

# **The Dungavel Handicap**

## **Scotland, Churchill and Rudolf Hess, 1941**

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**T**he writing of history is quite properly treated as a discipline. Many reputable historians, therefore, tend to be conservative, requiring multiple archival sources, an abundance of documentation and testimony from respectable eye-witnesses before reaching their conclusions. This often means that a very high level of proof is required before they engage in analysis of problematic events in the recent past. This is curious on two counts. Firstly, when studying ancient history, for instance, academics often base significant theories and make findings on very slender evidence: a few bones, one map, a single account. Secondly, an approach that is overly reliant on documents, ignores the possibility that those engaged in unpleasant, disloyal or illegal activity will deliberately avoid leaving a trail of incriminating evidence behind them. How should we approach such situations?

Perhaps we should follow the example of criminal law, which allows the consideration of circumstantial evidence. Indeed, the argument is often made that circumstantial evidence can be as compelling, or even more compelling, than traditional proof such as documents, forensic evidence, photographic evidence and so on. There are cases where convictions were obtained relying mainly on circumstantial evidence, and the convictions have been shown to be sound. The law allows, too, for an absence of evidence itself to be treated as a type of proof, provided other tests are met and those required to make a decision (such as a jury, or an enquiry) are properly briefed or instructed.

It is odd, therefore, that many of those writing about political events choose to avoid this criminological approach when dealing with controversial subjects in areas where evidence is either missing or withheld. In reaching conclusions about what was going on in the UK in 1940-1941 – i.e. whether or not efforts were being made to strike a peace deal with Germany, and dump Churchill – there are gaps in the official UK archives. Despite this, enough remains in foreign archives and reputable histories published elsewhere to allow a narrative to be constructed which, even when discarding the many anonymous and off-the-record contributors who crop up in most other

accounts, points to a conclusion somewhat at variance with the accepted narrative.

The passage of time is also a factor, altering our perspectives. Even if there isn't 'new evidence' one can always adopt an analogous method from the world of criminal investigations – the cold case review. By looking critically at a wider range of sources than may have been the case in the recent past, a fresh picture may emerge. Rather than not write the account at all, and leave history in abeyance, why not try to present what there is and 'put it to the jury'?

## **The new PM**

**W**inston Churchill became Prime Minister on 10 May 1940, the day Germany invaded Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. He carried out an immediate and wide-ranging cabinet reshuffle, dropping twelve of (his predecessor) Chamberlain's team, including seven ministers. On 14 May 1940, a David Low cartoon, *All Behind You Winston*, appeared in Lord Beaverbrook's *The Evening Standard* (edited at the time by Michael Foot). It showed a grimly determined Churchill, flanked by Clement Attlee, Ernest Bevin and Herbert Morrison marching forward and rolling up their sleeves as they do so, followed by a phalanx of other MPs, all doing likewise, preparing to 'get on with the job'. Looked at quickly, it appears to be the massed ranks of Parliament rallying behind the new Prime Minister. A closer inspection shows that Churchill's main supporters are from the Labour Party, with all the prominent Conservatives being in the second or third rows, if they are identifiable at all.

## **The UK opposition**

**S**ome of the surgery Churchill performed is understandable. He was heading a coalition government and needed to bring in Labour and Liberal members. But he had choices about whom he dropped, and it is instructive to look at these. They included: the Marquess of Zetland, Secretary of State for India and Burma and a prominent member of the Anglo-German Fellowship;<sup>1</sup> Leslie Burgin, Minister of Supply; and Lord Stanhope, Lord President of the Council. Both Burgin and Stanhope would be identified as '*Guilty Men*' by Michael Foot, Frank Owen and Peter Howard in their book of the same name a couple of

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<sup>1</sup> An elite pro-German, pro-appeasement pressure group, the Anglo-German Fellowship lost some members after the November 1938 pogroms in Germany. Charles, Duke of Coburg (head of the German branch of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha) and Ernst, Duke of Brunswick (head of the House of Hanover) were guests at several AGF events in the UK.

months later.<sup>2</sup> The other ministers discarded were Walter Elliott, Minister of Health; John Colville, Secretary of State for Scotland; Earl de la Warr, First Commissioner of Works and Ronald Cross, Minister of Economic Warfare.

Despite this, Churchill's cabinet still retained eight other 'Guilty Men': Lord Halifax, Foreign Secretary; Reginald Dorman-Smith, Minister of Agriculture; David Margesson, Secretary of State for War; Lord Simon, Lord Chancellor; Sir Kingsley Wood, Chancellor of the Exchequer; Ernest Brown, Minister of Labour; William Morrison, Postmaster-General; and Lord Caldecote, Lord Chancellor.<sup>3</sup> Among those not explicitly branded as *guilty*, but still retained, was Lord Reith, known for his pro-fascist views in the 1930s. Churchill – whom Reith called 'that bloody shit' – would move him from Minister of Information to First Commissioner of Works in October 1940, before finally sacking him in February 1942. Another interesting inclusion was John Moore-Brabazon, Minister of Aircraft Production, who had sought advice from Sir Oswald Mosley in 1939 about preventing the war. He was forced to resign in late 1942 after – disgracefully – stating that he hoped Germany and the Soviet Union, then desperately engaged at Stalingrad, would destroy each other. It is interesting to note – and it reflects Churchill's difficulties – that key positions like Secretary of State for War and Minister of Aircraft Production were still occupied after May 1940 by individuals who ideally would have wanted a different PM.

One person whom Churchill did move out of the way as quickly as possible was Samuel Hoare, replaced on 11 May as Secretary of State for Air, the department that ran the RAF. After 18 days, Hoare, a former Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary, was appointed UK Ambassador to Spain. Known for his pro-appeasement views, he had a significant following on the Conservative backbenches. His posting to Spain came in the midst of Dunkirk, and occurred the day after Churchill had managed to face down Halifax's suggestion that Mussolini broker peace talks. It can, therefore, be seen as a sop to the anti-war/pro-German group in Parliament

Hoare's role in Spain was clearly to follow-up discussions, whatever they were, about possible peace proposals. Unusually for an ambassador, Hoare

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<sup>2</sup> A rapidly written polemic, *Guilty Men* was published by the Left Book Club in July 1940. Its findings are not entirely accurate: Baldwin and Chamberlain, for instance, re-armed the UK very effectively from 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Dorman-Smith was a member of both English Array, a right-wing ecological group and English Mystery, which called for government based on 'the secret of race'. He was also Honorary Secretary of the Duke of Bedford's English People's Party. Churchill sent him to Burma as Governor on 6 May 1941. Margesson was sacked in February 1942, after the loss of Singapore.

retained his seat in the Commons (he was MP for Chelsea). Thus, were Churchill to falter, he could return to the UK at any time. Hoare's departure was 'evened out' 48 hours later by the appointment of Stafford Cripps as Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Disliked by Attlee, Morrison and Bevin, Cripps had actually been expelled from the Labour Party in January 1939 for advocating a Popular Front with the Communist Party. Like Hoare he kept his seat in Parliament as MP for Bristol South East.

All these measures were taken in the knowledge that there wasn't really much of a pro-Churchill, pro-war majority in Parliament. Richard Griffiths notes<sup>4</sup> the following prominent MPs as sitting in the House of Commons *after* May 1940 in spite of the fact that had all been, or even still were, in favour of a negotiated peace with Germany: Peter Agnew, Ernest Bennett, R. A. Butler, Cyril Culverwell, James Edmondson, Thomas Hunter, Charles Kerr, John McGovern, John Mackie, Thomas Moore, Archibald Maule Ramsay, Richard Stokes, John Stourton and Lambert Ward. Of these Bennett, Kerr, Mackie and Ramsay were members or supporters of the Right Club, a private anti-semitic organization Ramsay had established in May 1939 which sought to obtain an honourable (as they would put it) negotiated peace after war commenced. Among the others, Culverwell had stated, when seeking peace talks after the fall of Poland: 'I can even visualise our troops fighting side by side with the Germans to defeat the Bolshevik menace'<sup>5</sup> and Moore had written widely in support of Hitler and Nazism, pre-1939.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside these, in the House of Lords, Griffiths notes the continued presence of Lord Brocket, the Duke of Buccleuch, the Earl of Darnley, Lord Ronald Graham, James Graham the Marquess of Graham,<sup>7</sup> Viscount Lympington,

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<sup>4</sup> In his *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club, and British Anti-Semitism 1939-1940* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> He said this in the Parliamentary chamber during the debate following the King's Speech of November 1939 and it can be found at column 380 of the day's proceedings. See <<https://tinyurl.com/4x6h8kdp>> or <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1939-11-30/debates/9e254422-d4d6-4950-82d9-d79e392838b6/KingSSpeech>>.

<sup>6</sup> Maule Ramsay was interned on 23 May after evidence emerged of him having a close relationship with Tyler Kent, a US embassy employee who was obtaining confidential US and UK communications. After Ramsay's arrest, Lord Marley obliquely referred to him in the House of Lords as the Nazi sympathiser who had been chosen by the Germans as 'Gauleiter of Scotland' (see column 580 of Hansard for 13 June 1940 at <<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1940/jun/13/the-daily-worker>>.

Kerr accepted a peerage on 23 June 1940. He had previously been Comptroller of the Royal Household.

<sup>7</sup> Both Grahams were cousins of the Duke of Hamilton. The Marquess of Graham was one of the signatories on the Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965.

the Earl of Mar, Lord Mottistone, Lord Noel-Buxton, Lord Redesdale, Lord Sempill,<sup>8</sup> the Marquess of Tavistock, the Duke of Wellington and the Duke of Westminster – the last usually regarded as the richest man in the UK. Both Lord Brouncker and Duke of Buccleuch attended Hitler's 50th birthday party in April 1939, Buccleuch doing so while he was Lord Steward of the Royal Household. Like Bennett, Kerr, Mackie and Maule Ramsay, Sempill was a supporter of the Right Club.

