

Distorting Irish History, the stubborn facts of Kilmichael: Peter Hart and Irish Historiography

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The Newfoundland historian Peter Hart, who died recently at the age of 46, stimulated a debate on sectarianism within Irish nationalism and on the nature and conduct of the Irish War of Independence (WoI). He provoked controversy and subsequent research that has helped to clarify differences over the interpretation not only of Irish history but also of Irish society. Professor Paul (now Lord) Bew of Queen's University Belfast (QUB), said of Hart's landmark *The IRA and its Enemies* (OUP, 1998), 'The first work on the Irish revolution which can stand comparison with the best of the historiography of the French Revolution: brilliantly documented, statistically sophisticated, and superbly written'.¹ The weight of academic opinion afforded Hart numerous prizes and plaudits.

Critics emerged, also, however, who concluded that Hart's methodology was quite often slipshod, unreliable, and, in places, unbelievable. When the detail was published it was characterised within the academy as inappropriate. QUB's Fearghal McGarry put it, 'Some of the resulting controversies fell within the realm of legitimate debate, but a lot didn't', but without informing us what, in his view, either did or did not (*Irish News*, 28 Aug 2010).

Hart's argument provoked a debate on the conduct of academic historiography in Ireland and a perceived interrelationship with the requirements of public policy on the conflict in the North of Ireland. Consequently, Irish Historians divided in Hart's wake, into pro, con, or (more often) wary of venturing above the parapet.

In this essay, I examine:

- (a) the political context within which Hart's research was promoted and the reaction from within the academy to the emergence of a critique;
- (b) the basis of Hart's interpretive framework;
- (c) how evidence was shaped to fit that framework.

I conclude with a discussion of why demonstrable flaws in the research were ignored within professional historiography.

PART ONE Irish History Recreated

The controversy over Hart's research revived a debate thought to be over.

During the 1980s, Roy Foster, Oxford's Carroll Professor of Modern Irish History, critiqued

¹ 'The IRA & its Enemies: Violence & Community in Cork, 1916-1923', *Canadian Journal of History*, August 1999, Vol. 34, No. 2.

Irish nationalist historiography. He concluded in 1986, 'We are all revisionists now'.² The 'revisionist' project undermines a narrative of Irish history in which British rule accounted for Irish misfortune. Not so, say revisionists, claiming evidential objectivity and sophistication. We should blame, instead, more or less, ourselves alone. In a development of the idea that Irish nationalism was 'Catholic', during the 1990s the sectarian nature of unionist-dominated Northern Ireland was projected backwards into the outlook and practices of Irish nationalism during the early part of the Century. It was then brought forward to frame an understanding of Northern Irish politics and society. Foster cited Hart's research in support of this connection (*Times*, 21 May 1998).

Hart's findings energised two Irish newspaper columnists, Eoghan Harris in the *Sunday Times* and Kevin Myers in the *Irish Times* and *Daily Telegraph*. They were as contentious in their field as Foster is in his. Both journalists had been associated with left wing 'Official' Irish republicanism in the 1970s, that had split with the 'Provisional' kind in 1970.³ They viewed the latter as rightwing sectarians out for religious war, but moved rightwards themselves, and increasingly anti-republican, as they advanced in years. Murdock rather than Marx beckoned Harris toward the *Sunday Times*, Irish edition. Like Paul Bew, who also had Official republican leanings in his academic youth, Harris became an advisor to the Unionist Party leader David (now also Lord) Trimble. He briefly advised the Orange Order.⁴ Harris and Myers were connected in another way. Both their media careers suffered as a result of Conor Cruise O'Brien's ministerial control of broadcasting censorship from 1973-77, though both later bought into O'Brien's anti-nationalism that itself became a form of unionism.⁵

The consistent theme running through academic and journalistic arguments was that Irish nationalism is anti-Protestant. Hart, it appeared, proved it so. The idea undermined the democratic credentials of resistance to British rule in the north of Ireland. Resistance could not be portrayed as opposition to sectarianism if it was a form of sectarianism in itself.

² *The Irish Review*, No. 1, 1986, pp. 1-5. For a survey, Ciaran Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History: the Debate on Historical Revisionism 1938-1994*, Irish Academic Press, 1994. For a critique of Foster's approach, Brian Murphy, 'Past History and Present Politics: Roy Foster, historian', *Cycnos*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2008, available at <http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1324> (accessed 13 Oct 2010).

³ Myers and Harris write now for the *Independent Newspapers* group, Harris for the *Sunday* and Myers for the daily *Irish Independent*.

⁴ See Myers' impressionistic, *Watching the Door, a Memoir 1971-1978*, Lilliput, 2006, and the inevitably duller, because more accurate, Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party*, Penguin, 2009. On Eoghan Harris, the Unionist Party and the Orange Order, a *Sunday Times* (London, Ir. ed., 19 Aug 1997) article on the subject, by Audrey Magee, began, 'Ulster Loyalists are attending media classes to learn how to attract public sympathy with tales of oppression and hardship'.

⁵ See Myers, op. cit. and Niall Meehan, 'Eoghan Harris fed the hand that bit him - Conor Cruise O'Brien sidelined the man who later idolised him' (at, <http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers>), *Village Magazine* (Dublin), September 2009. On O'Brien see Niall Meehan, 'Arrested development: Conor Cruise O'Brien, 1917-2008', *History Ireland*, Vol. 17 No. 2, March April 2009 (at *ibid*). Myers observed in his memoir, having resigned from RTE in 1972 over the imposition of broadcasting censorship and the dismissal of the RTE Authority, that he now 'better understand[s] the position of government' (op. cit., pp. 115-6). The following episode is not covered in the memoir. In 1973, a minister with 'a more open attitude' (Myers' description) took over and 'I accepted work [from RTE] again'. Myers contributed items for a short period. However, RTE then issued an instruction that Myers not be employed under any circumstances. The reporter's relationship with RTE was over. The minister, Conor Cruise O'Brien, was determined then to have Eoghan Harris dismissed from RTE. He did not come to the aid of a journalist with some similar views who had dismissed himself (*IT*, 29 Nov 1972, 21, 22 June 1973).

Hart's analysis was promoted in the political context pursued by the two journalists mentioned.

Immediately prior to the 1994 IRA ceasefire, a Cassandra like Kevin Myers cited a litany of violent events between the July 1921 Truce with Britain, through the December Anglo Irish Treaty and the start of the Irish civil war in June 1922. He remarked on 'republicans' destroying "protestant property" and reported, 'the IRA mounted a pogrom of Protestants in the Dunmanway area' in April 1922. Events, he implied, were about to repeat themselves (*Irish Times*, 27 Aug 1994). After the collapse of the first (1994) IRA ceasefire in 1996, Myers wrote, 'we are up to our necks in the direst trouble, and all options are hard... It is, alas, time to air the beds in the [internment camp in the] Curragh'.⁶ He wavered momentarily, admitting at one point in 1998, 'Blessed are the peacemakers' and 'Wrong: totally and utterly wrong, wrong, wrong. It's an unsettling, disorienting thing finally to realise that the prediction about which I have written thousands of words turns out to have been complete rubbish.' Myers then effectively admitted, in the words of former *Irish Times* Editor, Conor Brady, that he had been 'wrong about being wrong' by reverting to his former position.⁷

Eoghan Harris did not admit to error. Prior to the IRA ceasefire in 1994 and after it momentarily collapsed, he warned of war spreading down from the North. He wrote, 'Northern Ireland is slowly stumbling backwards towards barbarism on the scale of Bosnia'. Harris asserted in February 1996, 'So we must brace ourselves for bombs in Dublin'.⁸ His 'bottomless contempt for the goliath of the national bourgeoisie' (the residue of a former political life) was vented at southern political leaders, but in particular at one architect of the process, SDLP leader John Hume, more so than at the other, Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams. Harris observed in 1996 that a 'successful policy of demonising [republicans] down [South] was disrupted at a critical point in 1993 [when] John Hume threw the thug [Adams] a lifeline'.⁹ In a summation of his feelings on the Irish peace process in June 1997, Harris observed,

'It was a fraud from start to finish. A fraud when President Robinson limply shook the hand of Gerry Adams. A fraud when [Gerry] Adams held [Taoiseach, Albert] Reynolds and [John] Hume's hands in a vice outside government buildings. A fraud when [RTE newsreader] Bryan Dobson leaned across an RTE news studio to sentimentally shake the hand of [Sinn Fein's] Lucillita Breathnach to celebrate the ceasefire. Munich was what was on my mind as I watched all these actors in the Sinn Fein play. Peace in our time, I thought, a lie then, a lie now. Those who think you can talk to Sinn Fein are as foolish as those who thought that you could talk to Hitler.'¹⁰

After the reinstatement of the IRA ceasefire in July, Harris observed,

⁶ *Irish Times (IT)*, 19 Jun 1996. The 1994 IRA ceasefire lasted from 31 August 1994 until January 1996, the second ceasefire began on 19 July 1997.

