

**ELIZABETH BOWEN:
A 'DEBATE' IN THE
IRISH EXAMINER**

Aubane Historical Society

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**ISBN 9781 903497 44 9
Aubane Historical Society
Aubane, Millstreet, Co. Cork
May 2008**

INTRODUCTION

Why all the fuss about Elizabeth Bowen?

Elizabeth Bowen was a British writer who happened to be born in Ireland, and to inherit a Cromwellian property in Co. Cork. Britain was an Empire and a great many of her well-known writers were born in the Empire. For example, Kipling was born in India and Orwell in Burma. Bowen was Irish only if one takes Irish as a subset of British – as was done, of course, for centuries.

She adopted an Irish persona for espionage purposes during the War. But in various memoirs, written without an ulterior motive she made it clear that she was not milk and watery British but English. The part of the world that made her buzz was Kent.

She was English Churchillian. After the rejection of Churchill in 1945 England was no longer English enough for her. She could not stand it when the lower classes came to the top. So she retreated to her property in Ireland – not because it was Ireland but because it was not Welfare State England.

Her espionage reports to Churchill are objective, well informed and well written accounts of Irish opinion during the War. It is a great pity that more of them are either withheld or destroyed. But they are espionage reports to her Government, written frankly in the confidence that they would remain secret.

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Following the inaugural Bowen/Trevor Summer School in Mitchelstown in 2007 an exchange of letters took place in the *Irish Examiner*. The most well-known contributor was Martin Mansergh TD.

Why does Mr Mansergh get so exercised about Elizabeth Bowen and her activities here during WWII?

The facts of the matter are now indisputable. At the beginning of the war she immediately volunteered her services to the British Government to do espionage work in Ireland. She befriended people under false pretences, reported in secret,, got paid for it, wrote about 200 reports (according to her biographer, Heather Bryant Jordan) - approximately one per fortnight - and delivered a number of personal reports too sensitive to be put in writing. She deceived all her Irish acquaintances and was well pleased with what she did. James Dillon was mortified and humiliated when the truth was brought to his attention in 1974.

Innumerable other English writers and artists did similar. It was their patriotic duty and they cannot be criticised for doing so. She succeeded in her main aim of helping to get Churchill to resist his instincts to invade and so helped him avoid a costly bloody nose. Southern Ireland always was '*unfinished business*' for him and he was '*bulling*' for another go after the failure of his Black and Tans. She was also successful in never having her cover blown.

And now we have the extraordinary situation of a legislator here seeking to maintain her cover! What does it say of his priorities and judgement? And he is no ordinary member of Fianna Fail, he is "*Fianna Fail's most venerated elder statesman*", no less, according to the Irish Independent (January 4, 2008).

To seek to make his case he has to turn Irish history, and common sense, inside out and upside down. Elizabeth Bowen becomes someone else. In fact she becomes some sort of monstrosity because she did all the above and was neither a traitor nor a spy but was an agent for both governments. The logic of this is that the Irish government needed someone to go around the country deceiving people in order to inform itself about how people felt about neutrality! Furthermore, that they got the British government to pay for this and never asked for a copy of any of the reports! She becomes not just a double agent in the

normal sense, more a duplicate or parallel agent. The logic gets more bizarre the more one thinks about it.

A good example of Mansergh's methodology is the way he tries to get an ultra-revisionist book "The Emergency" by Professor Brian Girvin further revised to seek to prove his case that it was really the Irish Government that set Bowen up for her spying.

In his book Girvin says that the Ministry of Information, for whom she worked, had to fight to get Bowen permission to come to Ireland as the Dominions Office had refused her permission because they understood that "*her trip involved spending some time working on a novel.*" To them this was skiving and such frivolity was not to be encouraged in a time of war. Culture could wait. The Ministry then sought allies to get her a permit to travel and these included John Dulanty (the Irish High Commissioner, or Ambassador), John Betjeman, Stephen Gwynn and others and this was clearly under the guise of her writing journalistic pieces which nobody could object to. Girvin says that he is not sure if, even in this regard, Dulanty was acting on his own or not.

However, according to Mansergh, in a '*personal communication*' with Girvin all this becomes transformed into the Irish Ambassador setting the whole thing in motion by suggesting to Bowen that she write these secret reports for the British Ministry of Information - which is not even suggested by Girvin in his book, never mind any evidence being provided for such an assertion. Then Mansergh spins it even further and, hey presto, the story is now transformed into the Irish government '*sponsoring*' her espionage as an agent for both governments.