To the above we could add Edwin Duncan Sandys, who had been close to Ribbentrop in the 1930s. Until quite late in the day Sandys wanted Germany to be allowed to dominate Europe, so that the UK could pursue its colonial interests. Another interesting figure was Sir Henry Channon, Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to R. A. Butler and, by virtue of this, closely associated with foreign policy. (Butler was Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and deputy to Lord Halifax.) Channon's social circle was exceptional and in 1936 included Edward VIII, the Duke of Kent and Prince Paul, Regent of Yugoslavia. After the accession of George VI, he was less influential. He strongly disliked Churchill.

To these two chunks of the political class – those ousted from office and the appeasers – could be added another two factions, the Imperial Policy Group and 'the Cliveden Set'.<sup>9</sup>

The former dated from 1934 and had been set up by the Earl of Mansfield, a strong believer in the UK and the British Empire acting as a self-contained economic and military bloc with as few dealings with Europe as possible. Kenneth de Courcy acted as the group's secretary and a membership of fifty, across both Houses of Parliament, was claimed.<sup>10</sup> Trying to verify this is

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<sup>8</sup> Sempill, who worked at the Air Ministry, was found to be receiving payments from the Japanese government in June 1941. His office was raided on 13 December 1941 and various confidential documents found. Rather than face prosecution for espionage, he agreed to retire from public life. See <<https://tinyurl.com/yhzmzu6b>> or <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/churchill-protected-scottish-peer-suspected-spying-japan-1173730.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> The American historian Carrol Quigley stated in two books, *Tragedy and Hope* and *The Anglo-American Establishment*, that 'the Cliveden set' was actually a meeting of an Anglo-American network variously known as Milner's kindergarten and the Round Table. Both books are on-line: *The Anglo-American Establishment* at <<http://www.papelesdesociedad.info/IMG/pdf/quigley.pdf>> and *Tragedy and Hope* at <<http://members.tranquility.net/~rwinkel/911/TragedyAndHope.pdf>>.

<sup>10</sup> *The Glasgow Herald* 20 August 1935 set out the aims of the IPG as: maintaining the British Empire as a united economic and military bloc, avoiding European commitments, ensuring a close relationship with the US, permanent UK rule over India and reform of the House of Lords. See <<https://tinyurl.com/4pd29kth>> or <[https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2507&dat=19350820&id=\\_IVRAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=LjQNAAAIAIBAJ&pg=1770,2860441&hl=en](https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2507&dat=19350820&id=_IVRAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=LjQNAAAIAIBAJ&pg=1770,2860441&hl=en)>. *Continues at the foot of the next page.*

difficult, but the following MPs are known to have been involved: Victor Cazalet, Roy Wise, William Nunn, Lawrence Kimball, Herbert Williams and Victor Raikes. In the Lords, other than Mansfield, the Earl of Glasgow and Lord Phillimore were both prominent IPG supporters. Of these, both Phillimore and Cazalet had been strongly pro-Franco after 1936, and Cazalet also had an influential role, from July 1940, as liaison officer with the Polish Government in Exile. (Of which more later). Glasgow funded Mosley in the 1930s as well as being a member of the Anglo-German Fellowship. He was also Lord Caldecote's brother-in-law. Nunn, formerly MP for Whitehaven 1931-1935, would be returned to Parliament in an uncontested wartime by-election (Newcastle upon Tyne West) on 5 July 1940. The fact that a member of the IPG could be adopted as a candidate at that point confirms their influence within the Conservative party. Mansfield, de Courcy and their colleagues were no friends of Churchill. They had connections outside Parliament too. William Douglas-Home, brother of Alec Douglas-Home, was a supporter.<sup>11</sup>

The Cliveden Set were a pro-German, pro-appeasement faction led by Viscount Astor (a US citizen, and owner of *The Observer*) and his wife Nancy Astor MP. Functioning as an elite, invitation-only discussion group, the most prominent attendees at their gatherings included Lord Halifax; Robert Barrington-Ward (Editor of *The Times* from 1941); Lord Brand (director, Lloyds Bank); Geoffrey Dawson (Editor of *The Times* until 1941); James Garvin (Editor of *The Observer*); Neville Henderson (UK Ambassador to Germany until September 1939); Lord McGowan (Chairman of ICI); the Duke of Manchester; Montagu Norman (Governor of the Bank of England); Lord Simon; Samuel Hoare and Edward FitzRoy MP (Speaker of the House of Commons). Any group containing the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Governor of the Bank of England and the Editor of *The Times*, must, by definition, be highly influential.

Finally, Stephen Dorril notes<sup>12</sup> the following as key pre-1939 contacts for Mosley: Robert Boothby, James Maxton and Harold Nicolson.

The point about mentioning these names is not that any of them were

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*Footnote 10 continued:*

The IPG officially disbanded in 1942 after the Soviet Union complained about its activities. De Courcy's papers include extensive correspondence with R. A. Butler, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Lord Caldecote, Quintin Hogg, Lord Hankey and the Duke of Windsor. See <[http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9d5nd5g3/entire\\_text/](http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt9d5nd5g3/entire_text/)>.

<sup>11</sup> William Douglas-Home contested parliamentary by-elections as an independent candidate opposed to Winston Churchill's objective of an unconditional surrender by Germany (i.e. in favour of a negotiated peace) at Glasgow Cathcart in April 1942, where he won 21% of the votes, and at Windsor in June 1942, where he won 42%.

<sup>12</sup> In his *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London: Viking, 2006).

unreservedly pro-Nazi (though some, such as Maule Ramsay, were). My intention, rather, is to show how many well-known and influential MPs in Parliament after May 1940 might have been open to the idea of a compromise peace, were one to appear that looked reasonable. When Chamberlain resigned, he stated that he could no longer command the support of a majority in the Conservative party. Assuming this was true, the arithmetic implies that more than half of the 417 Conservative MPs wanted a new PM to prosecute the war efficiently. But slightly less than half – say 200 – would have been happy to continue with Chamberlain. Exactly how many Conservative MPs in May 1940 were prepared to stick with Churchill, if military reversals ensued and no end to the war appeared to be in sight, was a moot point. A great many may have changed their minds, had the opportunity arisen.<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, there were the likes of Lord Nuffield, Lord Beaverbrook and Lloyd George to consider. Nuffield had been exceptionally pro-Mosley in the 1930s, as had Beaverbrook at one point. But Beaverbrook was close to Churchill, and loyal to him on a personal basis. Few really knew what Lloyd George might do, and few trusted him. In May-June 1940 he refused three offers to join Churchill's cabinet, remarking to his secretary, 'I shall wait until Winston is bust'.<sup>14</sup> There were a great many who agreed with both George Orwell's view, noted in his diary on 25 July 1940: 'There are now rumours that Lloyd George is the potential Pétain of England', and the later assessment by Oliver Harvey, PPS to Anthony Eden, in April 1941: 'at the end of that road lies Lloyd George, who would readily be a Pétain to us, with the support of the Press Barons and City Magnates'. In public, Lloyd George was extremely careful what he said. In private, though, he agreed with the Duke of Bedford in September 1940 that the UK should seek a negotiated peace with Germany. How he would act if, or when, peace terms were tabled was never clear.

Beyond Parliament there were others whose attitude toward Churchill was less than whole-hearted. Sir Horace Wilson, the Head of the Home Civil Service, was known for his strongly anti-semitic views and had been a staunch supporter of Chamberlain's policies pre-1939 remarking, 'The aim of our appeasement was to avoid war altogether, for all time'.<sup>15</sup> Among those with

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<sup>13</sup> The other anti-war/anti-Churchill groups in Parliament in 1941 were the Independent Labour Party (4 MPs), the Communist Party (1 MP) and the Irish Nationalist Party (2 MPs). There were also a smattering of pacifist MPs within both the Labour and Liberal ranks

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *Life with Lloyd George: The Diary of A. J. Sylvester* (London: Macmillan, 1975). Ref: <<https://tinyurl.com/93herexb>> or <<https://books.google.com.mx/books?id=UNIgAAAAMAAJ&dq=%22Life+with+Lloyd+George%22+%22cross%22&focus=searchwithinvolume&q=bust>>.

<sup>15</sup> Cited by Martin Gilbert in 'Horace Wilson: Man of Munich?', *History Today*, Vol. 32, no.10.

military connections were Basil Liddell Hart, who favoured an 'indirect approach' if the UK were to be involved in war (i.e. the British Army should be used sparingly, and allies should do most of the fighting if at all possible), and that unprofitable wars should be ended by negotiation.<sup>16</sup> Mention should also be made of General Ironside, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (until replaced in July 1940). Like Liddell Hart, Ironside favoured peripheral operations and was a close friend of Major J F C Fuller, a strong Mosley supporter. Both Ironside and Fuller were vehemently anti-Communist, as were most senior UK army officers. Which is not to say they were traitorous. Rather, as with the politicians, if the situation had arisen where peace terms that looked reasonable to them were available, which way would they have jumped?

And what of the UK's ruling family? In *Go-Betweens for Hitler*,<sup>17</sup> Karina Urbach sets out the dense and tangled web of royal connections across Europe in the 1930s that were used, mainly by the Nazi regime, to establish contact with interested parties abroad. Edward VIII, later Duke of Windsor, features heavily in this, as does his mother, Queen Mary and two of his brothers, Albert, Duke of York (later George VI) and George, Duke of Kent. Urbach notes, with some exceptions, that much of this royal activity ceased after September 1939, but caveats this by making it clear that the private papers of the House of Windsor are not open for inspection.

Like every monarch in the UK's non-constitutional democracy, George VI was supported and advised by a range of officials that the Crown appointed, whose functions were obscure (to the public) but who could be legitimately used, should the need arise, as a parallel structure to the elected government. One of these positions – Gentleman Usher – was held by Sir Louis Greig, a member in 1934 of Oswald Mosley's January Club, along with Basil Liddell Hart, Thomas Moore, John Erskine and William Montagu-Douglas-Scott MP, brother of the Duke of Buccleuch.<sup>18</sup> Another post, Lord Steward, was occupied until 22 May 1940 by the Duke of Buccleuch himself, who resigned at the invitation of the King. His replacement was Douglas Douglas-Hamilton, Duke of Hamilton. Like his cousins, Hamilton had been a member of the Anglo-German Fellowship. Churchill was told of this arrangement retrospectively with no

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<sup>16</sup> See Brian Holden Reid, *The Legacy of Liddell Hart: The Contrasting Responses of Michael Howard and André Beaufre* in *British Journal for Military History*, Volume 1, Issue 1, October 2014 at <<https://bjmh.gold.ac.uk/issue/view/52>>.

