Lecture on “**Inter-imperialist rivalry and World War 1: Britain ’s role**” by Gerry Docherty, author of *Hidden History: the secret origins of the First World War* (with Jim Macgregor) at the 27th Desmond Greaves Annual Weekend School, Dublin, Sunday afternoon, 13 September 2015 .

The trouble is that many people think that they know about the true causes of the First World War. After all, they ‘did’ it for their exams. Let me recall. I was advised to find four reasons: German Imperial ambition, the Naval Race, the system of alliances and the assassination of Archduke Frans Ferdinand. Add a conclusion and expect a good pass. Thus myths are established and the truth perishes because we are likely to accept that as fact for the rest of our lives.

We have to put aside the vagueness and anonymity which has been deliberately woven around the causes of the First World War and focus specifically on how a small group of very influential and powerful men led Britain and its Empire into war with one objective - to crush the main rival to Anglo-Saxon predominance over the known world, Germany. That was the one country whose economic and industrial growth and success was fast overshadowing Britain across the globe. Markets were being lost. New German designs were better. Their salesmanship was terrific. They even had the gall to produce sales brochures in native languages.

War against Germany was planned over a period of 15-20 years and successfully accomplished. But myths are perpetuated. We didn’t sleepwalk into war; it wasn’t a sudden binding point of honour; it wasn’t someone else’s fault. The declaration of war in 1914 was a carefully orchestrated decision taken by a small select cabal once all the necessary conditions were in place. The British Empire, including as it did, Scotland and Ireland, was literally bounced into war. Ambushed might be a better term.

We are lied to by Governments and those who have written the official histories which have been accepted and taught in our schools and universities. It was a matter of strategy, not an accident. Evidence has been removed, incriminating documents burned, minutes, reports and specific orders have been shredded. Today, I seek to challenge these lies, misconceptions and obfuscations about the real causes of that awful war.

The American historian Professor Carroll Quigley wrote a seminal work *The Anglo American Establishment*  in 1949, though it remained unpublished until 1981. It should be read, not so much as a historical narrative, but as a warning with signposts containing the names of the culprits whose zeal and determination brought about the apocalyptic war of 1914-1918 though Quigley’s disclosures went much further than the end of the war.

Quigley’s work has helped us identify the men behind the scenes, those who boasted that they would rather command real power than have the trappings of office. Some call them the money-power, the men behind the scenes or the hidden force. We have tried to identify them by name and have dubbed them, The Secret Elite. Follow with me, their impact on Britain's dynamic change of direction from the earliest days of the twentieth century and you will begin to understand what Quigley is talking about. I find the generic term which might be applied to them, “British Imperialists”, somewhat lame. It covers too many sins. I want to know who caused what and why?

Quigley pointed to the Triple penetration that this cabal had achieved in British society; of Politics, the Press, and the Writing of History. Jim Macgregor and I have added Finance and Industry to that list.

In 1891. Cecil Rhodes, William Stead and Reginald Brett (Lord Esher) met to agree what they called a Secret Society whose aim was to take over control of British foreign policy, renew the Anglo-Saxon bond between Britain and the USA and spread all that they considered good in English ruling-class traditions and values to expand the British Empire in a world they believed they were destined to control. Two vitally important figures were added to the group, namely Lord Natty Rothschild and Alfred Milner. Milner was the key to the successful direction of strategy. His background, and the common base for most of this elite, was Oxford University, the philosophy of John Ruskin, membership of All Souls College in Oxford and the privileged London clubs, ‘Grillions’ and ‘The Club’. Milner described himself with pride as a ‘British Race-Patriot.’Six years ago I had never heard of Alfred Milner. Perhaps you have?

Jim Macgregor, my co-author, and I now believe him to be the most important, influential, able and effective imperialist in modern British History. The man who caused the Boer War and worked ceaselessly to bring about the First World War. But why had we never heard his name? How can our assertion hold true? After all his name does not appear in mainstream histories of the First World War. The only conclusion we can come to is that his influence has been carefully airbrushed from contemporary accounts. Consider please, how central he was to the critical changes in British Imperial history.