⁷ *IT*, 15 Apr 1998, also in Conor Brady letter to *Irish Times*, 17 Jan 2007. Myers partially reverted again in 2009, saying of Conor Cruise O'Brien after the latter's death, 'he did not, as he should have done, declare that he was wrong about some aspects of the peace process (as was I)', *Belfast Telegraph*, 2 Jan 2009.

⁸ Conn Corrigan, *Begrudgers and doom merchants*, *Magill*, August-September 2007. *Is Dublin next on the bombers' target list?*, by Eoghan Harris, *Sunday Times*, Oct 6 1996.

⁹ *History's bloody morality lesson, A history lesson that slayed the green giant*, by Eoghan Harris, *Sunday Times*, 11 Feb, 13 Oct 1996.

¹⁰ *Sunday Times*, 22 Jun 1997.

‘we have no more reason to be grateful for the second ceasefire than a Jew would have to be grateful to a Gestapo guard who stopped beating him so as to fix the noose with which he proposed to hang him.’¹¹

Hart’s book in 1998 provided evidence for conclusions awaiting deployment. Those who questioned Hart were considered ineffectual nitpickers, purveyors of what Roy Foster termed ‘nationalism with footnotes’.¹²

The context in which the book was publicised affected its reception. While historians McGarry and Foster criticise negative reactions to Hart’s work, they do not address the polemical manner in which it was promoted and defended, a promotion Hart appeared to encourage. For instance, in the *Sunday Times* (19 April 1998) on Tom Barry, the IRA commander of the successful 28 November 1920 Kilmichael Ambush, ‘Barry is still considered to be an idealistic figure, unlike the great majority of his comrades he was little more than a serial killer and thought of the revolution largely in terms of shooting people. His politics were very primitive’.

The promotional efforts of Myers and Harris stimulated a low-level culture war in which the evidential basis of Hart’s views was challenged. Sceptics questioned the weight of received opinion within which Hart’s work became a standard academic reference point. For example, with others, Foster cited Hart as a basis for dismissing Ken Loach’s portrayal of the IRA in *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006). Hart ‘raised hell’ among (unnamed) ‘local historians’, noted the Waterford born professor. Foster also supported allegations of IRA sectarianism towards two Co Offaly farmers shot in June 1921. This was depicted in a contentious RTE documentary on the subject involving Eoghan Harris, that itself relied on Hart’s research to establish the notion of widespread anti-Protestantism.¹³

After the historian’s sudden unfortunate death Foster summed up Hart critics, as (again unnamed) ‘local historians and pietists’. UCD’s Diarmaid Ferriter endorsed Hart’s view that critics practiced ‘faith-based or creationist history’ (*Irish Times*, 31 July 2010). They were portrayed as an amalgam of rustic irreconcilables, ideological refugees from the wrong side of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and a monk from Glenstal Abbey. In Eoghan Harris’s unfortunate (and baseless) contribution, ‘Both Kevin Myers and myself believe the savage polemics directed at the physically frail Hart by ultra-nationalist lobby groups took a toll on this mildest of men’ (*Sunday Independent*, 25 July 2010).

By accusing Hart’s critics of engaging inappropriately, his supporters (who dismiss the notion that they support anything other than, disinterestedly, their craft) had a reason for refusing to engage. One particular criticism, however, was dismissed as unimportant. McGarry again, ‘The inordinate focus on who did what at Kilmichael detracted from appreciation of the significance of [Hart’s] body of work as a whole’ (*Irish News*, 28 Aug 2010). Criticism might be right, in other words, but it would be wrong to discuss it. Hart wrote of this event in 1998, that was central to his analysis overall, ‘my primary sources were interviews with participants and

¹¹ *Sunday Times*, 10 Aug 1997.

¹² Roy Foster, ‘“*Changed Utterly*”? Transformation and continuity in late twentieth-century Ireland’, *Historical Research*, vol. 80, no. 209 (August 2007), p. 436. Also, *Luck and the Irish, a brief history of change, 1970-2000*, Penguin, 2009, p. 177.

¹³ ‘The Red and the Green’, *Dublin Review* 24, Autumn 2006. See, Paddy Heaney, Pat Muldowney, Philip O’Connor, Dr Brian P Murphy, and others, *Coolacree: The True Story of the Pearson Executions, an incident in the War of Independence*, Aubane, 2008. See also, Niall Meehan, Frank Gallagher and land agitation, *Dublin Review of Books* 11, Autumn 2009 (available at, www.drb.ie).

statements made by them, conducted and collected by myself and others'.¹⁴ These 'primary sources' were anonymous and gradually attracted more attention than 'who did what'.

In his critical summary of Hart's legacy, Jack Lane criticised those who adopted Hart's 'millenarian... spirit' and who 'responded to it as believers'.¹⁵ Jeff Dudgeon, a Roger Casement scholar, questioned this view of Hart's analysis. He also, unusually, engaged with some detail, but challenged petty minded 'fact-checking'. Dudgeon asked his readers to acknowledge the inevitability of error and mentioned some of his own.¹⁶

Those who saw weaknesses in Hart's presentation of evidence regarded them as more than trivial, however.

Take one of the first examples to emerge.

Brian Murphy, a Benedictine monk from Glenstal Abbey, reviewed *The IRA and its Enemies in The Month* (Sept-Oct 1998). Murphy, English born, Oxford educated, is a historian with impeccable credentials.¹⁷ His words to the effect that Hart's book was 'important' appeared afterwards on its dust jacket.

In the course of his review, Murphy considered Hart's discussion of the 27-29 April 1922 republican killing of 13 Protestant civilians in West Cork. The unprecedented event climaxed Hart's analysis. This occurred during the increasingly chaotic interregnum between Anglo Irish Treaty signing in December 1921, republican split in January and the onset of Civil War in June 1922. Hart had cited a sentence from an archived British intelligence analysis that was, he wrote, 'by common consent the most trustworthy source we have'. It stated that, generally, Southern Irish Protestants were not guilty of informing because 'except by chance, they had not got [*information*] to give'. In other words Protestants were not active in support of British forces. Hart could then state with confidence that those shot in April 1922 were killed more or less at random 'because they were Protestants'. The point was central to his argument. However, Murphy pointed out that Hart left out a sentence following, stating, 'an exception to this rule was in the Bandon area', where these loyalists were killed, and that those involved suffered greatly. The evidence available to him in his 'most trustworthy source' contradicted Hart's conclusion and he omitted it.¹⁸

This example of misrepresentation of an archival source was not the first to emerge. It was difficult to elicit explanations of these and other anomalies. Take another example

In 2003 Meda Ryan published her critique of Hart, *Tom Barry, IRA Freedom Fighter*. Its title provided Hart with sufficient excuse to ignore her contention that Hart appeared to have interviewed an anonymous Kilmichael Ambush veteran after the last one died. It permitted him,

¹⁴ *Examiner*, 19 Aug 1998, *IT*, 1 Sept 1998. Also contained in, *Kilmichael, the False Surrender, a discussion with Pete Hart Pdraig O'Cuanachain, D.R. O'Connor Lysaght, Dr. Brian Murphy and Meda Ryan, with Why the Ballot was followed by the Bullet*, by Jack Lane and Brendan Clifford, Aubane Historical Society, 1999. In 1999 Lane and Clifford re-published *Irish Times* Kilmichael ambush correspondence, including Hart's.

