out because universal franchise and Irish democracy would undermine the system of sectarian privilege they used to divide and rule the industrialised working class in the North.

However, the pamphlet suggested that other nationalist forces standing aside in one northern constituency, Fermanagh South Tyrone for Bobby Sands in 1981, and in all-Ireland elections in 1920 for Sinn Féin, meant that candidates were selected, not elected. That is politically and historically unsound. In both periods there was a free election (though, post Bobby Sands’ victory, the British parliament made prisoners standing for election illegal). The outcome recognised overwhelming nationalist support for democratic demands, Irish Independence in 1920, recognition of the political status of republican prisoners (of Partition) in the North in 1981. As an illustration of this support, after Sands’ death, Owen Carron, formerly Sands’ election agent, won a subsequent by-election with 49% support, to the unionist’s 45.6%, while an Alliance and Workers Party candidate received 3 and 1.8% respectively.

As Hanley unwittingly intimates, this 1985 republican perception (which he calls ‘stirringly ‘revisionist’ stuff’, p. 15) was a breach through which Peter Hart’s Ulsterised conception of the 1918-21 period eventually entered. In it sectarianism became an all-Ireland phenomenon, one in which an argument for partition based on ethnic antagonism was advanced. It was an argument sustainable with weak to non-existent evidence that ignored astute contemporary understanding, such as RIC, then RUC, inspector John Regan’s observation that the further one travelled from Belfast the less sectarianism there was, generally. However, the result is that inordinate effort is spent discussing something generally refuted at the time by southern Protestants, allegations of IRA sectarianism toward Protestants. By and large actual sectarianism, directed by Ulster Unionists toward Roman Catholics, is ignored. The collection Terror in Ireland is a case in point, with the partial exception of Hanley’s contribution.

Despite these observations, Hanley’s is the most thoughtful addition to the collection and should be considered seriously by students of Irish history.

END OMITTED REVIEW SECTION