In examining the impact of Alfred Milner and the select group which operated behind the scenes directing British politics we should examine the following points;

**Point 1:** a group of exceptionally powerful men recognised the need to radically shake British Foreign Policy and manoeuvre the Empire into war to crush the old order in Europe … specifically, Germany. The new cry in their secret senate was *‘Germania delenda est.’* They believed that either the British ‘way’ would triumph over Germany, or the Empire would be overrun by its major competitor.

**Point 2:** The Boer War was the wake-up call. Mighty Britain was all but humbled by veldt farmers. The British army proved unfit for purpose. Certainly there was international glee at its ill-preparedness and incompetence. In Ireland, the Home Rule party was openly opposed to the enforced conquest of the Boer Republics. In Britain, loud opposition was mounted by importantLiberals in Parliament and the press. David Lloyd George was one such MP who was committed to peace. Alfred Milner was a man of steel. In the face of great criticism about the war his advice was to ‘Disregard the Screamers’. Milner had been sent to South Africa to reorganise the government after the embarrassment of the Jameson Raid and Cecil Rhodes’ involvement with the failed coup. He did not flinch at the introduction of concentration camps and the starvation of 25,000 women and children placed in them as a military tactic.

But Milnersaved the gold mines and diamond mines owned by Rhodes, his backer, the Rothschilds, by Alfred Beit and Sir Abe Bailey. He sanctioned the importation of Chinese coolies to work in the mines and permitted the mine-owners to used harsh corporal punishment. He set plans in place to rebuild South Africa with able administrators, but criticism of his tactics grew in Liberal circles. Milner understood what had to be done to save and expand the Empire and to safeguard and strengthen its future. He brought over from Oxford a hand-picked staff of very able young men, later called ‘Milner’s Kindergarten’. He was ennobled as Viscount Milner by a grateful King who admired him, and back home he took on the task of preparing the empire for war.

**Point 3:** British foreign policy underwent a profound and, at the time, near inexplicable change of direction at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Foreign Office abandoned the old policy of isolation. Lord Lansdowne, as Conservative foreign secretary took the decision without debate, with no reference to parliamentary procedure or collegiate cabinet discussion. ‘ Out of the blue’ an Alliance with Japan was signed in 1902. There was genuine shock throughout the Empire. What was this about? The answer was Russia. Russian ambitions in the Far East were of great concern to the ‘Imperialists’. Russia posed a long-term threat to India, to Afghanistan and Persia. If unchecked, the Russian Empire might interfere in these ‘British’ colonies, curve round from the east, undermine the Ottoman Empire and capture the jewel that was Constantinople. Russia had to be dealt with. And dealt with she was.

Before the Trans-Siberian Railway could be completed, Russia, as an ambitious imperial threat, was effectively neutered by Japan. In the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5 both her military and naval power was smashed. Most importantly, the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 was an outstanding naval victory which some commentators have hailed as more important than Trafalgar. What should be pointed out is that the four major battleships, Shikishima, Kikasa, Fuji and Asahi, were built in Britain at Thames Iron Works, Vickers in Barrow and John Brown in Clydebank. The Japanese, Britain’s only allies, blew the Russian navy away and destroyed her military pride. As a consequence the Czar lost his only warm-water port, and began to look longingly at Constantinople. This later would serve the British as a golden carrot to attract Russian support and friendship. There was also an immediate benefit to the Empire. British and Rothschild banks loaned money to Japan which paid for the ships that had been built in Britain before supporting Japan in its resolve to slay the Russian Bear. British shipyards reaped the dividends, British banks reaped great profits and the Japanese people paid the cost.

By 1905, Russia was no longer a serious rival to the British Empire and this changed the dynamic. Weakened, Russia was virtually friendless and vulnerable to sympathetic approach. Russia had one massive asset which was permanently denied to Britain, namely a huge army based on the continent of Europe. This became a key part of the building block for the Secret Elite’s new order.