Revisionism moves at a very fast pace these days - as quickly as any three card trick man. It should be interesting to read the next edition of Professor Girvin's book to see if this is developed even further - or has he been bounced into a hole by, shall we say, Mr.

Mansergh's verbal dexterity and will Girvin be trying to extricate himself?

As it happens, I have known Professor Brian Girvin for over forty years and I have practically read all he has ever written and we have shared much together, including the same school in Cork for a period. Brian has never been backward in coming forward with his views on anything and everything. However when I asked him about any evidence to support Mansergh's assertions he went uncharacteristically silent.

Then there are a whole series of half truths used by Mansergh in this debate which in effect are a total distortion of the facts, such as:

*De Valera allowed people to join the British Army. But what army did he ever prevent people from joining, apart from the IRA? Irish people joined several armies during the war. In the 30s he allowed people to join both sides in Spain even though he was on the Republican side. He had no totalitarian instincts. But for Mansergh Ireland should only be judged by its relationship with England. No other relationship matters.

*De Valera was neutral friendly to Britain, he says. But Dev was hostile to no state during the war. That of course was not reciprocated by Churchill who considered De Valera's neutrally hostile right to the end and that was of more political and historical significance than de Valera's desire to be friendly. De Valera's '*friendliness*' was that shown to bullies when it is wise to do so. It is a euphemism for the reality of such situations but Mansergh wants us to accept it as the real thing. He is either trying to kid us or kid himself.

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Of course, all this is good old fashioned bluff, blather and bluster on Mansergh's part. This is his style as a TD as well. He does not seem able to distinguish between making a convincing argument and bluster.

In the case of Bowen's espionage, Mansergh's denials are very transparent bluff and bluster and he has not got the talent to carry it off. Instead his case loses all credibility and he then resorts to slander and lies – a sure sign that one has lost an argument.

He accused me of being a Nazi sympathiser - and a hardline Unionist supporter for good measure. In fact there is now a 'law' that describes such behaviour. 'Godwin's Law' says that the first person who introduces Nazi and/or Fascist slanders into an argument these days is confirming that they have no more to say and have conceded their case.

Mr. Mansergh says a lot more about himself than he does about Bowen or me in resorting to such slander and lies.

However, what is of more concern is the behaviour of the Editor of the *Irish Examiner*, Tim Vaughan, who assisted Mr. Mansergh by ending the correspondence after publishing his lies.

There is no recollection in living memory of a correspondence being declared closed in the *Irish Examiner*. The Editor should be ashamed of himself.

The paper sought to make a mark nationally and showed signs of being more open and fair than the other national papers in its letters and opinion pieces.

That was short-lived.

Jack Lane
Aubane
May 2008

The exchange of letters

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20 August 2007

Elizabeth Bowen: the missing chapters

YOUR report on the inaugural Trevor/Bowen Summer School in Mitchelstown (County Supplement, August 14) says "the audience was thrilled to hear the voice of Elizabeth Bowen" from a recording that was part of Donnacha O'Dulaing's lecture on the writer.

I assume the recording, or the lecture, did not explain aspects of Elizabeth Bowen such as "... the vehemence with which she said 'I *hate* Ireland' " (emphasis not added) as reported by Roy Foster in his 1993 book, *Paddy and Mr Punch* (page 122).

Neither, I assume, did it deal with her paid espionage activities here during World War II, which was her only real connection with Ireland and which produced her most valuable writing on the country, though 99% of it appears to have been destroyed because it was classified as 'top secret'.

May I suggest that any future summer schools deal with these aspects of Bowen's career as they tend to be ignored or explained away even though they were the central focus of her relationship with Ireland.

Exploring these would add some real value to Bowen studies.

Of course, there are several aspects of her Cromwellian family history that would also be useful to explore at such schools.

These might also thrill audiences even more than Mr Ó Dulaing appears to have done.

Jack Lane, Aubane, Millstreet

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29 August 2007

A 'spy' writer in good company

THE letter from Jack Lane on the Trevor/Bowen Summer School in Mitchelstown and Farrihy, Kildorrery, Co Cork (August 20) gave an interesting side-view on a great Irish writer.

I have one, if not two, advantages over Mr Lane. I lived through the Second World War years in Ireland, and attended the Trevor/Bowen school last August bank holiday weekend. Those present enjoyed a stimulating series of lectures.