¹⁵ *Irish Political Review* (hereafter *IPR*), Sept 2010.

¹⁶ *IPR*, Oct 2010.

¹⁷ See Murphy's, 'The Canon of Irish Cultural History: Some Questions concerning Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland*', in Ciaran Brady, ed., op. cit..

¹⁸ Murphy developed the point in an important article, 'Peter Hart, the issue of Sources'. It is appended to Brian Murphy, Niall Meehan, *Troubled History, a 10th anniversary critique of Peter Hart's 'The IRA and its Enemies'*, Aubane, 2008. Available at, <http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Books>.

however, to observe that Ryan's analysis was not 'rational'. It was at this point, after a *History Ireland* interview with Hart (March-April 2005), in which Ryan was deemed irrational and in which Hart claimed that Murphy's criticism was unpublished, that discussion became heated. A newcomer and neutral in the debate, Dr Andreas Boldt of Maynooth, in surveying the fallout in later editions of *History Ireland* (to Sept-Oct 2005), suggested to Hart that he should engage with the argument objectively:

'I take issue with the argumentative manner in which Peter Hart approaches his response... His language is emotional and aggressive.... I don't believe that Hart is able to convince his 'enemies' by denouncing them; he has to argue with them, based on historical evidence and understanding of that time.'

Hart did not take the advice. As late as 2009 in *History Ireland*, the historian and former doctoral student colleague of Hart, Joost Augusteijn, recommended that Hart respond.¹⁹

Hart floated above his critics who, in peppering his academic flank with detailed criticism, could not knock him down to earth to deal with it. Doubtless, this was frustrating. By all accounts the late historian was a personable individual, far from a sense of his own importance and was generous with his time, expertise and advice. It may be wondered, therefore, why he did not acknowledge mistakes or address criticisms in a reasoned manner.

It may be that Hart did not have academically acceptable explanations. It may be also, that the academy had invested too much unquestioning belief in Hart to require him to explain his methods. Criticism was destined to be ignored and, where possible, suppressed.

Attention focused initially on Hart's second chapter, *The Kilmichael Ambush*, and his penultimate *Taking it out on the Protestants* chapter, because they established his view that the War of Independence was an exercise in ethnic and sectarian revenge. Hart regarded the Kilmichael ambush commander, Tom Barry, as 'vain, angry and ruthless' (p. 32), a liar (p. 36) and as a 'serial killer' (p. 100), who engineered a 'massacre' of surrendered British soldiers (p. 37). Hart observed: 'the culmination of a long process of social definition... produced both the heroes of Kilmichael and the victims of the April massacre'. As he put it, 'one is as important as the other in understanding of the Cork IRA' (p. 292). Hart went on to suggest in his final chapter, *Spies and Informers*, that the IRA shot imagined enemies at random, mainly Protestants and those they saw as 'deviants'.

Those sympathetic to the Newfoundland historian claimed that his methodology brought to the surface nationalist secrets that were buried deep. The timing was fortuitous. Details of institutional Catholic management of industrial schools were being revealed in the 1990s. In addition, corruption at the heart of Irish politics, centred on the person of former Taoiseach Charles Haughey, resulted in the setting up of one judicial enquiry after another. Hart's analysis appeared to reveal the historical unholy grail, a source of original Irish sin. It seemed to be in tune with southern Ireland's increasingly liberal, modern and middle class sensibility. Hart's use of anonymous informants reinforced the sense that he was exposing truths that could not otherwise be uttered. The alternative view of evidence not subject to verification was ignored.

In the 1990s the search was on for evidence of specifically republican sectarianism. A historian central to the project contradicted previous thoughts. TCD's David Fitzpatrick suggested in 1998, though without evidence, that, in addition to targeting Protestants, the IRA also went after adulterers and homosexuals during the War of Independence. However, nine years earlier,

¹⁹ *History Ireland*, vol. 13, no. 5, Sep-Oct 2005; vol. 17, no. 2, May-Jun 2009.

Fitzpatrick noted that Protestants, including loyalist ‘diehards’, suffered ‘few attacks’, apart from the burning of ‘many vacant houses’.²⁰ Followers in the footsteps of Oscar Wilde and Charles Stuart Parnell were entirely unremarked upon. Fitzpatrick’s earlier observations attracted the attention of Kevin Myers.

Myers had written for ten years on themes related to Peter Hart’s research. It was a subject on which he felt some passion. In his 2006 memoir on the conflict in Northern Ireland, he wrote,

‘Murdering people for their religion was what republicans had always done, especially in their most celebrated period 1919-22. Only the successful seizure of Irish historiography by Irish republicans has concealed this vital truth.’²¹

Clearly the journalist was intent on seizing it back.

Myers had his prose picked apart regularly in a process exposing a somewhat error-strewn point of view. In 1989 Myers told the tale of reportedly the only Protestant killed in Clare, in September 1920. After capture, it was reported that Alan Lendrum, Kilkee’s Acting Resident Magistrate, recently returned from fighting Bolsheviks in Russia, was ‘buried up to his neck on a nearby beach, to await the incoming tide and death’. Becoming impatient, his IRA captors dug up and reburied their quarry nearer the water’s edge, so as to hurry matters along. The story so impressed Myers he mentioned it four times over five weeks (*Irish Times*, 30 May, 22 June, 3, 6 July 1989).

18 months later Myers covered it for a fifth time. Here, he admitted the story was ‘not true’ (29 January 1992) because the event it described never happened. As the IRA attempted to either seize Lendrum’s car or to kidnap him, he produced a gun and was shot dead.²²

Myers’ admission of error was obscured, however, by another one. His 29 January 1992 *Irishman’s Diary* column was dominated by an apology to Terence McSwiney’s daughter. She had pursued Myers for having alleged on 19 December 1989 that one of the former Cork Lord Mayor’s ‘prime notions was to murder the Catholic bishop of Cork’. That also was not true. Myers was a modern day victim of British propagandist Basil Clarke and his colleagues in Dublin Castle, who worked for the British government’s Publicity Department. They concocted the McSwiney and Lendrum stories, and others, that did much to arouse unionist ire in the North of Ireland. They were agreeable to unionist leaders, however, in that the propaganda diffused Irish, British and US allegations of unionist sectarianism.²³ The propaganda was regurgitated by Myers, either because it was so expertly concocted as to be still believable, or because there was a pre-disposition to believe fantastic stories of that kind.

Significantly, in the 19 December 1989 column containing the untrue McSwiney allegation, Myers also alleged that one of ‘[Tom] Barry’s men... organised a pogrom of Protestants in the Dunmanway area in April 1922’. Myers pursued the story on 9 January 1990 and on and off for a number of years. It was the genesis for much that was to follow.

²⁰ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*, Opus, 1998, p. 95; ‘Ireland since 1870’, in RF Foster, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, OUP, 1989, p. 246.

²¹ Kevin Myers, *Watching the Door, a memoir 1971-78*, Lilliput, 2006, p 87.

²² See Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc, ‘Death Of Alan Lendrum’, http://www.warofindependence.net/?page_id=139 (accessed 14 Oct 2010).

²³ For an analysis of Basil Clarke and his team, Brian Murphy, *The Origin and Organisation of British Propaganda in 1920*, Aubane/Spinwatch, 2006. For Murphy on Myers specifically, *ibid*, p. 5, 39, 75-6. For an impressive account of the propaganda war from the republican side, see Frank Gallagher, *The Four Glorious Years*, Blackwater, 2005.

That column began with Myers taking issue with David Fitzpatrick, ‘one of the most brilliant and revolutionary historians this century’, for suggesting that ‘few attacks on Protestants’ occurred during the conflict. Myers then detailed what he thought were some. Perhaps the journalist helped engineer the historian’s change of mind, discussed earlier. Perhaps it also induced a fresh state in Peter Hart, Fitzpatrick’s then PhD pupil. Myers 19 December 1989 column featured as a source of information on the April 1922 killings in Hart’s 1992 TCD PhD thesis. Hart’s 1998 book replicated the doctoral research almost word for word, though Myers’ controversial and publicly ‘contradicted’ contribution was redacted, somewhat.²⁴

Myers became something of a public relations agent for the young historian. In 1995 he wrote, ‘Soon - I trust - Peter Hart's brilliant account... will be published... [and] establish new standards of demythologizing’ (12 January 1995). After publication, ‘*The IRA and its enemies...* must be the most masterly study ..., [reading] it is obligatory... It is a masterpiece’ (29 May 1998).²⁵ Myers did not mention his influence on the project. The 29 May 1998 column’s view of Tom Barry provoked a controversy that never went away. Peter Hart concluded six months of newspaper correspondence on 10 December 1998, before Meda Ryan could raise an interview-dating oddity she had encountered.²⁶ Thwarted, she decided to include the material in her 2003 biography of Tom Barry.