<sup>17</sup> Oxford University Press, 2015

<sup>18</sup> Greig served as a Group Captain in the RAF 1939-1945. After a spell as Governor of Madras, Erskine returned to the UK and was elected MP for Brighton on 9 May 1940. He and Churchill disagreed strongly about British rule in India.

details being given. It isn't clear whether Buccleuch was sacked, simply refused to serve once Churchill was PM, or it was decided that keeping him in post was risky given his high-profile support for Hitler, and a tactical move was made by the King to replace him with someone a bit more presentable. As well as taking up his Royal duties, Hamilton served as a Group Captain in the RAF. His residence, Dungavel House, had its own landing strip and was used as an RAF Emergency Landing Field.

The Buccleuch-Hamilton switch doesn't seem to have overly concerned Churchill: he had bigger worries with Edward, Duke of Windsor. Hurriedly leaving the French riviera on 21 June 1940, the Duke arrived in Spain, where he was recorded as making statements that peace should be made with Germany. He remained there, or in Portugal, until 1 August when he left for the Bahamas to be installed, at Churchill's insistence, as Governor.<sup>19</sup> Over 4000 miles from the UK and Europe, this limited his ability to network with like-minded types, and severely reduced his public visibility.

## Peace feelers

**B**efore Churchill could arrange a suitable berth for the Duke of Windsor, however, he faced a full-blown attempt to end his premiership only a fortnight after he had taken office. The day after Low's cartoon appeared, German forces broke through the French front at Sedan, reaching the Channel on 20 May and cutting off most of the British army in Belgium. This triggered an approach to Halifax by the Italian ambassador on 24 May 1940, suggesting that Mussolini broker peace. The difficulties and details of how Churchill faced this down over the following days are the subject of John Lukacs' *Five Day in London: May 1940*,<sup>20</sup> and also form the background to the 2017 film *Darkest Hour*, starring Gary Oldman as Churchill.

But although Churchill succeeded in staying in office, contrary to the traditional narrative, this did not end peace feelers being put out by Halifax and his colleagues. For instance, R. A. Butler, at the request of Halifax, was in touch with Carl Burckhardt, a Swiss diplomat and member of the International

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Padfield in *Hess, Hitler and Churchill: The Real Turning Point of the Second World War - A Secret History* (London: Icon, 2014) cites Stohrer to Ribbentrop 2 July 1940, quoting the Spanish Foreign Minister: 'Windsor has told the Foreign Minister that he will only return to England if his wife is recognised as a member of the royal family and if he receives an influential post of military or civil type [ . . . ] Windsor has spoken out to the Foreign Minister and also to other local acquaintances sharply against Churchill and against this war'; and Huene to Ribbentrop 2 August 1940: 'the Duke praised the Führer's desire for peace, which fully accorded with his own feelings'.

<sup>20</sup> London: The Folio Society, 2011.

Committee of the Red Cross, from May 1940, and via Burckhardt, with Prince Max Egon zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg.<sup>21</sup> Of this Burckhardt recorded that Butler was 'overflowing with pessimism and feverishly seeking a way out'.<sup>22</sup> More followed. On 7 June 1940 – ten days after Churchill supposedly ended any such activities – Butler asked Kenneth de Courcy to sound out possible peace terms with Germany, and to use US Ambassador Joseph Kennedy to establish them. While this was being pursued, Butler carried on his quest to end the UK's involvement in the war. On 17 June 1940, the same day Marshal Pétain asked for an armistice, Butler met the Swedish trade envoy Dr Björn Prytz, who reported afterwards that Butler stated British policy must be determined by 'common sense not bravado'<sup>23</sup> and had 'assured me that no opportunity for reaching a compromise (peace) would be neglected if the possibility were offered on reasonable conditions'.<sup>24</sup> A week later, the Finnish ambassador in Stockholm 'heard from diplomatic sources' – presumably either his Swedish or British counterparts – that the UK was likely to negotiate peace with Germany. Despite Churchill demanding explanations from Halifax and Butler, and Butler offering to resign and clarifying that there was 'nothing definite or specific that I would wish now to withdraw',<sup>25</sup> the momentum toward some kind of settlement continued. On 1 August 1940 the King of Sweden, Gustaf V, approached King George VI offering to broker peace.<sup>26</sup> Churchill's views notwithstanding, draft terms were worked out in Stockholm between two lawyers: Ludwig Weissauer, acting for Ribbentrop and Lars Ekeberg, acting with the agreement of UK Ambassador, Victor Mallet. They were:

- 1) The world to be divided into two economic spheres, one based on Europe dominated by Germany, the other based on the British Empire, and dominated by the UK.
- (2) A German evacuation of France, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Norway.

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<sup>21</sup> Hohenlohe was from the Austro-Hungarian branch of the family. The German branch, was led by Ernst of Hohenlohe-Langenburg whose wife was Princess Alexandra of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Ernst had acted as Regent during the childhood of Charles, Duke of Coburg.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Padfield, *Hess, Hitler and Churchill* (see note 19).

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Howard, *RAB: The Life of R.A. Butler*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987)

<sup>24</sup> Matthew & Harrison (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography - volume 9* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Howard (see note 23).

<sup>26</sup> Gustaf V's son and heir, Prince Gustaf, was married to Lady Louise Mountbatten, sister of Lord Louis Mountbatten.

- (3) A version of Poland to be restored.
- (4) No restoration of Czechoslovakia.
- (5) The economic division of Europe to be ended, and the continent to have an integrated economy under German strategic control and management.
- (6) The UK to retain all its colonies 'and such mandates as were needed for its political and military interests' with 'Germany possibly receiving compensation elsewhere'.
- (7) The Mediterranean, Egypt, French, Dutch and Belgian colonies were 'open to discussion'.

Mallet conveyed these to the UK where they were quickly rejected by Churchill and his cabinet on 8 September 1940. With the Battle of Britain raging, and an invasion expected, it was natural that the majority of both politicians and the public would be averse to appearing defeatist. National pride was at stake, and it was considered – correctly as it transpired – that the UK had a good chance of coming through this. Secondly, the idea that the Mediterranean, long a British dominated area, was 'open to discussion' would have struck most UK politicians, including most of the anti-Churchill faction, as a decisive blow against the British Empire. Thus, the terms were quickly rejected. For Churchill and his supporters this was a straightforward moral decision. For the anti-Churchill faction, it meant being pragmatic and waiting until the UK could negotiate from strength. What the failure of the Gustaf V approach showed, though, was that it would have to be the anti-Churchill group that pro-actively sought terms in the future: the government would not do so.

## **Finland**

**T**he involvement of Sweden in trying to broker a peace in August-September 1940 has been noted. By assembling material from a variety of sources, including John Lukacs's *The Last European War: September 1939 – December 1941*,<sup>27</sup> Finland emerges as the next critical player in attempts to take the UK out of the war through 1940-1941.

Both Gustav V and Marshal Mannerheim, President of Finland, considered the USSR to be the major threat to Europe, and both were in favour of peace between Germany and the UK. Finland had received some support from the UK during and after its 1939-1940 war with the Soviet Union, but it knew from its basic geographical position, particularly after the German triumphs of June 1940, that the UK could not be depended on as a military ally. Nor could it be

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<sup>27</sup> New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001.

counted on diplomatically either: Cripps, as Ambassador to the Soviet Union, suggested to his Finnish counterpart that the country surrender its independence and, like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, 're-join' the Soviet Union. Faced with unpalatable choices, Finland made a rapprochement with Germany. By July 1940, prior to his visit to Stockholm, Ludwig Weissauer was in Helsinki discussing Finland's ability to defend itself with Mannerheim, talks that continued a month later with Josef Veltjens, Göring's personal emissary.

There were attempts, in September-November 1940, to offset this move toward reliance on Germany with discussions about a Swedish-Finnish federal state, for which US support was canvassed. The idea was dropped when both Germany and the Soviet Union proved to be opposed to it. After Hitler decreed that planning for Operation Barbarossa (the invasion and subjugation of the Soviet Union) should commence on 5 December 1940, with the invasion itself taking place on 15 May 1941, Finland shifted inexorably into the German camp. Military talks, involving Major General Paavo Talvela, Colonel General Halder and Göring, began between Finland and Germany in Berlin on 15 January 1941 – though at this point they were still framed in terms of assisting Finland in its defensive preparations.

The same day that these talks began, the minute book of the Polish Relief Fund records: 'The Hon. Secretary reported that he would be absent abroad on Finnish Government business for the next 3-4 weeks. He asked therefore to be excused from attendance at meetings.' The Honorary Secretary of the Polish Relief Fund was Tancred Borenius. Born in Finland, then part of Russia, in 1885, he had moved to London where he became a Lecturer at University College, and was prominent in artistic circles (skirting the fringes of Bloomsbury Group) pre-1914. He was also close to Mannerheim and a member of the Finnish diplomatic mission from 1918. By the 1930s he was art adviser to the Earl of Harewood.<sup>28</sup> Son-in-law to Queen Mary, brother-in-law to George VI, Harewood said in later life: 'every war in which Britain had been involved had been due to the inefficiency of politicians, and that they began what soldiers had to end'<sup>29</sup> – not exactly a ringing endorsement of the Churchill government. Prior to departing on his mission for Finland, Borenius was briefed by Claude Dansey and sent with the knowledge of the head of MI6, Colonel

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<sup>28</sup> See <<https://tinyurl.com/8345memy>> or <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/1152018/catalogue-of-the-pictures-and-drawings-at-harewood-hosue-and-elsewhere-in-the>> and also <<https://tinyurl.com/6nw63t9f>> or <<https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2015/march/18/the-amazing-life-story-of-tancred-borenius/>> the conclusion of which appears to be at odds with the facts.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Matthew & Harrison (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography - volume 9* (Oxford: OUP, 2004)

Stewart Menzies.<sup>30</sup>

Borenium travelled via Portugal, Spain and France to Switzerland. Here he met Carl Burkhardt in Geneva. After this, Burkhardt met Ulrich von Hassell, a career German diplomat and member of the Central European Economic Council, a post which enabled him to travel around Europe speaking with political leaders and foreign diplomats.<sup>31</sup> Von Hassell was also a prominent figure in the German resistance to Hitler; and, according to the notes he took of his discussions with Burkhardt, Borenium stated 'there was a mood for compromise in the English cabinet'. This was apparently because Churchill sending Halifax to Washington as Ambassador (22 December 1940) and replacing him with Eden was unpopular. Borenium stressed that the UK would be unwilling to negotiate with Hitler and stated that he had close connections with Buckingham Palace 'above all the Queen' (i.e. Queen Mary) and represented a group who would be interested in discussing the following terms:

- (1) Holland and Belgium restored.
- (2) A Polish state, minus former German provinces 'because the Poles have struck out so bravely for England'.
- (3) Former German colonies to be returned.
- (4) The British Empire to be otherwise unaffected.
- (5) UK indifference to France, Czechoslovakia.

