



by Gordon
Craigie

Winston Churchill

My* Part in His Downfall!

EVERY time the state broadcaster or the Establishment-owned media comes up with yet another *Who is the Greatest Briton of All Time* cringe-fest, we should all know that the result is likely to be a foregone conclusion. In a variation on the famous quip describing football as being a sport where 22 players chase a ball for 90 minutes and, in the end, Germany always wins, most 'Great Briton' contests involve some patriotic (if you're English) debate about the merits of all the usual (English) suspects before concluding, once

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again, that the honour undoubtedly belongs to one great (English) man – Winston Churchill.

As evidence of the Anglocentric nature of any of these celebrations of great Britishness, consider as just one example the 2002 BBC series *100 Greatest Britons*. Out of that 100 only 10 are technically Scots – I say 'technically' since we're not likely to want to claim Tony Blair but his Edinburgh birthplace no doubt allows the British Nationalists to claim that a 10% representation is fair, so stop whingeing Scotland...! The top 10 are exclusively English with the first Scot in the list, Alexander Fleming, coming in at number 20 – apparently discovering penicillin and being awarded the Nobel Prize doesn't merit being ranked above Thatcher, various royals, a couple of Beatles

or... Michael Crawford??? It is an astonishing list, and well worth checking out. Anyway, Churchill came out top of the heap in the opinion of the great British public and, as we are being constantly reminded these days, *we must always respect the will of the people!*

So, when the Scottish Green MSP Ross Greer tweeted recently that Churchill was, in fact, a "white supremacist mass murderer", well, that was pretty much a case of 'light blue touch paper and retreat!' (Speaking of fireworks, Guy Fawkes made it into that top 100 in 30th position, ahead of John Logie Baird, Alexander Graham Bell, William Wallace, Robert the Bruce...) To be fair, Ross more than held his own in the ensuing stoochie when he was attacked mercilessly by a range of British Nationalist commentators/

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nomenities (delete as appropriate) despite being labelled, among other things, as a 'thick ginger turd'! But the main, balanced, takeaway from that particular episode was that Churchill is most definitely a figure who still divides opinion.

Churchill (or, to give him his full title so we're in absolutely no doubt about his entrenchment in the British Establishment, Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill KG OM CH TD DL FRS RAJ) was born into an aristocratic family in 1874 at their ancestral home, Blenheim Palace. He was educated at Harrow and Sandhurst before being commissioned into the British Army in 1895. Four years later he left the army to pursue his political and journalistic ambitions. He entered the Westminster parliament at his second attempt, in 1900, as the Conservative MP for Oldham, with his election expenses being paid by his cousin, the Duke of Marlborough no less. By the time the 1906 general election came around he had decided that he was more Liberal than Tory, possibly then as now difficult to tell the difference really, and was duly elected as a Liberal in the carefully-chosen safe seat of Manchester North West with his election expenses this time covered by his uncle, Lord Tweedmouth – hmmm, there's a pattern developing here. In 1908 he was promoted to the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade but, unfortunately for him, the 'law of unintended consequences' was to come into play. Under the regulations of the time, newly appointed cabinet ministers had to seek re-election at a by-election, which he then lost, ironically enough, to the Conservatives! According to Andrew Roberts in his book *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* his reaction to this defeat was quite stoical: "If I had won Manchester now, I should probably have lost it at the general election. Losing it now I shall hope to get a seat which will make me secure for many years." No hint of entitlement there then!

Churchill being carried on a chair into the Caird Hall in Dundee
© DC Thomson





Irish suffragette Mary Maloney rang her bell at every Churchill speech! © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans

Demonstrating the kind of opportunism that makes an absolute mockery of what the British Establishment term 'democracy', the Liberals quickly decided to award a peerage to their ailing Dundee MP Edmund Robertson in order to create a 'safe seat' for their rising star. So, the newly ennobled Baron Lochee dutifully shuffled off to the House of Lords and Churchill consulted his *Encyclopædia Britannica* to find out where exactly Dundee was... probably! Anyway, on 9 May 1908 he became the Liberal MP for Dundee with 44% of the vote on an 85% turnout, though it should be noted that the electorate at that time consisted only of male householders over the age of 21. Dundee had in fact returned only Liberal MPs since 1859 until a 'Labour Representation Committee' candidate had sneaked into second place in the previous (1906) election by around 700 votes. Prior to 1859 the MPs had been exclusively Whigs, essentially the forerunners of the Liberal Party, so it would seem that Dundee was rightly regarded as a relatively safe choice for a guaranteed shoo-in. In a letter to his mother Churchill described his new fiefdom as 'a life seat and cheap and easy beyond all experience'. Indeed! Churchill was re-elected in Dundee in 1910 (twice), though his share of the vote decreased on both occasions. He was promoted to Home Secretary before being appointed First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911, a position he was effectively dismissed from in 1915 on the insistence of the Conservatives as part of their conditions for agreeing to support the all-party coalition government during World War One. He remained an MP despite rejoining

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the army after his sacking, but in 1917 he was reappointed to the government as Minister of Munitions. As a 'new' ministerial appointee this, again, necessitated a by-election in Dundee which he won convincingly in a two-horse race. He was soon to be back in campaign mode again though as the 1918 general election, called immediately after the war had ended, saw the dawn of a new era in many ways. It was the first general election to be held on a single day (previously general election polling had been spread over several weeks), and was the first to be conducted with the extended franchise introduced by the Representation of the People Act 1918, which meant that some women, (those over the age of 30 classed as "householders, the wives of householders, occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5, [or] graduates of British universities"), and all men over the age of 21 were eligible to vote. Unsurprisingly perhaps, in the jingoistic aftermath of war, the prevailing Conservative-Liberal coalition was overwhelmingly endorsed, and Churchill was comfortably re-elected in Dundee as the Liberal Coalition candidate.

However, many of the policies which Churchill either supported, espoused or implemented were not those likely to gain great favour with the newly enfranchised electorate of Dundee once the realities of post-war imperialist Britain began to take hold. Notably the large Irish population were not impressed by his attitude to their homeland, and women had not forgotten that he had not been a supporter of their suffrage movement. Many Scots identified Churchill as being responsible for ordering British troops and tanks into Glasgow to quell the 'Battle of George Square' in 1919. Allied to this was the fact that he was never, outwith elections, to be seen anywhere near the city he supposedly represented – it would be fair to say that his 'seat for life' was on a shoochy peg, if you'll pardon the mixed metaphor.

In 1922, Churchill's re-election campaign in Dundee was to be hampered by his being carried around in a chair as he recovered from an appendix operation. Brian Cox, the Dundee-born actor, has related a story passed down by his uncle: As Churchill was being carried up the stairs to the Caird Hall, his uncle shouted to the four men carrying him, "How much did he pay ye?" When they replied, "A pound!" Cox's uncle came back with "I'll gie ye twa if ye drap him!" Professor Hugh Begg, a local historian, has researched the events leading up to this election and concludes, "In short,



Edwin Scrymgeour and his wife, Jeanette, leaving Dundee Railway Station for London. © DC Thomson

by 1922 Churchill's reforming zeal of the pre-war years, and the enthusiasm of the electorate for a war time leader had gone. They were replaced by much local bitterness and disillusionment with Churchill's record both as a member of the central government and as a largely absentee local Member of Parliament. Churchill's left-wing radicalism of 1908 had been transformed into the right-wing tendencies which were to characterise the rest of his long and turbulent political life. That was all to count against him in the general election of 1922.