Elizabeth Bowen's wartime activities did not pass without comment from two of the principal speakers.

Ms Bowen was loyal to England at war, but did not stop being Irish. She was not the only Irish person with shared or ambiguous loyalties.

Estimates vary for the number of Irishmen from the South who joined the British forces, but there is no dispute about the vast numbers who worked in Britain in wartime or the eight Victoria Crosses and one George Cross awarded to men from this part of the island.

There is also no dispute about the astute manner in which de Valera facilitated both this process and the recruitment of Irishmen into the British forces, a fact confirmed by Churchill in 1941 when he acknowledged "the considerable help which we were receiving by the enlistment in our forces of volunteers from Southern Ireland". After all, Miss Bowen and de Valera, whatever their differences, were both aware that the common enemy was fascism.

I will let Mr Lane decide whether Elizabeth Bowen's wartime reports to the British Ministry of Information on Irish public opinion amounted to "espionage".

I doubt if she found too many secrets or did any harm. Her reports may have helped foster some degree of understanding at a very difficult time in relations between the two islands and for this, as for many aspects of her writing, we must be thankful.

In this happier time in relations between the two countries it is interesting to recall these wartime experiences of one of Ireland's most distinguished writers. It is a pity Mr Lane employs a redundant epithet — "Cromwellian" — to describe Miss Bowen's family history. We cannot be responsible for our ancestors or be required to atone for their sins.

Indeed a trawl through all family histories might also produce as many thrilling tales as Mr Lane thinks will be found among Ms Bowen's ancestors. History is rarely so simple.

Kathleen Fitzgibbon
King's Square
Mitchelstown
Co Cork

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05 September 2007

Dear Sir,

British deemed Bowen reports espionage

Kathleen Fitzgibbon says that she has "one, if not two, advantages over Mr Lane. I lived through the Second World War years in Ireland, and attended the Trevor/Bowen school last August bank holiday weekend." (Irish Examiner 29/8/07)

However, on the actual point at issue - Bowen's espionage reports to Churchill - Kathleen and I are exactly in the same position because neither she nor I could have read any of Bowen's 200 odd reports during the war or subsequently as they

were secret reports and the vast majority were destroyed. The few that survived were never published by her admirers until I did so a few years ago.

Yet Kathleen speculates that Bowen's objective was to "foster some degree of understanding". Kathleen should really explain to us why a well known writer and a very competent and capable person such as Bowen chose this peculiar and very inefficient way to spread understanding!

People went to England for work during the Second World War, as they had been doing ever since the English Government had deliberately and systematically wrecked the Irish economy. The Irish people also joined the British Army in all of Britain's many wars over the centuries for much the same reason.

Bowen's reports to Churchill about the state of public feeling in Ireland about a possible British invasion possibly helped to ward off that invasion. Churchill in 1945 said he had the right to invade but chose not to. Bowen's reports indicated that resistance would be united and strong.

It is not me who classified her reports as espionage. They were treated by the British authorities as espionage reports. They were kept secret at the time and most were subsequently destroyed. A few survived through bureaucratic negligence.

I did not drag up the Bowen family history. Bowen flaunted it at us. It was Cromwellian in origin, and the Bowens of the Big House lived as aliens remote from the people to the bitter end.

Kathleen says that "After all, Miss Bowen and de Valera, whatever their differences, were both aware that the common enemy was fascism."

I beg to differ. England went to war against Germany, not fascism. Churchill had warmly welcomed fascism in Europe as the saviour of western civilisation and had hoped that, if it

proved necessary, a Hitler would have emerged in Britain. He went to war against Germany because as he graphically put it in the 30s, "the Hun is either at your throat or at your feet," just as he would have put it during WWI.

De Valera did not share such sentiments. He had never welcomed fascism and had countered it successfully in Ireland (without war) with no help whatever from England or Churchill. He was neutral on England's second war on Germany just as the US and the USSR were until they were attacked and he would no doubt have acted as they did if Ireland was attacked from any quarter.

As it happens, Bowen's published reports confirm that for her, as for Churchill, fascism was not the issue. The single Irish politician she really cultivated (and deceived) was James Dillon because he was the only significant politician who wanted Ireland to join the war that England had declared on Germany. Bowen describes her close study of him in an extant report and concluded he was a fascist but that mattered not a whit as he too supported war on Germany. Fascism was neither here nor there for her or Churchill when England was at war.