Simultaneous with the Borenium-Burkhardt meeting, Finland asked its ambassador in Berlin to send a reliable person to the UK, to assess the prospects for peace from direct talks with UK business and financial circles. Dr Carl Heinrick Ramsay, President of the Finnish Steamship Company, and a prominent member of the Swedish Peoples Party, was selected for this role.<sup>32</sup> Ramsay visited London between 18 and 26 January 1941. No records exist of

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<sup>30</sup> Dansey was Menzies' deputy and ran the Z network – a parallel structure to MI6 – across Europe. (See <<https://spartacus-educational.com/SSdansey.htm>>.) Some have suggested that this briefing implies Borenium went on behalf of the UK government; i.e. Churchill and the cabinet sent Borenium. If they did, it is odd that none of them claimed credit for what followed. Padfield (see note 19) suggests that Menzies and the Duke of Buccleuch were close friends, and cites a conversation (witnessed by Kenneth de Courcy) between them in White's Club. No specific proof of this friendship can be found, though Max Hastings in his *The Secret War: Spies, Codes and Guerrillas 1939–1945* (London: William Collins, 2016) notes on p. 17 that Buccleuch had been Menzies' fag at Eton. Stephen Dorril in his *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: 4th Estate, 2000) provides evidence that de Courcy and Menzies were on good terms.

<sup>31</sup> Padfield (see note 19) pp. 133-134 quoting diary entries by Ulrich von Hassell.

<sup>32</sup> Ramsay was later Foreign Minister of Finland 1943-1944.

his discussions. As to whom he may have met, Justin Brooke <sup>33</sup> provides some clues by listing as members of the Committee to Aid Finland, Lord Balfour of Burleigh (Chairman of Lloyds Bank); the Earl of Lytton (Chairman of London Associated Electricity); Sir George MacDonogh (Former Director of Military Intelligence at the War Office and President of Federation of British Industries 1933-1934) and Lord Nuffield.

Both the Borenus and Ramsay missions took place after the UK had apparently seen off a German invasion threat (August-October 1940) and won a considerable victory against Italy in Libya (December 1940-January 1941), the latter resulting in the capture of 133,000 prisoners. Thus the UK opposition to Churchill may have considered this an opportune moment to make a peace approach: as they would have believed they were doing so from a position of relative strength. But they were also alarmed. On 8 January 1941 Churchill had decided to send an expeditionary force from Libya to Greece to instigate a new front in the Balkans, fighting alongside Yugoslavia against Germany. (Military and political discussions to accomplish this, led by Sir Anthony Eden and Field Marshall Dill, began in Athens on 13 January 1941.) For many in the UK this would have appeared suicidal: a repeat, on a grand scale, of the same strategic error Churchill had committed at Gallipoli 25 years earlier. For Finland such a move raised the prospect of being engaged in a war with the Soviet Union alongside Germany, while Germany was fighting on two fronts. In facilitating the UK approach via Borenus, they would have considered, logically, that if Germany invaded Russia while still fighting the UK, Germany would eventually be defeated and Finland forcibly re-absorbed into Russia shortly afterwards. Both the anti-Churchill faction in the UK and the government of Finland therefore had strong motives for seeking a UK-Germany peace in the first six months of 1941.<sup>34</sup>

In early March, despite the opinion of both Eden and Dill being that 'the margin is narrow and the risk is considerable',<sup>35</sup> Churchill formally committed

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<sup>33</sup> In his *The Volunteers: The Full Story of the British Volunteers in Finland 1939-1941* (self-published, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Even official British policy was aligned, in some ways, with this outlook. Menzies's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and Dill's Imperial General Staff remained anti-Soviet up until the German invasion of the Soviet Union. In early 1941, for instance, SIS supplied Finland with radio equipment to monitor Soviet radio traffic and establish the Soviet order of battle. Dorril (see note 30) observes that many military and intelligence figures regarded the Soviet Union as an automatic enemy of the UK, and that the Imperial General Staff were studying plans to bomb oil fields in the Caucasus as late as May 1941.

<sup>35</sup> See page 63 of the wartime Cabinet papers for 3 March–30 June 1941 at <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-65-22.pdf>.

British forces to Greece. There followed a month of diplomatic activity. Borenus returned to London, where he dined with Victor Cazalet and Marshall Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile.<sup>36</sup> The Minutes of the Polish Relief Fund duly record (12 March 1941): 'The Hon. Secretary General had just returned to Great Britain after an absence abroad on Finnish Government business. He reported on the work of the Red Cross at Geneva for Polish prisoners and on the condition of Polish internees especially in Switzerland and the Pyrenees.' The last sentence, about meeting the Red Cross in Geneva, may be taken as confirmation that he did indeed meet Burkhardt.

In Madrid, while more and more British aircraft, tanks and troops reached Greece, Samuel Hoare met Prince Max Egon zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg, Butler's would-be interlocutor of ten months earlier. According to the notes of the Italian Ambassador, the discussion was about Hoare returning to the UK and replacing Churchill, with R. A. Butler replacing Eden as Foreign Secretary.<sup>37</sup> All of this would have been spurred on by Churchill's project – his aim of creating an anti-German UK-Greek-Yugoslav front in central Europe – collapsing before it had even begun. On 25 March 1941, Prince Paul, Regent of Yugoslavia, and, as noted a close friend of Sir Henry Channon MP and the Duke of Kent, agreed to Yugoslavia joining the Axis. His motives for doing so appear to have been a view that nothing should come in the way of Germany, and its various allies, attacking and defeating the Soviet Union. Like most European royalty (including the UK's ruling family) Prince Paul abhorred communism and considered it much worse than fascism. He would have reasoned, like the government of Finland and the anti-Churchill group, that if Germany had to fight on two fronts, against the Soviet Union and the UK, it would fail. Communism would then triumph and spread further into Europe. His solution was to avoid Yugoslavia becoming embroiled in Churchill's adventures.<sup>38</sup>

Two days after aligning Yugoslavia with Germany, Italy and Japan, Prince Paul was overthrown by a UK-backed coup. Many commentators regard this as a deliberate action taken to derail peace moves of the UK opposition, which were becoming significant. Hitler retaliated immediately. Operation Barbarossa was postponed for five weeks. German forces invaded Yugoslavia on 6 April

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<sup>36</sup> Not recorded in the 1976 biography of Cazalet, *Victor Cazalet: A Portrait* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), written by Robert Rhodes James MP, but confirmed by Cazalet's private papers.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Richard Bassett, *Hitler's Spy Chief: The Wilhelm Canaris Mystery* (London: Phoenix, 2005) pp. 213 and 218-219.

<sup>38</sup> Prince Paul was educated at Oxford, where he was a member of the Bullingdon Club. By his marriage to Princess Olga of Greece, he was a brother-in-law of the Duke of Kent.

and crossed a few days later into Greece. By 30 April 1941 both countries had fallen, the UK losing 14,000 killed and captured together with 100 tanks. Simultaneously, the weakened UK forces in Libya were ousted by a German led counter attack, losing all the territorial gains of only four months earlier, and all their tanks. Churchill's strategy had been disastrous.

## **Poland**

The Polish government-in-exile was another key player in the arrangements to try and secure a compromise peace in 1940-1941. Led by General Wladyslaw Sikorski, it had reassembled in the UK in July 1940 after the fall of France. Sikorski had been Prime Minister of Poland in 1922-1923 but, after Pilsudski's 1926 coup and the ushering in of a right-wing militarist/aristocratic regime, he became an opposition figure. In exile, he and his ministers were aware the UK had not assisted Poland in September 1939; nor had France, which had collapsed. Lloyd George had said subsequently that Poland did not deserve help as a reactionary country, therefore implying it should never have served as the reason for going to war with Germany. Halifax, when Foreign Secretary, had talked openly about adopting the Curzon Line once more as Poland's eastern boundary, meaning that the territories which the Soviet Union had taken from Poland in 1939 would not be returned. In 1940-1941 the prospect of a Polish restoration caused by the UK defeating Germany single-handed seemed remote.

Many Polish figures expected that Germany would attack the Soviet Union. Based on Poland's experience of fighting Russia in 1919-1920 and Germany in 1939, most assumed that Germany would win any such encounter. However, Germany would be less likely to prevail if it were fighting on two fronts by still being engaged in a war with the UK. The Soviet Union had captured 300,000 Polish prisoners in 1939, including a dozen generals, and in the months after the fall of Poland had deported 1,200,000 citizens east. Politically, then, the Sikorski government faced a critical issue in 1940-1941. In the absence of a crushing UK victory in the near future, how could they best and salvage some type of self-governing Poland that would be favourable to Germany – while remaining loyal to the UK? Beyond that they would obviously wish to retrieve as many as possible of their former soldiers and citizens from the Soviet Union.