**Point 4:** The Liberal Landslide of 1906. With 397 Liberal members of parliament, 82 Home Rulers from Ireland and 28 Labour members, against a mere 246 Tories, this was surely a new beginning for the nation. The Liberals had been swept to power in an election which promised Peace, Reform and Retrenchment. This was the pay-back for the embarrassment and failure of the Boer War. The Anti-War party of Campbell-Bannerman and David Lloyd George promised so much. But strange happenings had preceded the election. Milner’s men inside the Secret Elite, A J Balfour and Lord Lansdowne, were part of a conspiracy to implant Liberals who championed British Imperialism at the highest level of government. In matters of foreign policy there was a strange continuity. While the political arithmetic indicated a complete landslide, this did not translate into real change. The men who had criticised Milner and the Boer War were set on introducing great social reform, BUT, the men who mattered, the men previously approved and backed by the Secret Elite, namely Herbert Asquith, Richard Haldane and Sir Edward Grey, all Milner’s friends and associates, pursued the Secret Elite’saims and policies. In absolute secrecy, they approved preparations already underway for a military and naval plan to bring about a successful prosecution of war against Germany.

Of course this was not referred to as an alliance but merely ‘conversations’. These began with French and Belgian senior officers even before the Liberals were in office.Unknown to the Cabinet, Parliament and the Liberal Party, there was a much more important organ of power called the Committee of Imperial Defence, which controlled the direction of events that would lead to preparations for war. Allegedly formed to guide and advise the Prime Minister after the Boer War failures, it dictated the new agenda. Lord Esher, one of the original Secret Elite triumvirate, was given permanent membership, although he held no office of state, was unelected and responsible only to the King. Sir Henry Wilson, later Field Marshal and Chief of the Imperial General Staff, a serial political intriguer in Irish politics, formulated the detailed plans for a future war. For almost a decade he spent summer holidays cycling in northern France, drawing maps and diagrams of waterways, canals, roads and major geographical features. These were plans which signalled a secret alliance. Together, Britain and France agreed that in the war against Germany, British troops would be stationed along the Belgian border, shoulder to shoulder with the French army in the north. And so it came to pass.

**Point 5:** Salute the best Foreign Secretary the Secret Elite ever had. No, not Sir Edward Grey. He was incompetent, a failure at Oxford, linguistically inarticulate and took pride in the claim that he gained his knowledge of foreign affairs from the editorials in the Times. No, I refer to King Edward VII. By comparison, he was brilliant. Edward was fluent in French and German, had built up a network of royalties throughout Europe, and despite his mother’s objections, was trusted with state secrets. His cover was genius. Behind the facade of a philandering royal, his visits to Parisian brothels, his cavorting with the wives of other men (one historian referred to him as Edward the Caresser), he was the best foreign secretary Britain never had, and we place him deep inside the highest echelons of the Secret Elite. It must have helped that he greatly disliked his nephew, Kaiser Wilhelm, the Emperor of Germany, a man whom his mother, Victoria, greatly respected. Edward VII fronted the major changes in alliances with what is known as the Entente Cordiale, the ‘unnatural’ Entente Cordiale, as Roger Casement pointed out, because it not based on a cordial regard between France and Britain, but on the shared un-cordial designs on Germany.

What was it really? Not an open alliance, Oh no. Allegedly Britain had no alliances in Europe but in this grand charade stage one was to bring France on board. To that end Edward VII courted the revanchists; Delcasse and Poincaré, right-wing politicians whose driving aim was to grasp back Alsace and Lorraine the provinces lost to Germany in 1870. They were Edward’s men as was Alexander Izvolsky, the Russian foreign minister who became French Ambassador in Paris.

Edward blitzed the European monarchies and showered them with baubles and other honours in Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Italy, Belgium … and Russia. Friendship with Russia? The unthinkable manipulated by the unknown. Edward was quietly and secretly rewriting unacknowledged alliances. Disengaging Italy from Germany-Austria was his piece de resistance. With a touch of strategic genius he visited Pope Leo XIII. To be clear, he did not make Alliances but emerged with absolute understandings. His one aim was to surround Germany-Austria with hostile neighbours. By 1910, even Britain’s connections with Russia had been put on a much higher level, thanks to Edward, though the people of Britain did not realise what was happening. Russia, and the Czar’s regime, were despised. The vicious treatment of its Jewish population was disgusting. British MPs of the Jewish faith, even members of the House of Lords, were banned form visiting Russia. Yet secret talks leading to a naval understanding was extended to Russia.