At that point it was clear that questioning of Hart’s methodology was beyond mere nit picking. It was also clear that the broad academic community did not wish to discuss revelations about Hart’s methodology. I will discuss them now.

PART TWO Kilmichael

I take the detailed discussion further here by pinpointing the actual source of Hart’s anonymous information. I link this to a fundamental flaw in Hart’s reasoning that undermined his narrative. I concentrate on Kilmichael, not to demonstrate that there is a definitive account of the ambush (that is probably impossible), but in order to prove that Hart’s conclusion shaped his evidence. I also answer some significant points raised by Dudgeon in his response to Jack Lane The evidence unavoidably affects consideration of ‘the significance of the body of [Hart’s] work overall’, in particular the rest of his book. It is absurd to assert otherwise.

In a pivotal engagement at the 28 November Kilmichael Ambush during the 1919-21 War of independence, 36 armed IRA volunteers engaged and killed 16 elite British Auxiliary soldiers. One more escaped but was later captured and shot, while another thought dead survived with permanent injuries. Tom Barry, the Kilmichael Ambush commander, claimed that British Auxiliaries engaged in a false surrender. He reported that it resulted in the killing of two of three IRA volunteer casualties, Pat Deasy and Jim O’Sullivan, while Michael McCarthy was killed during the engagement proper. Barry ordered a fight to the finish on the basis that ‘soldiers who had cheated in war deserved to die’.²⁷ Their actions precluded the possibility of a prisoner of war

²⁴ *The Irish Republican Army and its Enemies, Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923*, PhD Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1992, p. 377, 379; compare to *Enemies*, p. 282, n. 67.

²⁵ For a small sample of Eoghan Harris on Peter Hart, see *Sunday Times*, 15 Nov 1998, 4 Apr 1999, 4 Jun, 26 Nov 2000. In *The Sunday Times* on 4 April 1999, Harris reported the work on first reading as ‘the best book ever written on the Irish revolution’. He continued, ‘Now, after months of rereading and reflection, I think it more than that; it is a classic of Irish letters, a book that will stand forever on the short shelf which includes the stories of William Carleton, Joyce's *Dubliners* and O'Brien's *States of Ireland*’.

²⁶ See unpublished letter from Ryan in *Kilmichael, the False Surrender*, op. cit..

²⁷ In Meda Ryan, *The Tom Barry Story*, Mercier, 1982, p. 35.

status, one Barry offered to defeated British soldiers on other occasions.²⁸

While British propagandists (Basil Clarke *et al*) portrayed the event as a massacre that included mutilation with axes, Lloyd George and his colleagues saw it differently, in private. The British PM observed, 'The last attack of the rebels [at Kilmichael] seemed ... to partake of a different character from the preceding operations. The others were assassinations. This last was a military operation'.²⁹ Hart's historical reassessment veered more toward the British government's public rather than its then private evaluation (p. 23-4).

Hart's 'willingness to accord some credibility to the "official" British report published in *The Times*' was 'hard to justify', commented Brian Murphy, but 'may be explained by two significant omissions from the full text'. Hart's connected argument that a typed, unsigned, 'rebel commandant's report' in British archives was genuine was similarly based on his omission of elements casting doubt on its authenticity.³⁰ It was becoming a familiar criticism with regard to Hart's presentation of archival evidence.

Brian Murphy concluded that Hart was at best a victim of a British propaganda strategy of 'verisimilitude' (the appearance of truth), devised by Basil Clarke. However, in systematically excluding relevant evidence, Hart was also a practitioner of it.

Hart was certainly a victim of his own misreading. He introduced Barry's false surrender narrative as an event that 'caused the death of the three IRA men' (*Enemies*, p. 23). This was a careless error since Hart had just cited Barry's consistently expressed view that it 'killed two of them' (p. 22). Hart's difficulty in accurately reconstructing the narrative of battle partially stems from misreading evidence.

The fog and friction of war limits our understanding of what happens during organised violence. While it occupies a broad canvas, its participant's perspective is framed narrowly. Concentration on the danger directly ahead in close quarter contact colours participant accounts of battle. Commanders, on the other hand, are required to gauge the tempo more so than ordinary soldiers. As the US military historian, William S Kautt, put it,

'The truth is that eyewitnesses are horribly unreliable... The ferocity of fighting limits one's view, literally, to what is immediately in front. Soldiers usually have a very poor understanding of what happened - that's why commanders are placed to the rear, so they aren't caught up in that and can make decisions based on the greater whole.'³¹

Barry observed the action in moving from a successfully completed part of the engagement to where the false surrender episode occurred. Since Hart found Barry to be, a liar (p. 36) and a 'serial killer' (p. 100) he dismissed Barry's account. Hart compensated for evidential inadequacy within alternative oral testimony with a mastery of story telling technique. His well-structured

²⁸ See Tom Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland*, Anvil, 1989, p. 92. An exception was made with regard to Major Percival's Essex Regiment and its 'Torture Squad', pp. 15, 103-4.

²⁹ In Tom Jones, *Whitehall Diary: Ireland, 1918-25*, OUP, 1969, p. 41.

³⁰ Brian Murphy, *The Origin and Organisation of British Propaganda in Ireland in 1920*, Aubane/Spinwatch, 2006, pp. 28-9, 62-76. See also, Meda Ryan, *Tom Barry, IRA Freedom Fighter, 2005*, pp. 75-81.

³¹ Email correspondence, March 30, 2006. Kautt lectures in the Department of Military History, US Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He is the author of, *The Anglo-Irish War, 1916-1921, a People's War*, Praeger, 1999; *Ambushes and Armour: The Irish Rebellion 1919-1921*, IAP, 2010.

narrative told a gruesome tale of the massacre of surrendered soldiers. McGarry's observation (*Irish News*, 28 Aug 2010) is apposite:

'A fan of crime fiction, [Hart] was very interested in narrative. He was a stylish writer with a literary sensibility: *The I.R.A. and its Enemies* deploys an unusual structure in which key chapters reconstruct particular events – a night of murder or a single ambush – in gripping, intimate detail.'

Hart's gripping and intimate 'reconstruction' of the Kilmichael Ambush (p. 33, n. 36) was based, he reported, on:

'six detailed interviews carried out with Kilmichael veterans,
 [1] *three of these conducted by Father John Chisholm;*
 [2] *two by myself (interview with AA, 3 April, 25 June 1988; AF 19 November 1989); and*
 [3] *one by the Ballineen/Enniskene Heritage Group.*
 [Plus,]
 [4] *In addition the latter have a detailed statement written by one of the ambush party'*

(Content in square brackets added)

The first two of these were also in Hart's 1992 Trinity College Dublin PhD thesis (p. 46, n. 50) that his book reproduces almost word for word. The third and fourth were added in 1998. Curiously, in [4] Hart fails to state whose statement this is, though, as we shall see, he cited it later by name, but not on Kilmichael.

Meda Ryan questioned the dating of Hart's interviews with two aged anonymous veterans in 2003 ([2] above). He then downgraded his own research and stated, typically, 'most of my reconstruction is based on other people's taped interviews'.³² One of these people was Father John Chisholm, to whom we now turn; the other ([3] above) is as anonymous as Hart's interviewees.

[1] Chisholm Interviews

The Chisholm interview tapes have never entered the public domain and their main subject matter was not Kilmichael. They were reminiscences of a number of veterans recorded in 1969 for Liam Deasy's *Toward Ireland Free* (1973), undertaken by Fr. Chisholm who completed the manuscript when Deasy became ill (he died soon after publication). In a letter dated 21 September 2007 from Chisholm to Liam Deasy's daughter, Maureen. He reported that on one, and only one, occasion he 'let [Hart] hear some passages I selected from the tapes I had', tapes Hart did not have 'possession of or access to'. Chisholm refers then to Hart citing them 'without permission'. If true, it indicates that Hart's condition of access to these recordings may have been less than ideal.