There were clearly limited options as to how this might be achieved. One possibility explored was the establishment of a Polish-Czech Federation. This was publicly aired on 11 November 1940, when the two governments made a declaration about forming 'a closer political and economic association', and continued in January 1941 with the formation of a Czechoslovak-Polish

Coordinating Committee. An interesting feature of these discussions is the suggestion it should be set up as a monarchy, with the Duke of Kent as King.<sup>39</sup> Although accounts of this stress that it would only happen 'after the war', that obviously depended on when the war was concluded.

In fact, the Duke of Kent had long nurtured extensive connections with Poland. In 1937 he carried out what was virtually a state visit to the country, staying with Count Alfred Potocki and having discussions with Colonel Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister.<sup>40</sup> Stories appeared in the press at this point stating the Duke of Kent had been offered the Polish throne.<sup>41</sup> That Poland might be better served by being a monarchy, rather than a republic, had actually been discussed twenty years earlier. After the collapse of Imperial Russia, proposals were made to 'restore' it as an independent country under a Habsburg Archduke. The logic was that, by being plugged into the pan European monarchical network, Poland's neutrality would be better preserved. Twenty years later, having George VI's brother as head of state had its attractions, and making alliances in this way would not have been alien to Sikorski, Potocki and Beck, all of whom were former citizens of Austro-Hungary.<sup>42</sup>

Later, in July 1939, King George VI had suggested that the Duke of Kent meet Hitler privately to try and avert war over Poland. Chamberlain refused to sanction this. One wonders what proposals Kent would have made about guaranteeing Poland, had the meeting happened.<sup>43</sup> Once war began, the Duke continued to cultivate his Polish connections, making numerous visits to

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<sup>39</sup> See Deborah Cadbury, *Princes at War: The British Royal Family's Private Battle in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) which quotes an unnamed FO official: 'non-official Poles discuss rather hopefully the possibility of persuading the Duke of Kent to accept the Polish throne after the war'.

<sup>40</sup> Footage of which can be seen at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BrieCTtaI>>.

<sup>41</sup> *The Advocate* (North Western Tasmania), 5 August 1937 (quoting the *Daily Mirror*). See <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/68442639>>.

<sup>42</sup> At the same time the Duke of Kent was being mentioned for this role, Dr Andrzej Suchcitz, Chief Archivist at London's Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, notes that 'a Belgian prince' had also been proposed. See <<https://culture.pl/en/article/6-unusual-people-who-were-offered-the-throne-of-poland>>.

This is likely to have been Prince Charles, Count of Flanders. The Belgium monarchy, like that of the UK and Bulgaria and the Duchy of Coburg, is part of the extended House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

<sup>43</sup> This was suggested to George VI by Prince Phillipp of Hesse, whose father was briefly King of Finland in 1918, when Finland considered adopting a monarchy. Following the German defeat, Mannerheim acted as Regent until it became a republic. Lithuania also briefly elected a German King in 1918. There were thrones to be had in Europe.

military units, squadrons and ships – much as a King, real or would-be, would have done. The Polish Army HQ was at Bridge of Earn, only 20 miles from the Duke's residence at Pitliver House, Dunfermline. General Sikorski was a frequent visitor there, and reports continue to appear that the Duke was offered the throne of Poland in any post-war peace settlement.<sup>44</sup>

The Polish government-in-exile had powerful allies at Court, and politically it was securely connected, via Victor Cazalet of the Imperial Policy Group, with the right-wing of the Conservative Party, many of whom distrusted and disliked Churchill.

## Germany

**A**t various points after the outbreak of war in September 1939, the UK was subject to approaches from both the German government and the anti-Hitler German resistance offering some kind of compromise peace. All of these were rebuffed, and after Churchill became Prime Minister they were not even responded to. In his definitive study, *Plotting Hitler's Death: The German Resistance to Hitler 1933-1945*,<sup>45</sup> Joachim Fest makes it clear that the German resistance regarded taking action against Hitler after his triumphs in June 1940, as completely impractical. A coup or an assassination would only be considered by them in the aftermath of a serious reversal, when a consensus might emerge that legitimate and drastic change was required. Hence serious efforts to eliminate Hitler only commenced after the massive defeat at Stalingrad.

Thus, the Nazi regime made its proposals to the UK via various third parties, many of whom were members of the German nobility.<sup>46</sup> There is some evidence of a planned German approach to the UK on 10 January 1941, two days after Churchill decided to commit UK forces to Greece.<sup>47</sup> This didn't

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<sup>44</sup> One such instance was Peter Millar (writing in the *Sunday Times* Culture section on 26 January, 2003) who, discussing the historical accuracy of Stephen Poliakoff's contemporaneous *The Lost Prince*, interestingly referred to how 'Foreign Office files released in 1972 (30 years after his death) revealed, Georgie [the Duke of Kent] had been offered the Polish throne.' See <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/cover-story-the-other-prince-jgml8mrt926>>.

<sup>45</sup> London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996.

<sup>46</sup> As noted, this included Prince Max of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, Prince Philip of Hesse, the Duke of Brunswick and the Duke of Coburg, the latter a significant figure in the German Red Cross.

<sup>47</sup> Padfield (see note 19) quotes post-war interrogations of Karl-Heinz Pintsch (Hess's adjutant) and Ernst Bohle. A State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, Bohle was an SS Obergruppenführer. Born in Bradford, he moved to South Africa as a child, and only arrived in  
*Continues at the foot of the next page.*

happen and having ousted the UK from Europe for a third time, Hitler duly taunted Churchill in a speech on 3 May 1941, pointing out that he led 'a small clique resolved on war whatever the consequences'. The following day he discussed the UK with his deputy Rudolf Hess. There is no record of this – a feature of several important decisions taken by Hitler – but after it, Hess made preparations to visit the country, and would claim later that he did so as a peace emissary. Hitler, whose views were noted for their rigidity, consistently maintained he had no wish to fight Britain. Like Poland, Finland, much of European royalty and the anti-Churchill group in the UK, he regarded Communism as the most significant threat to Europe. He would have wanted to avoid a war on two fronts if he was going to attack the Soviet Union. He had, therefore, a motive for making a dramatic, late attempt to seek peace with the UK, and could now do so from a possession of strength.

On 5 May Hess met with Albrecht Haushofer, an academic and personal friend of the Duke of Hamilton. Haushofer had also seen Burkhardt in Geneva, and told Hess that Burkhardt had confirmed 'the wish of important English circles for an examination of the possibilities for peace'.<sup>48</sup> After asking for legal clarification of whether the King had the constitutional power in the UK to dismiss the Prime Minister, Hess took off in his specially modified aircraft (fitted with additional fuel tanks and a radar homing device) at 5.45 pm, German time on Saturday 10 May 1941. German air control switched on his radar beam at 9 pm German time (10 pm UK time) and maintained it for the next hour. Hess crossed the UK coast at Bamburgh at 10.24 pm, 9-10 minutes after sunset, overshot the landing strip at Dungavel in fading light at 10.47 pm, found himself over the Firth of Clyde at 10.52 pm. He turned back, overshot Dungavel again at 10.59 pm (at about the time the blackout came into force) ran out of fuel and parachuted, awkwardly, out of his aircraft, landing at Eaglesham, 10 miles north of Dungavel, at 11.09 pm. He either injured his leg or twisted his ankle in the descent, and had also been separated from a satchel of documents that he had brought with him.<sup>49</sup> By 11.30 pm he had been found by a Home Guard patrol who took him into custody. He told them his name was Alfred Horn, and that he wanted to see the Duke of Hamilton.

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*Note 47 continued:*

Germany at the age of 17. Padfield records that he and his brother were used, in early 1941, to translate, into good English, documents that sought to establish peace between the UK and Germany, i.e. a draft treaty.

<sup>48</sup> 'Document on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945: series D.' from the United States Department of State, p. 785.

<sup>49</sup> Padfield (see note 19) p. 225 quoting a letter from a Major Perfect, 19 May 1941 about 'the documents which were recovered from a ditch in the field where Hess had landed'.

## Five days in May 1941

Group Captain Douglas-Hamilton (the Duke of Hamilton) was on duty at RAF Turnhouse, now Edinburgh airport, on 10 May 1941. He retired for the night at around midnight. By 2 am on 11 May he had returned to the Operations Room to take at least one, and possibly two calls, wearing his uniform over his pyjamas and looking 'a very worried man [. . .] extremely horrified' as he was informed that a German pilot called Alfred Horn wanted to speak to him. His wife recalls that after 2 am he left Turnhouse to travel the 39 miles to where Hess was being held, at Maryhill Barracks, Paisley.<sup>50</sup> He arrived there at 09.00 am. What isn't clear is why (a) he agreed, at no notice, to see a pilot who was identifying himself as 'Alfred Horn' and (b) what he was doing during the time between leaving RAF Turnhouse and arriving at Maryhill Barracks. By any reckoning at least five hours are unaccounted for. On reaching Paisley, Hamilton asked everyone to leave the room, at Horn/Hess's request, while they spoke in private. This was extraordinary and a breach of every regulation dealing with captured POWs. According to Hamilton's report of this private meeting, he wasn't sure who he was talking to ('The prisoner, who I had no recollection of ever having seen before'), but Hess identified himself and asked Hamilton 'to get together leading members of my party to talk things over with a view to making peace proposals' and to contact the King 'to give him parole'.<sup>51</sup> That is to arrange that Hess be treated as a negotiator approaching under a flag of truce. Hess also outlined to Hamilton the German peace terms.

After the meeting, telling the army at Paisley that he believed the prisoner to be an important person, and stating on his return to RAF Turnhouse, 'I think it's Hess. I must go to London at once', Hamilton flew south to see Churchill. While he did so, Hess was taken 24 miles north-east to Drymen Military Hospital, Buchanan Castle, Loch Lomond. This held German and Italian prisoners of war, and was later noted for its research on artificial knees and hips: it was an obvious place to take Hess, given his injuries on bailing out, and had a substantial army guard. The outcome of Hamilton's meeting with Churchill – during which the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair was present – was that Hamilton maintained 'whether the man was Hess or not was still very uncertain'. It was agreed that Hamilton would return to Scotland with diplomat Ivone Kirkpatrick (who had met all the senior Nazis while in Berlin during the 1930s), so that a positive identification could take

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<sup>50</sup> Padfield (see note 19) pp. 184-185 quoting the Duchess of Hamilton and Nancy Goodall, then serving in the Women's Royal Naval Service, and attached to RAF Turnhouse.