**Point 6:** Haldane and the Reform of the army was central to the overall preparation for war against Germany. Richard Haldane was Milner’s friend and correspondent during his years in South Africa. ‘Tell us what to do,’ he once wrote to Milner, seeking direction. The creation of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was attributable to Haldane. King Edward liked him personally; theirs was a real friendship. They talked in confidence together, ironically in German. Edward VII stamped the reorganisation of the British army with his approval. It was not to be a matter for political dispute or aristocratic objection. The King called a conference of every Lord Lieutenant in the country and ordained that the reorganisation would take place with his blessing. The BEF trained for one thing; not the defence of Egypt or the protection of India, but solely for a European war against Germany. The Secret Elite understood that Britain alone simply did not have sufficient men on the ground to challenge the Germans on continental Europe, but France did, and Russia did, and France and Russia had signed an alliance. Our very professional small addition, the BEF, was exclusively prepared for war in Northern France, which was that the whole point of its creation. Naval domination was presumed. Germany had a vast land army. It could not be not tackled by Britain in a continental war unless part of a huge combined force.

**Point 7:** By the turn of the twentieth century, public opinion had become an important factor in the political dynamic. The Boer War had been very unpopular at home because newspapers turned their criticism on the military failures. Changing the nations’s opinion became an important strand in the Secret Elite’s preparation for war. Where France had once been portrayed as the national enemy, Germany became the whipping-boy. Foremost of the press barons was Lord Northcliffe, a man vetted by Lord Esher on behalf of the Elite before he was permitted to take ownership of the Times and Daily Mail. Northcliffe’s media stables wallowed in spy mania. Erskine Childers wrote one of the most important anti-German novel of the pre-war period, *The Riddle of the Sands,* a warning of a German invasion. Childers became the darling of the Right and a personal friend of Lord Roberts. Worst of all was the legendary William Le Queux, a barely literate scare-monger whose ‘novels’ gained ever-increasing notoriety. Northcliffe commissioned him to write *The Invasion of 1910,* which was serialised in the Daily Mail. This scandalous anti-German story was based on an invasion of southern England, but because the population base was insufficient, Northcliffe re-routed the German invasion, accompanied with maps and drawings, to Sheffield, before marching into London. It was reprinted many times and translated into twenty-seven languages. The Germans also carried the story, though in their version, to Le Queux’s disgust, Germany won the war.

**Point 8:** After his years in South Africa, Milner had been subject to a motion of censure in Parliament. Churchill spoke in his favour, declaring that Lord Milner had no pension, no job and no future, so parliament should leave him be. It was of course nonsense. Viscount Milner was inundated with top jobs. His friend Natty Rothschild appointed him to the Board of Rio Tinto. He was given a directorship of the Bank of Egypt. But of course. He had saved the gold and diamonds for them. Milner’s main objective however was to prepare the Empire for War. He visited the Dominions, organised Imperial Conferences both for national leaders and for press representatives. His kindergarten, the young men who had formed his South African administration, came home to build Round Table groups, secret pressure groups to promote Milner’s ideals in Britain, Canada, Australia and South Africa, The key concepts they promulgated included Duty, Mother Country and Heritage. Milner worked closely with his friend, Lord Roberts. Their agenda was preparation for war.

**Point 9:** To what extent was Ireland a cause of the first world war? It naturally suits the ‘Just so happened brigade’ to pretend that the critical situation in Ulster was a chance event. It was not. The fear of civil war was always a threat, but no more than that. We believe that it would have become the issue for a declaration of war had Belgian ‘neutrality’ not sufficed. Political arithmetic after both the elections of 1910 meant that the Liberals were dependant on outspoken anti-imperialists, the Irish Home Rule Party, to stay in power. To the Secret Elite, IrishHome Rule, which would represent the break-up of the Empire, was unthinkable. Their role in supporting Ulster both directly and indirectly, was absolute. Milner and Sir Edward Carson [Carson was A J Balfour’s prodigy] were in constant cahoots. During the Curragh ‘mutiny’ Milner was advising Sir Henry Wilson and promising parliamentary support for all officers who resigned. He promised that their pensions would not be endangered.The end product was the resignation of John Seeley as Minister of War, which spawned an unusual situation. The Prime Minister himself took charge of the office. Why? Asquith could not let anyone take the post. There were no senior Liberals whom he could trust with the secret that, behind the scenes, Britain, France and Russia were on the point of declaring war against Germany.