Perhaps this accounts for weaknesses in presentation. Hart does not differentiate these taped veteran voices, not even anonymously. Sometimes he appears to entangle them with his own interviewees. Significant information, that should be cited directly, is paraphrased in footnotes,

³² 'Troubles and strife as IRA historians draws peers' fire', John Gill, *Times Higher Education*, 3 July 2008, a report on the publication of *Troubled History, a 10th anniversary critique of Peter Hart's 'The IRA and its Enemies'*.

as in (p. 43, n. 58):

‘All of the men interviewed agree on this point: McCarthy and O’Sullivan... did not die because of a fake surrender. Two of these veterans considered Barry’s account to be an insult to the memory of these men.’

There are a number of problems with this. Barry did not assert that McCarthy died because of a false surrender, though Hart thought Barry did (see above). What ‘the men’ said on this crucial point is left unstated by Hart. Also, it begs the unanswered question, what then did ‘the men’ say, if anything, about the other casualty, Pat Deasy? As for what ‘two of these veterans’ (which ones?) said about ‘Barry’s... insult’, we are encouraged to assume that it relates to Barry’s false surrender account, but this is not clear, since Hart does not tell us. This is an example of weak reporting based on misunderstanding, masked by a compelling, seemingly forensic, narrative.

[2] Hart Interviews

Hart wrote that he interviewed two Kilmichael veterans, identified as AA and AF to preserve their anonymity.³³ Hart dated interviews with AA on 3 April and 25 June of 1988. He dated his AF interview on 19 November 1989.

In 1998 just one veteran of the ambush, Ned Young (1892-1989), was alive, the second last, Jack O’Sullivan, having died in 1986. There seems to be no doubt on this matter. Dates of death of all 46 Kilmichael ambush participants, 36 armed, 10 unarmed scouts and helpers, was published in *The Wild heather Glen, the Kilmichael Story of Grief and Glory* (1995, hereafter WHG) by the same heritage group from which Hart obtained sources [3] and [4].³⁴

No veteran was alive on 19 November 1989, the date of Hart’s final veteran interview (with AF). We know this because the previous day’s (18 November) widely read *Southern Star* newspaper reported that the last one had died and was consigned to the ground. The headline read, *Ned Young – last of the ‘Boys of Kilmichael’*.

The subsequent 19 November interviewee, AF, is sometimes mistakenly conflated with Ned Young who died on 13 November. AF is not Ned Young. Let us look at AA, who is.

Hart interviewed AA on 3 April and 25 June of 1988, who can only be Ned Young. By way of corroboration, Hart’s 1992 PhD thesis named AA differently as EY. In the thesis 12 interviewees were identified by their initials, sometimes reversed, while the book noted them (plus one extra), as AA, AB, AC, AD, etc.³⁵

The thesis initials EY plausibly translate into Edward (‘Ned’) Young.

The proposition that Hart interviewed Young, who was alive, though in his late 90s, also faces a significant obstacle. An affidavit by Ned Young’s son, John Young, was published as an appendix to mine and Brian Murphy’s *Troubled History, a 10th anniversary critique of Peter*

³³ *Enemies*, 1998, p. 33. This methodology is not common in other research on the period. It is not possible to ascertain from Hart’s TCD PhD examiners what, if any, conditions attached to anonymising his sources. The examiners, David Fitzpatrick (internal) and Charles Townshend (external), informed me that the information is confidential.

³⁴ Meda Ryan also listed these details in the paperback edition of *Tom Barry, IRA Freedom Fighter*, Mercier, 2005, p. 390-91.

³⁵ They were not listed together by Hart; they are by Ryan, *Barry*, 2005, p. 68.

Hart's *The IRA and its Enemies* (2008). In it, John Young stated:

'... at that stage [1988 – NM] Ned Young was wheelchair bound having suffered a stroke sometime previously (circa late 1986). As a consequence, it made him incapable of giving an interview, having virtually lost the faculty of speech. He was constantly attended day and night by family members and full-time professional carers... [T]he only people allowed into my parents' home were family members, i.e. his nephews and nieces, grandchildren, his doctor, Dr. John Young, (his nephew) and the priests of the parish.'

Furthermore, said John Young, Hart had no access to his father, who, it appears, could not speak coherently. Ned Young's public activity was confined to attendance at the annual Kilmichael commemoration up to 1988. Logic suggests that, in the absence of Young, the only veteran then alive, Hart interviewed no Kilmichael veteran in 1988-89. His claim to have interviewed two is unbelievable.

But did Hart have any other source of information?

Hart had access to Ned Young's Bureau of Military History (BMH) Witness statement that was not released publicly until 2003 (No. 1402). These originally confidential statements from the 1950s (mainly) allowed WoI veterans to detail their war service. Hart cited young's statement once, as 'Edward Young Statement', but on the subject of volunteer organisation prior to the War of Independence, not Kilmichael.³⁶

Young's BMH statement contains information ascribed by Hart to his AA/EY interviews. For example, on page 80 of the 1988 book in which Hart noted that AA 'grew angry all over again as he recounted how his father had been used by the Auxiliaries as a hostage'. Significantly, here Hart calls AA an '87 year old man', while Young was 97 when he died. This possibly strengthens a connection with the original copy of Young's BMH typescript, which I have seen. Young's typed date of birth is deleted and the correct '1892' is written in. Perhaps Hart saw a copy prior to amendment. If Hart had met Young, it is unlikely that he would have misreported his age. The alternative scenario is that an 87-year-old AA was not Young, in which case he was not a Kilmichael veteran.

In his description of the Kilmichael fight, Hart's citations from Chisholm interviewees, from the mysterious AF/HJ and from AA/EY (Young), appear to be intertwined.³⁷

Let us now leave Young and turn to the very interesting AF, after brief consideration of Hart's 1998 reference to a heritage group recording.

[3] Heritage Group Interview

On page 36 of his book, after the blow-by-blow account of battle, Hart accused Barry of producing a history of the ambush 'riddled with lies and evasions... The surviving Auxiliaries

³⁶ *Thesis*, 1992, p. 306, n. 37; *Enemies*, 1998, p. 232, n. 36.

³⁷ Chisholm did not divulge the tape's contents to researchers, other than, apparently and in a limited context, to Hart (Letter to Maureen Deasy, Liam Deasy's eldest daughter, 21 Sep, 2007). Currently, the tapes are in the possession of a member of the Deasy family who hopes to turn them into a feature film, but beyond the reach of researchers. Information from Maureen Deasy, who typed her father's text to print ready stage. She would like the tapes to be given to UCC's History Department archive and made available to historians.

were simply exterminated'. Hart then cited his new 1998 source, in a discussion of how volunteers may have been enraged by the deaths of 'their comrades':

'They died to my mind a cruel death, because the men that were in with Mick McCarthy, where he was shot, they knew their two men were shot and they came out and they shot them and I think a bayonet was used on one or maybe two of them'.

The use of 'they' and 'them' is potentially confusing, confusion encouraged by Hart's ambiguous presentation.

Is the first 'they' IRA Volunteers, or are 'they' Auxiliaries? It would appear that 'they' are the IRA and 'them' near the end are Auxiliaries. If so, two IRA Volunteers adjudged by Barry to have been victims of the false surrender, Jim O'Sullivan and Pat Deasy, are explicitly separated out from Mick McCarthy and it may plausibly be implied that they, unlike him, suffered a 'cruel death'. Being killed during a false surrender might fit these 'cruel' circumstances. As pointed out, Hart, did not understand the distinction between McCarthy and his comrades in the context of the false surrender. He was not in a position, therefore, to frame this oral evidence accurately for the reader.

It would be intriguing to know more of this source, noted as 'Taped interview in the possession of the Ballineen/Enniskeane Heritage Group'. The only tape distributed by the group was a disquisition on Irish history by Tom Barry, the Kilmichael Ambush commander. There is nothing on this tape to support Hart's highly personalised observations on Barry or on the conduct of the ambush.