<sup>51</sup> Padfield (see note 19) p. 186.

place. This duly occurred. Hamilton and Kirkpatrick arrived at Drymen Military Hospital at 00.30 am on 13 May, and Kirkpatrick quickly identified Hess. Hess also gave a very basic outline of the terms Germany would accept for a peace settlement:

- (1) The British Empire would remain intact.
- (2) The European continent would go to Germany.
- (3) Germany would have its colonies returned.

At 3 am they concluded the meeting. Hamilton and Kirkpatrick then drove to RAF Turnhouse (a distance of 44 miles) where they stayed in Hamilton's married quarters. Around 11 am Kirkpatrick called Sir Anthony Eden, confirmed it was Hess, outlined the peace terms, and noted that Hess wouldn't talk freely with anyone he thought associated with the government. However, 'if he could be put in touch with perhaps some member of the Conservative Party who would give him the impression that he was tempted by the idea of getting rid of the present administration, it might be that Hess would open up freely'.

Kirkpatrick's confirmation seems to have been made on the same morning that reports began appearing in UK newspapers about Hess's arrival. Later the same day it seems Hess was brought under armed guard to a large country house near RAF Turnhouse, possibly Craigiehall House, the British Army HQ in Scotland. This incident was mentioned in *The Times* (12 June 1992) and later in the obituary of Squadron Leader Day, *The Independent*, 29 June 2008, which records 'One of the earliest assignments the young pilot had to undertake was to guard Rudolf Hess, the Nazi peace broker, at gunpoint at RAF Turnhouse.'<sup>52</sup> Day also recalls, in correspondence with Padfield, Hess being privately visited by a senior RAF officer, decorated with many medals and much gold braid on his cap. He was told it was 'the Duke'. If so, this wasn't Hamilton, who as a Group Captain wore no gold braid. The description, however, matches the RAF uniform worn by the Duke of Kent.<sup>53</sup> The whereabouts of the Duke of Kent between 10 May and 13 May 1941 are not known, and his papers are not available to researchers. His residence at Pitliver House, Dunfermline was about 10 miles from Turnhouse, so it is possible he could have visited Hess. Further, the way Hess was taken from Drymen to Turnhouse and back could have been done to facilitate such a meeting.

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<sup>52</sup> See <<https://tinyurl.com/ydx629jk>> or <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/sqn-ldr-frank-day-fearless-spitfire-pilot-878717.html>>. See also Padfield (see note 19) who quotes Day re: 'the Duke'.

<sup>53</sup> For a picture of the Duke of Kent in RAF uniform see <<https://www.military-history.org/articles/battle-royal-prince-george-duke-of-kent.htm>>.

The following day, 14 May, Kirkpatrick and Hamilton drove back to Drymen Military Hospital, where once again Hess explained his peace proposal. The outcome of this was a search by the police and army for documents in the vicinity of Hess's landing.<sup>54</sup> The censors were busy too. On 14 May they intercepted in the post a photostat copy of a letter from Hess. This was forwarded to a Group Captain Blackford, Director of Intelligence (Security) RAF.<sup>55</sup> None of these documents, letters or photostats can be found in official files today. Hess and Kirkpatrick spoke again on 15 May. Hess requested that two German internees being held in the UK be made available to him to help in peace negotiations, to interpret and take minutes. This suggests that he had been told by Kirkpatrick that some papers had indeed been found and assumed that talks would now commence. More remarkably, he named both of the assistants and gave their internment numbers. It turned out that both had been moved from Huyton, near Liverpool to Lochgilphead, about 58 miles north-west of Dungavel, on 8 May, just prior to his arrival. Instead of negotiations, though, Hess travelled on 16 May by train from Glasgow to London, where he was held at the Tower, and from there to a country house near Aldershot on 20 May. His long years of captivity had begun. Kirkpatrick produced a report on his dealings with Hess, which was circulated to Churchill, Eden, Attlee and Beaverbrook.

Hamilton's inability to recognize Hess led to a delay of 48 hours before the government were clear about what was afoot: that it was Hess who had arrived and he was trying to discuss peace terms. In the days and weeks that followed little was said officially about the episode. And with Hess securely in custody, and no documents substantiating his peace proposals in the public domain, there was little that any opposition to Churchill could do – even though the war continued to go badly. (An attempt to maintain a base in Crete ended in ignominious defeat on 1 June with 23,000 UK troops killed or captured and 12 ships sunk.)

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<sup>54</sup> See above footnote 49. The BBC *History Magazine* May 2001 (cited in Padfield) quotes a Margaret Baird, wife of the farmer who owned the land where Hess crashed: 'the police was ordered to search for a valuable document which was missing, he found it over near the wee burn'. On Baird see <<https://tinyurl.com/5h4axn6v>> or <<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/eagleshams-link-hitler-deputy-rudolf-2417200>>.

<sup>55</sup> On Blackford see <<http://www.rafweb.org/Biographies/Blackford.htm>>. The interception of the letter implies that all post in the area where Hess landed was being intercepted and scrutinised in the days after he arrived. This indicates the authorities were anxious that correspondence lost by Hess, but found by third parties would reach the public domain. The issue of the letter being a photostat is puzzling. How many members of the public could photostat documents in 1941? Some accounts of Hess's flight, though, state that he brought with him a peace proposal and several copies (i.e. photostats) of the same, for distribution.

The government maintained its silence about Hess until 3 June. On that day Beaverbrook visited Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London for dinner. The discussion they had is recorded in Maisky's diary.<sup>56</sup> Beaverbrook confirms 'Oh, Hess, of course, is Hitler's emissary' and tells Maisky that Hess had additional fuel tanks and a radar direction finder fitted to his aircraft: his flight, therefore, was planned in advance to a specific, pre-selected location. An 'honourable' peace was offered to the UK, on the following basis:

- (1) The British Empire would remain intact.
- (2) The European continent would go to Germany.
- (3) Germany would have its colonies returned.
- (4) A UK-Germany non-aggression pact for 25 years.

However, the precondition for peace and an agreement was the removal of Churchill from power. Beaverbrook concluded by breezily stating 'Hess probably thought that as soon as he presented his plan to the dukes they would run to the king, overthrow Churchill and set up a "reasonable government". . . Idiot!'

Beaverbrook must have visited Maisky with Churchill's agreement, and in the knowledge that what he said would be reported back to Stalin. Whether Maisky, or Stalin, concurred with the view that Hess's assumptions were idiotic must be doubtful. Maisky, who made no entry in his personal diary between 9 and 23 May, during which he was trying to find out everything possible about Hess's flight, recorded after his dinner with Beaverbrook:

'Hess (i.e. Hitler) was counting on British "Quislings" – the Duke of Hamilton, the Duke of Buccleuch, and others. It is not without reason that Hess landed near Hamilton's estate [. . . .] Hess expected to spend 2-3 days in England, negotiate with the local "Quislings" and fly back home'.

With MPs demanding to know more, and the government saying little, the next event came on 9 June when Hess was interviewed by Lord Simon (Sir John Simon) at that point Lord Chancellor and previously Foreign Secretary (1931-1935). Kirkpatrick and the two German internees requested by Hess were also present. For reasons that aren't clear, Simon posed as Dr Guthrie, a peace negotiator and 'high representative of the Foreign Office', even though it was quite possible that as an ex-Foreign Secretary Hess would have recognized him. On this occasion, Hess stated the peace terms were:

- (1) UK to keep out of European matters, including Russia
- (2) Germany to keep out of Empire

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<sup>56</sup> *The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St James's 1932-1943*, edited by Gabriel Gorodetsky (London: Yale University Press, 2015)

- (3) German colonies to be returned
- (4) UK to make peace simultaneously with Italy
- (5) War losses suffered by individuals to be indemnified.

Simon reported this to Churchill the following day, adding that Hess had come on his own initiative and that Hitler was not involved . . . the opposite of what Beaverbrook had told Maisky a week earlier. How far Simon's report was disseminated isn't clear. It is possible that MPs, if they enquired, were being told the opposite of what Beaverbrook, Churchill and others believed. The government continued to say little publicly about Hess, although some questions were asked about him in the House of Commons on 19 June.<sup>57</sup> Three days later, with the German invasion of the Soviet Union, matters quickly switched to how best to fight alongside the Soviet Union.

Suspicious continued to fester, though, that Hess had brought with him German proposals that were broader than the UK government were willing to admit. In October 1942, with the Soviet Union fighting the decisive battle at Stalingrad (and no second-front to assist them in sight), Stalin had formally requested clarification of this matter, particularly whether the UK had been told of the German attack on Russia before it occurred. He was advised on 4 November 1942 that Hess's peace proposals were:

- (1) Germany to have a free hand in Europe.
- (2) Germany to get her colonies back.
- (3) UK to have a free hand in the British Empire.
- (4) 'Russia to be included in Asia' but Germany to make demands on Russia that would either be satisfied by negotiation or war.