Through the actions of Milner, Rudyard Kipling, Rothschild, Waldorf Astor, Lord Iveagh,and the Duke of Bedford, the Ulster Volunteer Force, was funded and able to buy the guns to arm the province. At today’s values, they raised over £8,000,000 secretly, and this included anonymous donations. The gun-running was grossly illegal and utterly unconstitutional. The legend of Fred Crawford’s mission to buy guns and ammunition for Ulster is the stuff of folklore. If the British authorities had not sanctioned it, the guns would never have been landed, but we know now that the cheque handed to Ulster came directly from the hands of the Tory leaders at Westminster. Fred Crawford delivered the armaments to Larne and in due time was made a Commander of the British Empire for his … well, was it treason or loyalty? Whatever, had it been necessary, the newspapers could rightly claim that the Kaiser had armed Ulster, since the guns were purchased in Hamburg.

What the Secret Elite needed was a semblance of balance which would suggest that Germany had also armed the Irish Volunteers. Step forward Erskine Childers, the same who wrote *The Riddle of the Sands* and spent ten years alarming the nation to prepare for a German invasion. Was Childers a British agent? Was his change of heart to the republican cause as complete as Paul on the road to Damascus? He would claim so. Backed by a fraction of the funds granted so willingly to the UVF, Childers procured much older weapons from the same source in Hamburg and loaded on the *Asgard* and the *Kelpie*, bravely struggled through storms and fog - the worst weather seen in the Channel for years, it was claimed - to deliver a small quantity of guns and ammunition at Howth. Checked against the Times weather reports for the Channel and the Irish Sea from 22-25 July 1914, it appears that there was some fog, but the weather conditions varied from fair with light breeze to N.W breeze in moderate seas to moderate westerly and at worst, moderate to strong winds. This is not how this legend has been portrayed.

Ireland played a major part in the strategic deception used by the Secret Elite through the British Foreign Office to deceive Germany into believing that Britain was incapable of declaring war because she stood on the brink of a civil war that would impact on the whole nation. The Germans were banking on British neutrality in the event of a continental war. The question we have raised is, would Ireland have acted as Plan B had Germany avoided an invasion of Belgium? There is good reason to consider the probability that with both sides armed by Germany, any consequent disruption could be blamed on the ‘devious’ Kaiser. When Milner was High Commissioner in South Africa and seeking to goad President Kruger of the Transvaal to declare war, one of his close Balliol College friends and a member of the Secret Elite, Philip Lyttelton Gell, wrote to him and advised that if he made an issue of Germany supplying guns to the Boers, Britain would treat that as a case for war. All it would need, suggested Gell, was some gory act of bloody terrorism to accompany the allegations.

Time runs against my covering all of the important issues which accompanied the last few months of peace as the world was being manoeuvred into global conflict, but there are a few very important points to be clarified, namely the myth of Belgian neutrality, the devious mobilisations which took place behind Germany’s back, and the stunning hypocrisy of Sir Edward Grey.

**Point 10: Belgian Neutrality / Mobilisations / Sir Edward Grey.** Belgian neutrality was a myth. A senior Belgian officer, Major General Ducarne, was originally involved in the secret conversations between Britain and France in 1906. They had discussed the allocation of Belgian interpreters, accommodation for troops and wounded soldiers. Indeed Belgium had to be kept distant from the Entente because its involvement would have destroyed the notion of neutrality. Consider too the fact that the National Bank of Belgium set plans in 1912 whereby in the event of war with Germany its gold, note-printing plates and government bonds were to be immediately shipped to the Bank of England. And they were. Be mindful that Belgium was a very wealthy country whose fortunes had been amassed on the imperial rape of the Congo, as lambasted by Rodger Casement.