Jack Lane

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05 September 2007

Britain did not go to war to defeat fascism

KATHLEEN FITZGIBBON (Letters, August 29) says, "Miss [Elizabeth] Bowen and de Valera, whatever their differences, were both aware that the common enemy [in WWII] was fascism".

It is true de Valera achieved political power democratically against the fascist movement in Ireland but Britain, on the other

hand, did not go to war in 1939 against fascism as such.

Churchill had been, notoriously, an admirer and friend of Mussolini and he declared that a British Hitler might be necessary in certain circumstances. Britain went to war against its former ally in 1939 not to defeat fascism as such but to assert its position as the predominant world power. Other world powers, such as the US, remained neutral until their own interests were at stake.

From 1945 to the present, Britain has made effective propaganda use of Nazi crimes, in order to give itself licence for continual warfare around the world. While Elizabeth Bowen's favourite Irish person was the fascist-minded John Dillon, Churchill himself was in favour of world conquest and genocide of inferior races — provided it was done by or for Britain or its allies. Here is his testimony to the 1937 parliamentary commission of Lord Peel, to decide the fate of Palestine:

“I do not admit that the dog in the manger [the Palestinian Arabs] has the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to those people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher grade race, has come in and taken their place. I do not admit it. I do not think the Red Indians had any right to say, ‘The American continent belongs to us and we are not going to have any of these European settlers coming in here.’ They had not the right, nor had they the power.”

Pat Muldowney
Magee College
University of Ulster
Derry

6 September 2007

A laudable emissary, yes; a traitor, no

JACK LANE (Letters, August 20 and September 5) might desist from his continuing efforts to denigrate the memory of the writer Elizabeth Bowen, who is buried in Farahy Church, near Kildorrery in north Cork, of which I am a trustee (my family and hers are related by marriage). He has two grievances in particular against her: one, that she spied against Ireland, betraying Ireland's interests/secrets to the British in WWII, and, second, on the basis of a fleeting, frustrated remark, that she hated Ireland.

When Mr Lane claims these were "the central focus of her relationship with Ireland", he is either being disingenuous or displaying his animus against a meritorious representative of the Anglo-Irish tradition, which some two-nations theorists would like to see excommunicated altogether from the Irish nation and put down as English, quite out of kilter with today's pluralism and multiculturalism.

In 1948, Bowen said, "I regard myself as an Irish novelist. As long as I can remember I've been extremely conscious of being Irish; even when I was writing about very un-Irish things ... All my life I've been going backwards and forwards between Ireland and England ... but that has never robbed me of the strong feeling of my nationality." There is no sign of hating Ireland.

It is generally accepted today that, within the limits of nationality defined by law, and she always qualified as Irish on that count, people should be free to decide their own identity, not to have it posthumously confiscated from them by political ideologues.

Brian Girvin's book *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland 1939-45* contains many debatable conclusions but also useful new information. From this, it emerges that Bowen wanted an acceptable excuse to travel to Ireland at the height of the war, and that the Irish high commissioner in London, John Dulanty,

supported her visit (unpaid) to Ireland to provide independent reports on the state of opinion. To give credit to Mr Lane, he and the Aubane Society have done a public service in publishing some of her reports, despite the lurid commentary accompanying them.

Girvin assesses these reports, which were critical of Churchill's more belligerent approach to Irish neutrality, echoing the views of de Valera, Walshe, and the army chief of staff at that time.

Bowen was sceptical of James Dillon, the one politician who wanted to involve Ireland in the war. Dulanty's foreknowledge and encouragement of her visit surely requires a reassessment of the theory she was some kind of traitor to her country and therefore not deserving to be considered Irish.

Britain and Ireland were not enemies. De Valera's policy during WWII was for Ireland to be vis-à-vis Britain a "friendly neutral".

Bowen will be commemorated in a service at 3.30pm on Sunday at St Colman's Church in Farahy. She will be honoured beside Bowen's Court, where her family lived for generations. If it had been left standing when sold in 1959, though circumstances at the time were not conducive to that, it would surely be a tourist attraction. It would also, like Strokestown House, provide a point of reference on the morals of landlords of Cromwellian descent, which Bowen herself wrote about.

Dr Martin Mansergh, TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

10 September 2007

Neither fascism nor saving the Jews was Britain's aim

PAT MULDOWNNEY quite rightly points out that Britain did not go to war to defeat fascism (Letters, Sept 5).