The new citation does not support Hart's case, if anything it weakens it.

[4] Heritage Group Detailed Statement

In his response to Jack Lane, Jeff Dudgeon observed of the 'dead' (his inverted commas) Kilmichael witness, AF, 'Hart describes that person as a scout not an armed and fighting participant'. It may be that Dudgeon is suggesting that scouts enjoyed greater longevity than armed participants. Alas, not so. According to WHG the last scout, Dan O'Driscoll, died in 1967 and the last dispatch scout, Sean Falvey, in 1971.

Dudgeon hit on a significant issue, however, in referring to this 'scout'.

Hart engaged in unacknowledged revision on this very point.

In Hart's 1992 thesis (where AF was HJ) he was armed. This changed to an unarmed 'scout' status in 1998, 'further away from the ambush site'. It does some violence to Hart's 1998 narrative, since, in it, AF participates in the fighting. However, Hart's notation is confused, a confusion compounded by AF/HJ's change of status. I wrote in *Troubled History* (p. 23):

'In the 1998 book, [AF] became transformed into an unarmed 'scout rather than a rifleman, and therefore further away from the ambush site than the other interviewees'. This revelation creates further anomalies.... [I]n the Kilmichael account there is a clear mistake in the 1998 book (implied in the 1992 thesis) in ascribing statements from two people to one interviewee, again the mysterious AF/HJ. It is not possible for all the quotes to be from AF/HJ because a second citation relating to the execution of Auxiliaries reads: "'Barry made us", said

another [interviewee]. “*He shot one, then we shot one*”. This phrasing, the use of ‘said another’, clearly delineates two separate interviewees.’

In other words, though Hart informs us in the 1998 book that AF/HJ is a ‘scout’, some way away from the battle (p. 33, n. 56), he is also, apparently, in the thick of it. It made some sense in 1992, when HJ was armed, not in 1998, when AF (the same man) was not. It should be pointed out that ‘further away from the ambush site’, means 150 to 200 yards away in hilly terrain.³⁸

This leads us to a further anomaly.

The 1998 book observed: ‘I was also fortunate to be given a tour of the ambush site by one of my interviewees...’ (p. 33, n. 56). In the 1992 thesis Hart wrote, ‘I was also fortunate to be given a tour of the ambush site by the latter [HJ]’ (p. 46, n. 50).

Why these changes with regard to AF/HJ’s armed participation and tour-guide status between book and thesis?

The reason perhaps lies in the publication in 1995 of the comprehensive list of Kilmichael veterans by the West Cork heritage group mentioned above entitled, *The Wild Heather Glen, the Kilmichael Story of Grief and Glory*. Hart noted (p. 131) that it contained ‘valuable biographical details’. This included a note on all 46 who had participated in the Kilmichael ambush, armed and unarmed, including when they died.

Hart’s narrative was unsustainable from that point. He was not prepared to recognise that (at the very least) a mistake had been made in his then forthcoming 1998 book. Instead, he buried problems deeper within his text. AF/HJ became a scout and his tour-guide status was withheld, while the fact that he was not alive on 19 November 1989 continued to be ignored.

But who was AF/HJ, if not a figment of the imagination?

Elsewhere in the book (p. 132, n. 20) Hart cited a second BMH Witness Statement (No. 1234) of another Kilmichael veteran, Jack Hennessy, who died in 1970. Jack Hennessy’s initials, reversed, are HJ. This is same unnamed ‘detailed statement written by one of the ambush party’ held by the heritage group mentioned by Hart (p. 33) in [4] above. As with Ned Young’s statement, Hart does not cite it on Kilmichael. He should have, as the statement has something very direct to say on the false surrender, but Hart ignores this in his narrative.

Instead of direct citation of a named source and a document, Hart preferred (again) to paraphrase his alleged interviewee by footnote. This is highly significant.

Jack Hennessy’s statement contains echoes of the AF/HJ account. Hennessy reports that after Michael McCarthy was shot dead, he took McCarthy’s rifle, as his own was jammed by blood from a wound:

‘Vice Comdt. McCarthy got a bullet through the head and lay dead.... Our orders were to fix bayonets and charge onto the road when we heard three blasts from the O/C’s whistle. I heard the three blasts and got up from my position, shouting ‘*hands-up*’. At the same time one of the Auxies about five yards from me drew his revolver. He had thrown down his rifle. I pulled on him and shot him dead. I got back to cover, where I remained for a few minutes

³⁸ See Meda Ryan, *Tom Barry IRA Freedom Fighter*, Mercier, 2005, p. 67-8.

firing at living and dead Auxies on the road. The Column O/C sounded his whistle again. Nearly all the Auxies had been wiped out’.

After an enemy soldier had thrown down his rifle in what may presumed to be, or was assumed to be, a gesture of surrender that soldier then drew a side arm. This is an account of a false surrender. Hennessy’s formulation might appear to be corroboration of an assumption by IRA volunteers that a false surrender had taken place. The death of McCarthy prior to the fatal wounding of Pat Deasy and Jim Sullivan during the false surrender fits Barry’s accounts, writing as ‘Eyewitness’ in *An Cosantoir*, the Irish defence forces magazine (9, 16 May, 1941), in his *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (1949), and in his last version from Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O’Grady’s book and documentary film *Curious Journey* (1982, p. 182), as cited and also misread by Hart. (Tom Barry died on 2 July 1980.)

Let us now examine what Hart said AF/HJ reported?

In a footnote (!) Hart noted that AF/HJ, ‘says there was a sort of false surrender’. If a participant said this, it deserved consideration in the main text with direct citation rather than footnoted paraphrase. Of course this would have disrupted Hart’s narrative flow. But what was more important, dramatic impact or historical accuracy?

By comparing differences between thesis and book and then looking again at what Hennessy actually said, we may establish similarities, differences and problems. Hart’s footnoted 1998 account below is the same as in his 1992 thesis, except that in 1992 the section within brackets at the start stated, simply, ‘(HJ)’ without further embellishment:

‘One witness (*AF – a scout rather than a rifleman, and therefore further away from the ambush site than the other interviewees*) saw several auxiliaries surrender after the three volunteers were hit, but then heard further firing, some of which he believed came from the Englishmen. Because of this he says there was a sort of false surrender, but no IRA men died as a result. To confuse things further, Meda Ryan (*Tom Barry Story* [(1982)], 35) concluded from her investigation that Deasy died before any auxiliaries surrendered, falsely or otherwise (although it should be mentioned that Ryan is a firm believer in the ‘false surrender’ story).’³⁹

Hart added, in the thesis only, ‘if anything, this underlines just how difficult it is to reconcile the various accounts and perceptions’. Indeed, an observation that would have been more apposite in the 1998 book, from which it was excised.

In these circumstances, should we take AF’s (as distinct from HJ’s) alleged scout status seriously? Should we take seriously what Hart says AF/HJ said? Should we in fact consider what Jack Hennessy (on whom AF/HJ appears to be based) actually said, whose testimony Hart had but did not cite on the Kilmichael ambush? Hennessy said that McCarthy died before what Hart footnoted as ‘a sort of false surrender’. He did not state that ‘three three volunteers were hit’ prior to the false surrender.

Isn’t what Hennessy said, ‘sort of’, good enough to establish what was believed at the time, something established by an earlier Hart footnote (p. 27, n. 21): ‘the false surrender story was circulating within the IRA as early as 1921’. In fact it was published by British Prime Minister Lloyd George’s adviser, Lionel Curtis, in a June 1921 *Round Table* article entitled simply ‘Ireland’. The false surrender story was, it might be safe to assume, circulating in Downing

³⁹ *Thesis*, 1992, p. 49 n. 55; *Enemies*, 1998, p. 35, n. 61.