The UK also stated that Hess denied Germany would make an early attack on Russia. As a summary of what Kirkpatrick and Simon reported about Hess's statements, this was more or less true. The UK Ambassador in Moscow, Clark Kerr, though, commented in his official despatch that he wondered 'if these alleged proposals were indeed (as was suggested to me at the time) that in exchange for the evacuation of certain of the occupied countries we should

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<sup>57</sup> Two Labour MPs, Sydney Silverman and Richard Stokes, were particularly notable in this respect. Silverman, who had taught at Helsinki University in the 1920s, made several speeches trying to get confirmation about Hess and his mission. He was critical of Churchill's unconditional surrender policy, favouring carefully drafted peace aims that would end the war and resolve the threat to European Jewry. Richard Stokes led the Peace Aims Group, corresponding with the Pope and Franz von Papen (German Ambassador in Turkey, and previously German Chancellor May-November 1932). See <<https://tinyurl.com/ftjdm9rw>> or <[https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1941/jun/10/rudolf-hess#S5CV0372P0\\_19410610\\_HOC\\_192](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1941/jun/10/rudolf-hess#S5CV0372P0_19410610_HOC_192)>.

withdraw from the war and leave Germany a free hand in the East'. This is an interesting comment. In May 1941 Kerr was Ambassador in China, so 'suggested to me at the time' must mean one of two things. The first possibility is that he was told of the actual terms being proposed by Hess because he was as Ambassador. If that was how it happened, then many other Ambassadors would have also been told - but there is no evidence of such information being circulated. The second possibility is that he was told privately by a third party; if this was the case, then Clark Kerr's Royal connections may have been the route. Pre-1914 he was a confidant of the German Kaiser's sister, Princess Sophie of Prussia (later Queen Consort of Constantine I of Greece), and in the 1920s he was also an early suitor of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon before her marriage to George VI.<sup>58</sup>

Whether Stalin believed the official UK explanation is a moot point. There are signs he didn't. German-Soviet peace talks, referenced in Bassett and Fest,<sup>59</sup> began in Stockholm in December 1942. Despite the German announcement that they had discovered the Katyn massacre (13 April 1943), they continued at some pace, with the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* announcing on 30 April that 'well informed' sources were predicting an imminent Russo-German peace. At this point *The American Mercury*, then a respectable monthly literary journal owned by Lawrence E Spivak, ran a piece in its May 1943 edition stating that Hess's peace proposals were:

- (1) German evacuation of France, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Norway.
- (2) Alsace and Lorraine be returned to Germany.
- (3) Luxembourg ceded to Germany.
- (4) UK to be neutral toward Europe in future.
- (5) Germany 'ready' to withdraw from Yugoslavia and Greece.
- (6) UK and French military production to be available to Germany in its crusade to rid the world of Bolshevism.

The article said that Churchill discussed the proposals with Roosevelt, who agreed they should be ignored and Hess treated publicly as mad. Both points are plausible – Churchill shared a lot with Roosevelt and Hess was treated as if

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<sup>58</sup> On Clark Kerr see <<https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/2777>>.

<sup>59</sup> Bassett in *Canaris: Hitler's Spy Chief* (see note 37) and Joachim Fest in *Plotting Hitler's Death: The German Resistance to Hitler 1933-1945* (see note 45).

he were mad.<sup>60</sup> Regarding the terms, it is striking how similar they are to those put forward by Borenus, on behalf of the UK, in January 1941, with one significant caveat. As with Hess's statements to Kirkpatrick and Simon, there is no suggestion of a special arrangement for Poland; no restoration under a UK nominated monarch. Is this what the Duke of Kent wanted to establish when speaking with Hess at Craigiehall House on 13 May?

Churchill's near silence during May and June 1941, concerning every aspect of Hess's arrival had certainly raised suspicions. The Czech government-in-exile assumed that a second Munich was being planned. The Poles had concerns, too. It is clear from the Borenus approach that they were banking on getting something out of a compromise peace. With no evidence to the contrary, the silence from the UK government was ominous. In this context we should note the diary entries of Guy Liddell, a senior MI5 officer.<sup>61</sup> He notes on 9 June 1941 that the Poles believed the UK was about to abandon them and 'the Poles imagine that Hess may be making peace overtures and that this will be listened to by the British government'. What emerged was a plot, presumably instigated some weeks earlier, to kidnap, interrogate and kill Hess. Liddell later records that in July 1941, seventeen Polish and two British officers, from a special forces base at Inverlochy Castle, Fort William, tried to travel south to Aldershot, where Hess was being held. They were intercepted at the railway station by MI5, and the mission aborted. Their key UK accomplice was Alfgar Hesketh-Pritchard, head of the SOE Czech section (he helped organise the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich) and sympathetic to the Polish plight. Like Clark Kerr, Hesketh-Pritchard had Royal connections: from 1924 his mother Elizabeth (née Grimston) was Woman of the Bedchamber to Queen Mary.<sup>62</sup>

To return to May 1943, the most likely explanation behind *The American Mercury* article was an attempt by the UK and US to come clean. They wanted to show how reasonable they had been in their dealings with the Soviet Union, and, how unfair it would be therefore, for the Soviet Union to now make a

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<sup>60</sup> For a list of Churchill's statements in Parliament on Hess see < <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-winston-churchill/1941>>

<sup>61</sup> See *The Guy Liddell Diaries, Volume I: 1939-1942: MI5's Director of Counter-Espionage in World War 2*, edited by Nigel West (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). Liddell, Head of Counter Espionage in MI5, was responsible for the internment of Maule Ramsay in 1940. Liddell was a friend of Guy Burgess and an associate of Philby, Blunt and other Soviet agents. One wonders if any of these pursued enquiries about Hess via Liddell in May 1941.

<sup>62</sup> See <<http://www.thepeerage.com/p8542.htm#i85417>>. For more on the Polish attempt to kill Hess see *The Scotsman*, 4 February 2005 at <<https://www.scotsman.com/news/uk-news/mi5-foiled-polish-plot-kill-hess-2464467>>.

separate peace with Germany. As it contradicted what Stalin had been told previously, and would presumably have angered him, it is hard to conclude that its content is inaccurate. Its appearance may not have changed anything, though. For various other reasons, including the UK-US landings in Italy, the Italian surrender, the continued success of the Soviet advance and the obstinacy of Hitler, the German-Soviet talks were abandoned in late September 1943 and the war continued.

Over many years various theories have been canvassed about the Hess flight, and whether or not it was an attempt to broker peace by a section of the UK political class. Among these theories are that it was a coup by the intelligence services to lure Hess to the UK under false pretences, so that the public would be impressed at a time when the war was going badly; or that Hess was lured to the UK at the instigation of the Churchill government as a clever bluff to play for time with bogus peace negotiations, when the war was going badly; or, finally, that Hess was lured to the UK to smoke out UK collaborators and fifth columnists.

The last of these can be discounted: if this was the intention, nothing was done about it. There were no mass arrests and trials, as there had been in May 1940 with Mosley and his supporters. As to the first two theories, neither Churchill nor anyone else has mentioned any such manoeuvres in their memoirs, autobiographies or diaries. Nor are there any code-names known for such a high-profile operation, which would have involved dozens if not hundreds of people. Following the release of a cache of official papers in 2004, *The Scotsman* ran an article (9 November 2004) stating:

'Professor David Stafford, project director for the Centre for Second World War Studies at Edinburgh University and expert on British Intelligence, agreed the files prove MI5 was not involved with Hess.

"If we boil it down very simply, the conspiracy theory is that there was a plot by British intelligence deliberately to lure Rudolf Hess to Britain to engage in peace negotiations in the spring of 1941," he said.

"But I think these documents knock that theory very firmly on the head. Hess deluded himself into thinking that he could broker a peace deal and thought he could secure the peace that Chamberlain thought he had gained when he flew to Munich before the war started."<sup>63</sup>

Leaving aside whether Hess was deluded in the calculations he made before arriving in the UK, if the intelligence services were not involved, and it wasn't a move by Churchill to pro-actively sue for peace, then the only explanation that

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<sup>63</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/he5ju3ar>> or <<https://www.scotsman.com/news/world/secret-papers-finally-tell-truth-hesss-flight-2508821>>

one can default to is that what Borenus told Burkhardt in Geneva in January 1941 (and which Burkhardt relayed to von Hassell and Haushofer) was true: a section of the UK political class, with the discreet backing of the Royal family, wanted to explore peace talks. To suggest otherwise is to believe two specific – and highly unlikely, or impossible – things. Primarily, it would have meant that the government of Finland double-crossed Germany (making Germany less likely to win a war with the Soviet Union, and thus exposing Finland to severe risk). It would also have meant that the Ramsay mission to London was a deliberate waste of time; that Borenus, Burkhardt (a senior figure at the League of Nations as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross) and von Hassell (a determined and dignified member of the German resistance) all fabricated their accounts of what took place between them. It is not clear what motive any of them could have had for doing such a thing

## **What was supposed to happen in May 1941**

**G**uided by his radar homing device, Hess lands at Dungavel air strip at 10.30 pm on 10 May 1941. He is met by a small group representing the main figures in the anti-Churchill opposition.<sup>64</sup> By 11.30 pm telephone calls have been made to a range of parties in the vicinity confirming that Hess has arrived, and has brought with him several copies of the peace terms being offered by Germany. These terms come in response to the approach made that January, on their behalf, via Tandred Borenus. Hess formally requests that he be recognized as a peace negotiator, and suggests the International Red Cross are contacted to facilitate this.

The following day, the main figures in the anti-Churchill opposition begin gathering at one of the country houses they own near Dungavel. Multiple copies are made of the draft peace document and arrangements are made to

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<sup>64</sup> On the issue of whether people were at Dungavel waiting for Hess to arrive, Padfield (see note 19) pp. 336-337 cites Ronald Williams, who states that his father, G E Williams, a social credit economist and associate of Mosley, was interned for six months in June-December 1940. In May 1941 Ronald Williams was taken by his father and mother to Glasgow. His father absented himself while he and his mother visited various 'sites', but returned to their hotel in the early hours on 11 May and insisted they pack and leave immediately to get the earliest possible train back to Liverpool. Ronald Williams later asked his mother about the events that night and was told that his father 'had been among the group waiting for Hess'. Though borderline in terms of admissibility, this account is oddly compelling. Note that the Duke of Bedford, also a social credit enthusiast, wrote to Richard Stokes on 10 May 1941 proposing Lloyd George as PM so that a statement could be made about possible peace terms with Germany. The Duke of Bedford also owned a shooting estate at Cairnsmore House, Newton Stewart.

send it to newspapers, political parties and foreign embassies. The International Committee of the Red Cross confirm that Hess is a peace negotiator. A similar statement is made publicly by Prince Carl of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, cousin of King George VI and President of the German Red Cross.