Churchill himself admitted as much in a famous exchange with one of his generals, who bridled at returning the Cossacks to Stalin.

The general argued that Britain had gone to war because of the sort of atrocity which certainly faced the returned Cossacks.

Churchill did not argue (as he could have) that the Cossacks voluntarily sided with Hitler and deserved their fate. Instead, he called the general a fool for not understanding that Britain had gone to war to restore the balance of power in Europe, and for no other reason.

There is a subtle rewriting of history that suggests the Allies were trying to save the Jews. In fact, the Allies made no attempt to disrupt the railways on which the camps depended.

There is evidence that news of the camps was deliberately downplayed by the British government because it feared anti-Semitic sentiment would weaken the war effort if the truth were more generally known.

We owe Britain a lot for its stance against Hitler, just as we owe a debt to the old Soviet Union. But no debt can obligate us to lie about the historical facts.

Tim O'Halloran
23 Ferndale Rd
Dublin 11

12 September 2007

Not the only one

ACCORDING to Jack Lane (Letters, Sept 5) and Dr Martin Mansergh TD (Letters, Sept 6), former Fine Gael leader and agriculture minister James Dillon was the only politician who wanted to involve Ireland in World War II.

Not so.

In fact, Dillon's view was shared by an earlier political associate, Frank MacDermot, a member of Dáil Éireann from 1932 to 1937 and Seanad Éireann from 1938 to 1942).

JA Barnwell
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Dublin 9

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12 September 2007

Saving the Jews: rewriting history is nothing new

IN his letter headlined 'Neither fascism nor saving the Jews was Britain's aim' (Sept 10), Tim O'Halloran says "there is a subtle rewriting of history that suggests the Allies were trying to save the Jews".

This is not such a recent phenomenon as Mr O' Halloran would think: it was already part of the Nazi propaganda claim that the war between the two great Aryan nations, Britain and Germany, was a result of the international Jewish conspiracy to take over the world.

As Mr. O'Halloran quite correctly observes, "the Allies made no attempt to disrupt the railways on which the camps depended".

In fact, it has been reported that when such a suggestion was made, the then British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, asked: “What should we do with all those Jews?”

Small wonder then that, as Mr O’Halloran puts it, “news of the camps was deliberately downplayed by the British government”.

Martin D Stern
7 Hanover Gardens
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17 September 2007

Writer did an excellent job in her ‘spy’ reports to London

I CAN assure Martin Mansergh (Letters, Sept 9) that I have neither the inclination nor the power to excommunicate Elizabeth Bowen or anybody else from anything they might wish to be.

What I seek to do is to make sense of Bowen's activities during WW II. That is why I published her extant reports and while Martin describes my comments on those as “lurid” I would describe them as calling a spade a spade – just as her reports did.

Was she a traitor to Ireland or a spy for England? I believe the evidence clearly supports the latter and as doing one’s patriotic duty in time of war to the best of one’s ability is normally a laudable thing I cannot see how I denigrate her as Martin claims. She did an excellent job. My admiration for her increases every time I read her reports. If Mr Mansergh insists she was Irish then he is automatically making her a traitor which is not considered very laudable and I would not dream of accusing her of that and have never done so.

Mr Mansergh invokes Brian Girvin's book "The Emergency" in his case: "...the Irish High commissioner in London, John Dulanty, supported her visit (unpaid) to Ireland to provide independent reports on the state of opinion." However, Brian Girvin provides no actual evidence by Dulanty to support Martin's claims and the reference to an "unpaid" trip is actually by John Betjeman of the British Embassy in Dublin. This latter reference indicates that the secret reports could not be the matter in question here as the secret reports were paid for by the British Government and the payments have been detailed by Heather Bryant Jordan in her biography, "Will the heart endure" (page 210). Mr Mansergh should keep up with the literature on this

Of course, there is no doubt that Dulanty and everyone in the Irish Government would have welcomed all kinds of reports to London, open or secret, written and oral that helped ward off Churchill's desire to invade. But Bowen's reports were certainly not written for the benefit of the Irish government and they were not party to them. Mr Mansergh is clutching at straws to try to prove otherwise. If the Irish government was in some way involved we would surely have come across some copies somewhere in Irish archives over the past 60 years.

Mr Mansergh says "Britain and Ireland were not enemies." Was that why Ireland had to fight a war of independence against England, and then a civil war insisted on by England? In 1940 Churchill denied Ireland the right to neutrality. Irish independence was a standing affront to him and Bowen's job was to advise him on the probable strength of Irish resistance if he invaded.