Street as well in 1921. Hart missed this and a version in a 1926 biography of Michael Collins by Piaras Beaslai. Hart suggested the episode was invented by former Auxiliary commander, Brigadier FP Crozier, in his *Ireland Forever* and that Barry copied his version from this source. Crozier had resigned as commander of the notorious Auxiliaries in 1920, when his dismissal of Auxiliaries who ran amok in Trim Co. Meath was countermanded and they were reinstated. Crozier reported that he attempted to find out what happened at Kilmichael, 'in mufti'. He reported a version of the false surrender. In these circumstances, Hart's account is, to use his characterisation of Crozier's view, 'incredible'.⁴⁰

One final point, the latter part of Hart's 'One witness' observation (cited above) on Meda Ryan's earlier, *The Tom Barry Story* (1982) is simply wrong. Ryan did not state that Deasy died before the false surrender, she wrote that he suffered a non-fatal grazing wound. This is evidence of another uncorrected and careless mistake in both thesis and book. Ryan pointed it out in a significant, but ignored, academic journal article.⁴¹ Ryan reported numerous veterans, by name, in the 1970s and early 1980s as speaking on the false surrender.⁴² Ryan was researching earlier than Hart, giving her an advantage in speaking to veterans when they were alive and well. She cited them by name.

PART THREE Sectarianism

Hart's errors go beyond mere sloppiness or signs of extreme sloppiness. The six-year period between thesis and book publication could have shown some improvement (surely?). In fact we observe, if anything, deterioration in Hart's presentation.

It is reasonable in these circumstances to speculate on Hart's motive.

Hart portrayed IRA commander Tom Barry as bloodthirsty in his conduct of the Kilmichael ambush. It is reasonable to suggest that Hart wished to do so. Evidence to the contrary was either misrepresented or ignored. Corroborative evidence appears to have been invented.

Hart's narrative is believable because it fits with what people are encouraged to believe about Irish nationalism, that it is at best a form of xenophobic hostility towards Englishness, at worst an expression of sectarian anti-Protestant Catholicism. Indeed, Hart's Kilmichael story at the start of the book sets up the penultimate chapter, when the IRA went on a predictable rampage - predicted by the emotional sweep of Hart's narrative. Kilmichael 'belonged to the same world of 'disappearances' and revenge killings' (p. 37).

Hart carried his Kilmichael methodology into his pivotal *Taking it out on the Protestants* chapter. Evidence from southern Protestants that they were not subject to republican sectarianism

⁴⁰ Meda Ryan, *Tom Barry, IRA Freedom Fighter*, 2005, p.74, 81; F.P. Crozier, *Ireland Forever*, 1932, pp. 128, 129-33, Peter Berresford Ellis, *Eyewitness to Irish History*, 2004, John Wiley, p. 246. For a benign view of the force from which Crozier resigned, see Kevin Myers, 'Laziness and Propaganda have unfairly tarnished the Black and Tans' reputation', *Irish Independent*, 29 Aug 2006. For his malign view of an RIC mutiny in Listowel, Co Kerry, against official orders to shoot unarmed civilians, 'The truth about a liar and fantasist who sullied the good name of a heroic policeman', *Irish Independent*, 26 Jul 2007. For the point of view of Jeremiah Mee, the alleged RIC 'fantasist', see, J Anthony Gaughan, *The Memoirs of Constable Jeremiah Mee*, Anvil, 1975.

⁴¹ 'The Kilmichael Ambush: exploring the 'Provocative Chapters'', *History*, 92 (306), April 2007, p. 240-1. While Peter Hart may have considered Ryan's contribution as not rational (*History Ireland* interview, March-April 2005), the editors of this journal presumably disagreed, otherwise, it would not have been published.

⁴² *Ibid.*

was systematically ignored. Even an unavoidable (one might think) statement from the widely reported 11 May 1922 Protestant Convention in Dublin that the April killings were sectarian was ignored. Possibly, this was because it was accompanied by an observation that ‘apart from this incident, hostility to Protestants by reason of their religion has been almost, if not wholly, unknown in the twenty six counties in which Protestants are in the minority’ (see *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, 12 May 1922).

Peter Hart withdrew a suggestion in his thesis that IRA officer Frank Busted might have been involved in the April killings. Busted’s father was a Protestant and he became an atheist. Perhaps this affected the withdrawal of his name in this context from the 1998 book. In addition, three British intelligence officers and their driver were abducted and executed in nearby Macroom immediately prior to the start of the April killings. According to Busted, he was responsible for this action. Sean O’Callaghan’s *Execution* (1974) told Busted’s story of the killing of the officers (p. 189-92). Hart wrote of *Execution*, ‘much of this book appears to be substantially accurate’ (p.15), though there is reason to doubt Busted’s personal rationale for killing the officers. While Hart mentions the officer’s execution, he might as well not have, as it was relegated to the status of a non-event and even partially misreported. Evaluation of this episode and Busted’s role in it before the April killings or the Protestant Convention statement after it would have disrupted Hart’s theory of generalised republican sectarianism on the one hand, or even that the April killings themselves were sectarian, on the other. Hence, in what may be established at this stage as a pattern, they were either ignored or obscured for no obviously good reason.⁴³

A major concern of southern Protestants was disassociation from the anti-Catholic sectarianism of northern unionism. They distanced themselves from it regularly. Southern Protestants also repudiated unionist rationalisations for attacks on Catholics in the North, justified on the basis that Protestants in the south were attacked too. British policy also alienated southern Protestants, whose businesses were burned and destroyed in British reprisals.⁴⁴ In addition, southern unionists felt abandoned by northern unionists partitioning of six of the province of Ulster’s nine counties into a separate and overtly sectarian state.

Intuitively, this is hard to grasp. The Irish War of Independence confronted a British regime that relied on sectarian management of Irish society. It was one in which Protestants enjoyed economic, social and political privileges, and not so long since the majority of Catholics were legally prohibited from enjoying any. It would be reasonable to perceive a majority Catholic force as seeking to reverse Protestant prosperity by attacking it. It is also hard to square the non-sectarian outlook of Sinn Fein, reminiscent of the later relentlessly anti-racist ideology of the African National Congress in South Africa, with Roman Catholic domination of the Irish Free State post 1922. However, those who were the more ideologically republican were defeated in the civil war by a reconsolidation of right wing forces that came to rule the Free State. The social

⁴³ I discussed this previously in ‘After the War of Independence, some further questions about West Cork, April 27-29 1922’ (*IPR*, March 2008, available at, <http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers>). Hart reported (p. 280, n. 49) that three kidnapped British Officers, ‘on their way from Cork to Bantry’, ‘were also released’. He cited the 1 May 1922 *Irish Times*. But that paper headlined (p. 6) ‘Officers kidnapped, Unsuccessful searches in County Cork’. No mention of released officers.

⁴⁴ I deal with the position of southern Irish Protestants in more detail in two *Dublin Review of Books* articles: ‘Top People’, Number 14, Summer 2010; and ‘Frank Gallagher and land agitation’, Number 11, Autumn 2009. These are available at drb.ie and at www.gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan, where this neglected issue is brought up to date also in further articles, for instance, ‘Church and State and the Bethany Home’, supplement to *History Ireland*, vol. 18, no. 5, September-October 2010; ‘“Protestants... were left as orphans”’, *Church & State* 102, 4th Quarter, 2010, at, <http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers>.

structure became relentlessly conservative, more so than simply Catholic. The right wing forces included a predominantly Protestant business class and a Roman Catholic hierarchy that excommunicated the anti-Treaty republicans. Social class factors have been misunderstood in this process, not least in the low-grade sociology evidenced in Hart's analysis. In its banal observations were considered illustrations of analytical acuity.

For instance, Hart's discussion of the IRA 'myth of *the informer*', in which innocent Protestants were said to have been fingered over and above treacherous comrades, led Eugenio Biagini (2008), in an otherwise very interesting and instructive article, to cite,

'Hart's conclusions about the ethnic cleansing aspects of the war, with IRA units targeting minorities and other *'undesirables'* (protestants, gays, ex-crown soldiers, gypsies) and using wartime powers to settle private scores'.

Biagini's source for this revelation is Hart's *The IRA at War* (2003), but alas, no page number. *The IRA at War* contains no reference to homosexuals. Hart had referred to the IRA targeting 'deviants' in 1998 and 'those seen... as socially deviant' in 2003.⁴⁵ Possibly, Biagini was vaguely remembering Fitzpatrick's un-sourced comments, cited earlier.