On 12 May 1941 Hess gives a news conference flanked by major figures in the anti-Churchill opposition. He confirms that the terms are:

- (1) German evacuation of France, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Norway.
- (2) Alsace and Lorraine returned to Germany.
- (3) Luxembourg ceded to Germany.
- (4) UK to refrain from involvement in Europe in the future.
- (5) Germany 'ready' to withdraw from Yugoslavia and Greece, subject to further negotiation.
- (6) German colonies to be returned, but no other demands to be made on the British Empire.
- (7) UK to make peace simultaneously with Italy.
- (8) War losses suffered by individuals to be indemnified.
- (9) A UK-Germany non-aggression pact for 25 years.

That afternoon a request for a formal debate on the subject is granted by the Speaker of the House of Commons. A motion is put down, on a bi-partisan basis, to commence talks on this proposal. It is defeated, but Churchill's majority drops. Using the precedent of the May 1940 Norway debate, the King summons Churchill and requests he resign. Churchill refuses and is then dismissed. Sir Samuel Hoare resigns as Ambassador to Spain, arrives back in the UK on 15 May where he becomes PM to lead the peace discussions that end the UK's involvement in the war. Hoare tries as part of these talks to negotiate, with US backing, the recreation of a Polish state.

## **What actually happened in May 1941**

**I**n fading light, Hess is unable to locate the Dungavel landing strip. He runs out of fuel and bails out, losing contact with his satchel of documents containing the peace proposals as he does so. He lands awkwardly and injures his leg. The Home Guard capture him and he falls into army custody. The reception party at Dungavel realise he is not coming and rapidly disperse. Hess tells his captors his name is Alfred Horn and he wants to contact the Duke of Hamilton. The use of the name Alfred Horn was pre-arranged: it was a code Hess was to use if he were captured. The Duke of Hamilton is called at RAF Turnhouse and told that Alfred Horn, a German pilot, has bailed out over

Scotland and wants to see him.<sup>65</sup> Hamilton knows this is Hess, and that he is in army custody, rather than with the anti-Churchill group. In the early hours of the morning, Hamilton contacts various people advising them of this, and seeking guidance about what he should do.

When Hamilton eventually reaches Hess, he has a private meeting with him. He then maintains that he isn't certain it is Hess, travels to London where he reports to the Prime Minister. He is sent back to Scotland with Ivone Kirkpatrick, who confirms on the morning of 13 May that it is indeed Hess. He also confirms that Hess has lost his satchel of papers. An order is immediately made to intercept and check all post in the area where Hess landed to see if any of his papers turn up. Later that day Hess is brought by the army to their HQ near Edinburgh at Craigiehall House. Here the Duke of Kent has a private meeting with him. Hess, from memory, tells the Duke of Kent the German peace terms: they do not include a restored Poland. Hess is then taken back to Drymen Hospital where Kirkpatrick and Hamilton talk to him again on 14 May. Later that day, an army and police search find Hess's peace proposals. Kirkpatrick tells Hess of this and Hess, thinking he may now be able to negotiate, requests interpreters. Instead of negotiations, Hess is taken south and his long captivity begins. Kirkpatrick makes a confidential report to Churchill and a few others. Hess's papers are included with this.

The UK government says little about its discussions with Hess or about his peace terms. This leads the Czech government in exile to suspect a 'second Munich'. The Polish government-in-exile think that peace negotiations might take place and are told that Germany is not offering a restored Poland. A plot is hatched to kill Hess, but it is foiled by MI5. Beaverbrook gives a candid account of Hess's arrival to meet Hamilton, Buccleuch 'and others' to Soviet Ambassador Maisky, stressing that the UK government are not negotiating with Germany. In June Churchill agrees that Hess should be interviewed by Lord Simon. When this happens, Hess is not forthcoming and Simon's report – which contradicts Beaverbrook's account to Maisky – is as far as the UK government will go in public.

Two weeks later Germany invades the Soviet Union. The UK has a powerful new ally, prospects looks better and Churchill's moment of danger has passed.

## **Conclusion**

**L**ooked at in this way, it appears that Churchill was a lucky man in May 1941.

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<sup>65</sup> Alternatively, as more than one call was involved, that the man looks like Hess. The soldiers guarding the prisoner were not afflicted with Hamilton's inability to identify him.

The difference between his staying in office and a messy debate aimed at his removal, may have come down to Hess getting disorientated over Scotland, bailing out rather than meeting his accomplices, and falling into army custody. Whatever was being done to publicly keep up appearances, in reality Churchill was not universally supported while PM 1940-1941. The traditional narrative of UK history during this period – the country united behind him, apart for a tiny minority of dissenters on the political fringe – is a myth.

Most who have looked at the events of May 1941 have remarked on the odd gaps in the UK documentary record, particularly with regard to the various Royal archives. Urbach<sup>66</sup> portrays Queen Mary as a determined matriarch, anxious to advance her family's interests within the wider network of European royalty. She was also a strong supporter of appeasement (like all her sons) and unshakeably anti-communist.<sup>67</sup> Her correspondence with the many German relatives of the Royal family after 1918 are not available to researchers. As noted elsewhere in this piece, neither are the papers of the Duke of Kent. The official files on the Hess flight contain no trace of any draft peace plan, made by Germany to the UK, despite other correspondence, as cited here, appearing to refer to this.

The travels of Anthony Blunt across Germany in 1945 have also raised eyebrows. Officially, Urbach notes, he was sent with the royal archivist, Sir Owen Morshead, to recover correspondence, held at Schloss Friedrichshof, between Queen Victoria and her daughter Victoria Adelaide, Empress of Prussia. About 8,000 letters were involved, all written pre-1900. One wonders why this was so important. Blunt also made three other trips to Germany to recover 'royal artwork' as well as a visit to the late Kaiser's former residence at Doorn, Utrecht. During the war Blunt worked at MI5 as PA to Guy Liddell. Padfield, and others have noted that Schloss Friedrichshof was also the residence of Prince Philipp of Hesse, the conduit used for the abortive July 1939 Duke of Kent-Hitler talks. Was Blunt really sent to get hold of sensitive royal correspondence with Hitler and other senior Nazis? In support of this theory, after Blunt had been revealed as a Soviet agent, his MI5 interrogator, Peter Wright, states that was told in 1964 by Michael Adeane, Private Secretary to Queen Elizabeth II: 'From time to time . . . you may find Blunt referring to an assignment he undertook on behalf of the Palace – a visit to Germany at the end of the war. Please do not pursue this matter. Strictly

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<sup>66</sup> In *Go Betweens for Hitler*. See note 17.

<sup>67</sup> About the 1938 Munich agreement she remarked: 'I'm sure that you feel as angry as I do at people croaking, as they do, at the P.M.'s action. He brought home Peace, why can't they be grateful?' David Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

speaking, it is not relevant to considerations of national security.<sup>68</sup> (This is accurate of course: Queen Victoria's letters to her daughter are not relevant to national security).

One suspects that any compromising documents, written by, to or from – or even mentioning – the royal family and dating from this period have long been destroyed, along with any of the papers recovered from the site of Hess's landing.

Finally . . . why did Hess fly to Scotland? Wouldn't it have been easier to choose East Anglia, or Dorset? With, perhaps, as an alternative: fly from Brittany to Ireland, be met at the airport by the embassy car, get driven to Dublin and lay out the peace terms at a public news conference?

Steve Dorril<sup>69</sup> looks at the Scottish League for European Freedom (a 1944 formed anti-Soviet, pro-Polish right-wing group) and describes it as 'prominent members of the Borders landed gentry and aristocracy; essentially a section of the Scottish establishment with links to the Royal family'. The same terminology fits the various pro-appeasement/anti-Churchill groupings in Parliament in 1940-1941. These included the MPs Walter Elliot (Glasgow Kelvingrove); John Colville (Midlothian and Peebles North); Ernest Brown (Leith); Thomas Hunter (Perth); Charles Kerr (Montrose Burghs); John Mackie (Galloway); Thomas Moore (Ayr Burghs); Guy Lloyd (East Renfrewshire), Archibald Maule Ramsay (Peebles and South Midlothian); Robert Boothby (Kincardine and Aberdeen); William Montagu-Douglas-Scott (Roxburgh and Selkirk); Sir John McEwen (Berwick and Haddington) and Alec Douglas-Home (Lanark, the constituency that included Dungavel).<sup>70</sup>

The House of Lords also contained the following: the Duke of Buccleuch (a choice of three country seats: Bowhill House, Drumlanrig Castle and Dalkeith Palace); Lord Ronald Graham and James Graham, Marquess of Graham (cousins of the Duke of Hamilton, Auchmar House, Loch Lomond); the Earl of Mar (Hilton Farm, Alloa); Lord Sempill (Craigievar Castle); Lord Balfour of Burleigh (Brucefield House, Clackmannanshire); the Earl of Mansfield (Scone

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<sup>68</sup> Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt: His Lives* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2017)

<sup>69</sup> In his *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations*. See note 30.

<sup>70</sup> On Douglas-Home *The New York Times* 22 November 1987 stated:

'On the very evening Churchill took over at No. 10, Sir John was invited by three leading Conservative MPs to join them in a toast to "the king over the water" (meaning Chamberlain). One of them was a future Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home; another, R. A. Butler – who was later to serve under Churchill, with considerable success – complained bitterly that the party had "surrendered to a half-breed American".'

The Colville here is Chamberlain's personal secretary, not the MP of the same name.

Palace), the Earl of Glasgow (Kelburn Castle, Ayr); the Duke of Hamilton (Dungavel House) and the Duke of Bedford (a shooting estate at Cairnsmore House, Newton Stewart).

It's quite a selection. One might conclude that, in the recent past, Scottish Unionists were amongst the most right-wing elements in the Conservative Party. If he could arrive there unscathed, Dungavel was a safe place for Hess to visit. As Maisky noted after his talk with Beaverbrook, 'It is not without reason that Hess landed near Hamilton's estate'.

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Simon Matthews' latest book is *Looking For a New England: Music, Films and TV 1975-86* (Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 2021)

[www.oldcastlebooks.co.uk/LOOKING-FOR-A-NEW-ENGLAND](http://www.oldcastlebooks.co.uk/LOOKING-FOR-A-NEW-ENGLAND)