He adds "De Valera's policy during WWII was for Ireland to be vis-à-vis Britain a "friendly neutral". Of course it was – friendly to everybody. That is what neutrality means. Eamon de Valera was pragmatic and sensible enough not to provoke any of the major powers at war around him – just like all other neutrals.

He concludes that “It is generally accepted today that, within the limits of nationality defined by law, and she always qualified as Irish on that count, people should be free to decide their own identity”. This is very true and Bowen was constitutionally an Irish citizen by birth if she chose to exercise that right - but she did not. By the same token, I and millions of others are legally British subjects being born here before 1948 but most do not exercise that right either. Nationality is not defined by law. Like home, it is where the heart is and Bowen’s heart was in England (and certainly not in Anglo-Ireland) and she cannot and should not be robbed of that. She simply adopted an Irish persona when necessary.

It is regrettable and ironic that Mr Mansergh actively helped to change the noble and generous aspect of the Irish Constitution which guaranteed the opportunity of citizenship to all people born here.

Jack Lane

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26 September 2007

Anglo-Irish writer was helpful to both countries

Notwithstanding the offensive campaign over many years by Jack Lane to blacken the memory of Elizabeth Bowen, the holding of a Trevor/Bowen weekend in Mitchelstown and the annual service at Farahy show that many people in north Cork appreciate the area’s association with a famous writer.

Having had the chance to consult a personal communication from Brian Girvin clarifying the part of the text of his book on Irish neutrality, I find I was understating the position in saying that the Irish High Commissioner in London, John Dulanty, had foreknowledge and approval of Bowen’s visits to Ireland (Letters, September 9).

According to Girvin, Dulanty pressed her case to travel and he was the person who suggested to Bowen that she offer her services to the Ministry of Information as an unofficial correspondent. The fact that she was sponsored by Ireland's chief diplomat in London — and her reports were helpful to the main cause of Irish neutrality as even Mr Lane acknowledges — blows all the hate-mongering charges of treason and espionage sky-high. “Unofficial correspondent” is a very accurate description of her work. Why not acknowledge in this era of excellent Anglo-Irish relations that she was helpful to both countries and that, in a sense, she was an agent of both?

Britain and Ireland were not enemies during World War II, which is the other false premise. Indeed, there was a considerable coincidence of interest, as evidenced by the close cooperation between the intelligence organisations in both countries and no obstacle was placed in the path of those who wanted to join the British or other forces.

Elizabeth Bowen declared herself as an Irish national, which she was entitled to do, and that was more than sufficient to make her so. Her choice of burial place in Farahy speaks for itself.

Dr Martin Mansergh TD

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8 October 2007

Britain and Ireland were best of enemies back then

DR MARTIN MANSERGH TD refers to a private communication from Brian Girvin as proof that Elizabeth Bowen's secret reports to the British government about Ireland during the war were not spy reports (Letters, September 26).

But a private communication is evidence of nothing.

The suggestion seems to be that Ms Bowen was jointly commissioned by the British and Irish governments to draw up these reports which the British government marked 'secret' upon receipt of them, utilised them, paid for them and destroyed them after World War II. And no copies have turned up in Irish archives.

If "Britain and Ireland were not enemies during WWII", as Mr Mansergh says, then when did they cease to be enemies?

Leaving aside the Six Counties, parts of Ireland were under forcible British occupation until the appeasement of 1938. The following year Ireland made preparations to meet England once again as an enemy. A British invasion was expected daily in 1940, as my father and many others could testify because they trained in the LDF to counter it. They were not expecting the Germans in north Cork.

And in 1945, the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, said it had been within his rights to occupy Ireland if he found it expedient. Elizabeth Bowen's espionage reports helped him to decide it was not expedient.

Mr Mansergh obviously thinks that present-day Britain would not be friendly with us if we tell the truth about the past. He may be right.

Mr Mansergh says that Ms Bowen's "choice of burial place in Farahy speaks for itself".

Her husband, Alan Cameron, who was certainly not Irish, had died at Bowenscourt and was buried at Farahy in 1952. The estate was lost a few years afterwards, including the house, Bowenscourt, which Virginia Woolf described as "a stone box".

More than 20 years later, Ms Bowen wished to be brought back to be buried with her husband and, if that was not possible, to be buried with her mother in England. Perfectly normal things to

wish for, i.e., to be buried with one of those she loved no matter where they were buried. A purely personal matter and not a political proclamation.