Mobilisations - Mobilisation meant war. If a large nation had to mobilise its army, the cost was so prohibitive that war was bound to follow. Everyone knew this. To that end, encouraged by the French President Poincaré, and in the expectation that Britain would become involved, Russia mobilised its forces against Germany. The date of preliminary Russian mobilisation was 26 July, 1914. A full mobilisation followed on 30 July. On 1 August, France secretly mobilised but instructed troops to remain 10-25 kilometres from the border with Germany so that they wouldn’t know. With Europe on the brink, Sir Edward Grey and his foreign office team lied repeatedly to Germany about its intentions. On 1 August, Germany at last declared war, the Kaiser having tried repeatedly to get the Czar to change his mind and reverse his instruction to mobilise. To all intents and purposes, Britain too had mobilised. Churchill ordered the Navy to move in secret from Spithead to Scapa Flow, its chosen battle station. Grey and Churchill rushed through a bill to take ownership of Persian oil [Anglo-Persian Oil], which was to have major long-term implications. The British Expeditionary Force was armed and prepared for one thing… war with Germany. I have to draw your attention to a blatant attempt to rewrite the story through Establishment eyes. In March 2014, the BBC transmitted a dramatic account of the lead up to war called *37 Days* . It chose to portray Edward Grey’s deliberate deception of the German Ambassador as caused by a faulty telephone line, and completely blanked out the greatest lie of all, Grey’s statement to Parliament on 3 August, by relegating it to a voice-over at the end. By such underhand methods, lies and myths persist.

Sir Edward Grey and that speech : Before the Secretary of State rose to make his statement to the House of Commons on 3 August 1914, the prime minister sent Richard Haldane to the War Office where he summoned a War Council and stunned the assembled generals by announcing that mobilisation would begin. Grey started by announcing that peace in Europe could not be preserved. He made frequent references to British interests, honour and obligations, but - stop there - what obligations? All the previous statement to Parliament made by Asquith’s governments had repeatedly denied that any secret agreements or obligations had been made by Britain. The concept of Belgian neutrality was his trump card and his greatest lie. He declared that it would be the direst crime that ever stained the pages of history if little Belgium was invaded by Germany. The direst crime in History? Had he forgotten the concentration camps in South Africa or the massacres in the Congo or Matabeleland? Sir Edward Grey predicted that after Belgium, Germany would take Holland and Denmark. Lies of course. But the most stunning moment came when he announced in that speech that ‘We do not have to take the Irish Question into account’. From where did he get the notion that the ‘general feeling throughout Ireland’ was in favour of British policy? No-one had asked Ireland.

What happened next challenges opinion even today. John Redmond rose as the Irish Home Rule Party leader and backed Grey’s assertion that Britain would be obliged to take action if Germany invaded Belgium. Asquith noted in his letters to Venetia Stanley that ‘Redmond cut in effectively’. It reads like a stage direction. What was that all about? Asquith had a private meeting with Redmond that morning. The other major Irish politician at Westminster, John Dillon, ‘just happened to be in Dublin’, allegedly to attend the Coroner’s enquiry into the shootings at Batchelor’s Walk. Was he sent or invited?

Grey left Commons to send an ultimatum to Germany that was already too late. It was no more than a charade. There was a measure of outrage from some backbench Liberals and Socialists which was very vocal, but virtually ignored by the press. There was only one story, War with Germany. It was the Secret Elite’s War. *Germania Delenda Est*.

————————————————————————————————————————

By its very nature, and the 50 minute time bar, this lecture could only briefly cover some of the detailed narrative contained in *Hidden History, The Secret Origins of the First World War*. Participants at the Greaves School bought up all the copies I was able to carry and if interested may I direct you to [**amazon.com.uk**](http://amazon.com.uk) from which it can be purchased. Should you wish a copy, the quality bookstore Hodges Figgis, Dublin, is also happy to place an order.

In addition, Jim Macgregor and Gerry Docherty post a regular blog on their website covering major First World War scandals and misrepresentations regarding them which have not been given publicity. It can be viewed at [**firstworldwarhiddenhistory.wordpress.com**](http://firstworldwarhiddenhistory.wordpress.com)