Hart's sweeping generalizations were ripe for further exaggeration.

An enthusiastic review of *The IRA and its Enemies* drew attention to,

'Hart's analysis of the ritualistic elements of Volunteers' raids [that] brings out superbly the cultural underlay of these small-scale collective actions, found he suggests in the traditions of youthful gangs who signified their rebelliousness through masking and cross-dressing'.⁴⁶

Cross-dressed rebels targeting deviants is possibly a construct too far and its supportive props are limited by evidential weakness. But the concept does flow from Hart's argument. Biagini might be forgiven for thinking so, but Hart did not extend his already generous IRA target taxonomy to the extent suggested. However, Hart's suggested target list conditions the audience, and historians, to believe in the myth of the IRA myth of the informer. And it conditions the audience to consume present-centered unhistorical myths about Ireland's liberation struggle.

Biagini's use of the term 'ethnic cleansing' is also instructive. Hart used it in an essay written in a collection called *Unionism in Modern Ireland* in 1996, where he wrote,

'Similar campaigns of what might be termed *'ethnic cleansing'* were waged in parts of Kings and Queens Counties, South Tipperary, Leitrim, Mayo, Limerick, Westmeath, Louth and Cork. Worst of all was the massacre of 14 men in West Cork in April [1922]'.⁴⁷

In *The IRA and its Enemies*, however, Hart did not use the term, but implied it. In a letter in the *Irish Times* (28 June 2006), he wrote, surprisingly,

⁴⁵ Eugenio F Biagini, 'Liberty and nationalism in Ireland, 1798–1922', 2008, p. 806, *The Historical Journal*, 51, 3 (2008), pp. 793–809; Hart, *Enemies*, 1998: 31, 314; Hart, *The IRA at War*, 2003: 237. David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*, Opus, 1998: 95. One persecuted homosexual was Roger Casement, though by the British authorities after Casement was condemned to death for treason. His clemency campaign was undermined when sexually explicit material from the so-called 'black diaries' was divulged to Casement sympathisers. The covert 'black propaganda' had the desired effect.

⁴⁶ Mark Finnane, 'Peter Hart, The IRA and Its Enemies: violence and community in Cork, 1916–23', *Crime, History & Societies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2002, pp. 178–183.

⁴⁷ In Richard English, Graham Walker, eds, *Unionism in Modern Ireland*, Palgrave, 1996.

‘Niall Meehan, as usual, misrepresents my work (June 23rd). I have never argued that “*ethnic cleansing*” took place in Cork or elsewhere in the 1920s - in fact, quite the opposite.’

This, along with Fitzpatrick’s earlier un-sourced commentary, is academic insouciance of a high order. The response from within the academy has been to pass over largely in silence. As a result, Dudgeon could write (*IPR*, September 2010):

‘Hart’s chapter in *The IRA and its Enemies*, entitled ‘The Protestant Experience of Revolution in Southern Ireland’ was especially illuminating.’

Illuminating it undoubtedly is, but not in that book. The chapter was in *Unionism in modern Ireland* and contained the ‘ethnic cleansing’ remarks Hart later denied having written. Confusion reigns because corrective debate is foreign to Irish historiography.

CONCLUSION

The inevitable conclusion drawn from depictions of nationalist irrationality is an assumption of British rationality. Such ‘history’ has become de-rigueur in Irish universities and is it largely unchallenged in Irish media.

One reason I suggest is the destabilising effect in the South of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland post 1968. The popular nationalist narrative of dispossession, suppression and resistance was deemed by Conor Cruise O’Brien and others as a contributing factor in support for violence per se (divorced from the social and political conditions that caused it to break out, divorced also from the state that provoked and perpetuated it). At the same time the history of resistance to colonial rule began to be construed as ‘Catholic nationalism’. This was a distancing manoeuvre that tapped into emerging socially progressive non-sectarian elements within Irish society, that were gaining a hold on popular consciousness. For instance, the prohibition of contraception and divorce was challenged by the women’s movement and by the young.

Secular movements and consciousness had been repressed by the conservative Irish state that used predominantly Roman Catholic institutions to control southern Irish society. The revisionist argument therefore appeared to make sense in tandem with increasingly popular reaction against the ideological and institutional dominance of the Catholic Church. In addition, increased urbanisation and living standards, accompanied by the abandonment of small-scale protected capitalist economic development, seemed to be the abandonment also of small-mindedness. The latter was associated with a peasant Catholicism, though in fact the period of economic isolationism from 1932 to the mid 1960s was a mechanism that kept alive an indigenous Protestant business class as a distinct economic and social group. Nevertheless, EEC Entry in 1973 compounded a view promoted by the political elite that Catholic nationalist isolationism was being abandoned in favour of a wider pluralism. After that point, the residue of indigenous manufacturing mostly disappeared in competition with cheaper, because produced efficiently on a larger scale, imports. Manufacturing employment was replaced by multinational investors located outside the EEC, who saw the Irish Republic as an attractive location for tariff-free penetration of the European market. They could also avail of super-profits through a combination of low corporation tax and transfer pricing between manufacturing, sales and marketing subsidiaries. The EEC itself treated the territory of the republic as a peripheral area qualifying for structural funding aimed at bringing Irish poverty up to an average European standard of living. Irish prosperity became increasingly dependent on economic forces outside of its own territory.

At the same time, the violent conflict in the north was portrayed as a reflection of a sectarian Irish past intruding on to a southern civic society appearing to move beyond its limitations. It was also seen as a threat to the new economic project based on EEC membership post 1973. Censorship and severe repression of republicans developed during the 1970s. The intellectual response from progressive republican or socialist republican voices was marginalised. Censorship was consolidated institutionally within broadcasting and continued until 1994. Those who opposed repression on civil rights grounds in the 1970s were also marginalised, not least by Conor Cruise O'Brien during his 1973-77 ministerial career, for example when he accused then Senator, former President, Mary Robinson, of being an apologist for killing judges in Northern Ireland. Intellectual opposition to the revisionist project that O'Brien spearheaded was neutralised. As an 'ideological revisionist' (*Irish Times*, 9 November 1978) O'Brien led the assault on nationalist historiography and promoted its characterisation as a catholic phenomenon.

The association of revisionism with popular reaction to overt Catholicism was, in essence, a piggybacking operation. Reaction to Catholic institutional dominance was a movement from within Irish society, but was presented as something that transcended and superseded it, a form of ideological post-nationalism that accompanied post-Catholicism. O'Brien managed to link and to construe support for the republican position in the North, or merely political agitation on the worst effects of repression, as support for something generic called 'violence'. It was as institutionally successful, and ultimately stultifying, in its way as institutional Catholicism had been.

In these circumstances, historical revisionism appeared to be an intellectual and career building wave of the future. Viewing the past in light of present centred concerns of the elite produced a concept of nationalist narrow mindedness and sectarianism having its roots in the revolutionary period. It is useful to the elite and seemed to make a sort of sense, for which Peter Hart's *The IRA and its Enemies* provided evidential detail. Roy Foster continues to promote the theme, recently in 'How the Catholics became Protestants', in *Luck and the Irish* (Penguin, 2009), a book including the observation that those who challenge revisionist views are purveyors, merely, of 'nationalism with footnotes'.⁴⁸

The Irish economy today is still dependent (primarily) on US multinational investment using Ireland to penetrate the European market. Expressions of Irish national sovereignty are limited to preventing the European Union from raising such taxes, while relying on the same EU to rescue the currently near bankrupt Irish financial system.

On the other hand, the northern problem is currently contained within a rigid framework that recognises the irreducibly sectarian basis of the six-county statelet, and for which there is no workable alternative while that state continues to exist. It is the only framework minimally acceptable to nationalists and maximally allowable by unionists.

In such circumstances of political and economic fragility, a de-motivating, facile and conservative historiography can be a useful thing, since the actual history is considered so thoroughly unsettling. In these circumstances in reaction to bad history Irish historians keep their heads down, their attention fixated on what is directly ahead.

⁴⁸ To footnote, it is a view with which I take issue in "*Protestants... were left as orphans*", *Church & State* 102, 4th Quarter, 2010, available at, <http://gcd.academia.edu/NiallMeehan/Papers>.