Mr Mansergh might stick to the facts of her life and leave her rest in peace in her afterlife. Or is nothing sacred in his fixation to renationalise Elizabeth Bowen?

Jack Lane

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8 October 2007

We don't need yarns about the past to maintain good relations now

I THINK it is not very becoming for an acclaimed legislator, Dr Martin Mansergh TD, to be so gratuitously rude to another correspondent, Jack Lane, who put his case on Elizabeth Bowen's reports on World War II in a very scholarly and objective manner (Letters, September 17).

Dr Mansergh, on the other hand, is now relying on a private letter from Prof Brian Girvin to make his case (Letters, September 26). Apparently, Prof Girvin made a case to Dr Mansergh that he omitted to make in his book on the subject!

Both seek to argue that the Bowen reports were really 'unofficial' and sponsored by the Irish High Commissioner in London, John Dulanty, simply because he was aware of her visits. But Dulanty encouraged anyone and everyone to visit Ireland and report on the feeling for neutrality to anyone and everyone who mattered in the British government in order to influence them against possible invasion. That was an essential part of his job at the time.

However, there is no proof whatever that he knew of, or was in

any way party to, the secret, paid and destroyed reports — and the necessary deception that Bowen engaged in during those years.

Dr Mansergh seems to think it is necessary for us to rewrite our history to preserve good relations between Ireland and Britain today. Why can't good history make for good relations? I think both countries and governments are robust and mature enough not to need yarns about their past relations — and espionage has always been a part of relations between them. Espionage is a normal part of government. Most of us have left the nursery.

As regards Bowen's wish to be buried at Farahy, surely that was a personal, and not a political, matter and it is rather perverse to use it to make a point about her activities during World War II.

Again, not very becoming of Dr Mansergh. I am disappointed.

Joe Keenan
15 Haywood Ave
Belfast BT73EU

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8 October 2007

Our benevolent neutrality tended to favour one side over the other

IN his letter (September 26), Dr Martin Mansergh says “Britain and Ireland were not enemies during World War II”. But that goes without saying since neutral Ireland self-evidently had no enemies.

Dr Mansergh observes that a “considerable coincidence of interest” existed between both states — hence shared intelligence, co-operation etc. Ireland then had its own limited, benevolent neutrality which essentially equated to non-

belligerence.

Witness the contrasting treatment of captured combatants. British captives were readily released while German prisoners were detained “for the duration”. In the end, they were delivered to the Allies to avail of ‘victor’s justice’.

J A Barnwell
5 St Patrick’s Road
Dublin 9

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9 October 2007

Writer’s wartime role: a question of sources

MARTIN MANSERGH (Letters, September 26) relies on (unquoted) help from Prof Brian Girvin in his efforts to prove that Elizabeth Bowen’s activities in Ireland during World War II were other than those of a patriotic British spy.

I listened to Dr Mansergh debate that period with Prof Girvin on RTÉ’s What If radio programme. At every turn, in my opinion, Dr Mansergh demolished the professor’s theses on Ireland and World War II. How can he now call on this source to support him in his debate with Jack Lane in your columns?

Conor Lynch
Carretera
Logrono-Mendavia
Viana
Navarra
Spain

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6 November 2007

Ill-founded vendetta against writer who did not betray her country

I AM not surprised that Jack Lane (Letters, October 8) is impervious to new evidence that his vendetta against the memory of Elizabeth Bowen is ill-founded. There is simply no answer to the point that a mission that had the prior approval and support of the Irish High Commissioner in London in June 1940 could not have been a betrayal of the interests of this country.

Conor Lynch (Letters, October 9) is quite right that I disagreed fundamentally on radio with the anti-neutrality thesis in Brian Girvin's book on the Emergency. That does not invalidate the information he has discovered in relation to Elizabeth Bowen.

Given Ireland was neutral in World War II, by definition Britain and Ireland could not have been enemy nations in that context. If only a British invasion was to be feared or guarded against, perhaps Jack Lane would like to explain why Eamon de Valera ordered the destruction of hundreds of files of the Department of External Affairs on May 25, 1940, for fear they might fall into German hands (Appendix 1 of Vol. 5 of Documents of Irish Foreign Policy).

Which country bombed the North Strand in Dublin and whose submarines sank Irish merchant shipping, with considerable loss of life?

If, nevertheless, Britain was, as alleged, the enemy, logically, does Jack Lane regret that Germany lost the war (as is hinted at in his North Cork Anthology)? I do not have to renationalise Elizabeth Bowen, as Jack Lane never succeeded in denationalising her. As for the plea to leave her to rest in peace, who started this correspondence by objecting to a weekend in

Mitchelstown being held in her memory? I share the view of many that it deserves to be cherished and vindicated.

Underlying all of this is a habit of old-fashioned ideological bullying, directed against a former ruling class that, post-independence, had become a vulnerable minority. It is exemplified in the belligerent comment in the North Cork Anthology that when Bowenscourt was destroyed and the foundations dug up, “the difference that made to Irish life was the addition of a good agricultural field”.

Jack Lane’s dismissal of Bowenscourt, the Bowen grave in Farahy and Anglo-Irish (i.e., Protestant) Dublin as “a little piece of the English home counties” can only be described as vicious caricature, far removed from any spirit of pluralism or reconciliation. It is telling that the ideology behind so clear a demarcation was a positive inspiration to David Trimble and unionism at their most hard line.

Dr Martin Mansergh TD
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

This correspondence is now closed — Editor

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Follow-up

11th November 2007

Dear Editor,

Closing of the correspondence with Martin Mansergh

I submit below a letter rebutting unfounded assertions made about me by Martin Mansergh in his letter of 6th November.

Namely the suggestion that I was a "positive inspiration to David Trimble" and that I wished Nazi Germany had won WWII.

These assertions do not form part of anything that was germane to the substantial issue in the preceding correspondence. They are entirely false, being the opposite of the factual truth.

I understand that every correspondence has to be ended by the Editor at some point but the correspondence cannot be allowed to end with lies told by one party against the other. If you had deleted these two references I would have no complaint. But you chose to publish them

If you do not publish my purely factual rebuttal you will be implicating yourself in the lies, and making it impossible for the matter to end there.

Jack Lane

Letter for publication

Dear Sir

Character assassination

You are of course entitled to close a correspondence at any point, but you are not entitled to introduce fresh allegations of a personal nature by one correspondent directed against the other when doing so. This is what you did on 6th November, when you

allowed Martin Mansergh to assert that I was a "positive inspiration to David Trimble" in his final sentence. That assertion is the reverse of the truth.

The Irish Political Review, in which my view of Trimble was expressed over the years, opposed him at every stage of his political career, from his Vanguard days to the time when as Unionist leader he was subverting the Good Friday Agreement from within, while being courted by Martin Mansergh and his colleagues.

This is on public record in scores of critical articles, especially during the years when Trimble was preventing the Agreement from functioning. Mr. Mansergh cannot produce a shred of evidence in support of the accusation which he throws out in his parting shot.

His other piece of lying character assassination is that I am a Nazi: "does Jack Lane regret that Germany lost the war (as is hinted at in his "North Cork Anthology").

Nowhere in the Anthology do I say anything which even malevolent misrepresentation could present as support for the Nazis in the war. And I am amazed that any reputable newspaper should give a politician space to assert that I did, and then expect to get away with "closing the correspondence".

Most of the other matters in the correspondence are matters of opinion. These are not. They are indisputable matters of fact.

Jack Lane

(Letter was not published)

Some other publications from the AHS

- A North Cork Anthology, *by Jack. Lane and B Clifford*
- Spotlights On Irish History, *by Brendan Clifford*
- The 'Cork Free Press' *by Brendan Clifford*
- Piarais Feiritéir: Dánta/Poems, *with translations by Pat Muldowney*
- Elizabeth Bowen: "Notes On Eire". Her espionage reports to Winston Churchill
- Kilmichael: the false surrender. A discussion
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- Extracts from 'The Nation', 1842-44
- Na h-Aislingí - vision poems of Eoghan Ruadh O'Súilleabháin *translated by Pat Muldowney*
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- The Battle of Crossbarry *by Eoin Neeson*

Orders to: jacklaneaubane@hotmail.com

Was Elizabeth Bowen a traitor or a spy in her
'activities' here during WWII?

Her activities must be described as one or the other.
This was the essential issue in a debate in *The Irish
Examiner* in late 2007 which was unfortunately cut
short by the Editor.

The debate is reproduced here with a commentary
on Mr. Martin Mansergh's contributions to that
debate.

ISBN 9781 903497 44 9

**AUBANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
2008**