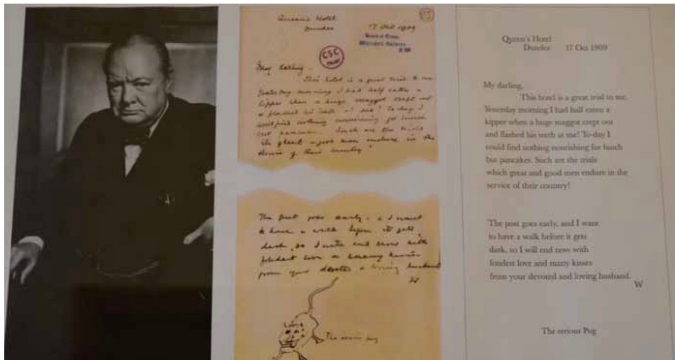
Now, you would think that perhaps with the people starting to see through the Liberal and Conservative dogma of the time a largely working-class city would be fertile ground for the socialist ideas of the Labour Party – stop laughing at the back! – but Dundee has always set itself apart from the rest of Scotland. Instead, step forward a socialist whose prime objective was the eradication of alcohol from society – Edwin 'Neddy' Scrymgeour. A pioneer of the Scottish temperance movement, Scrymgeour represented the Scottish Prohibition Party in Dundee parliamentary elections starting in the 1908 by-election when Churchill first appeared on the local scene. Starting from a lowly point – he gained 655 votes to Churchill's 7079 at that first outing – Neddy increased his share of the vote at each subsequent poll.

Despite having won five elections in a row, if Churchill felt comfortable in Dundee then he was seriously misjudging the situation. Even in 1908, each time he tried to campaign publicly, he would be followed around by a suffragette, Mary Maloney, who would ring a hand-bell constantly beside his podium as he made his speeches. Many of his actions as Home Secretary had not gone down well with significant sections of the Dundee electorate. For example, sending troops in against civilians, not only in the George Square incident but also against miners in Wales and carters and dockers in Dundee (his own constituency!), and ordering

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the 'Black and Tans' into Ireland. Add to this that he was rarely seen in Dundee, he never lived in the city, and was increasingly judged to be generally negligent in regard to his constituency, devoting all of his efforts to 'national' issues. In *The Scottish Historical Review*, historian Dr William Walker describes one interpretation of this disenchantment as being that some influential local figures felt Churchill "was born a Tory, is still a Tory, and will always be a Tory ... has done nothing for the working classes of Dundee [but] uses them for his own purposes". He also cites local union leader, John Sims, in describing Churchill as "one of the most dangerous men to the peace of the world", tallying with Scrymgeour's view that Churchill was "the man particularly associated with imperialism and war". And, to top it all off, Churchill managed to get himself on the wrong side of the influential DC Thomson owner, David Couper Thomson. This resulted in less than helpful coverage in both of the local newspapers, the *Dundee Courier* and the *Dundee Advertiser*, and then, as now, many voters would be guided by what they read in their paper.

Although the Dundee electorate had been increased by some 300% in 1918, this had not immediately affected voting patterns. By 1922 however, a perfect storm was gathering around Churchill. The



On one of his rare stopovers in Dundee, Churchill wrote home complaining about finding a maggot in his breakfast! Credit: Gordon Craigie

Irish community had turned against him, the lute workers and employers were not impressed by his lack of support for their industry, women had recognised his continuing disregard for their votes, and the population of Dundee had, in general, developed an awareness of international politics that was wary of Churchill's persistent imperialism. Scrymgeour, and the Labour candidate Edmund Morel, were to be the principle beneficiaries of this groundswell as being seen to offer more radical alternatives. That Ned was a born and bred Dundonian, a former Town Councillor, and a constant presence in the city in stark contrast to Churchill's absentee landlordism, was probably not insignificant either. On 15 November 1922 Edwin Scrymgeour was elected as Dundee's first choice MP with a 10,000 majority. Edmund Morel was also elected in second place and, adding further insult to injury, Churchill's National Liberal running-mate, David Johnstone, came third in the contest. Yes, the citizens of Dundee had consigned their sitting MP, the former Home Secretary, First Lord of the Admiralty, Secretary of State for War, and (then) current Secretary of State for the Colonies, to fourth place and, effectively, the dole queue!

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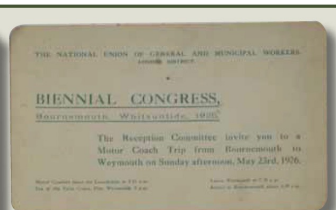
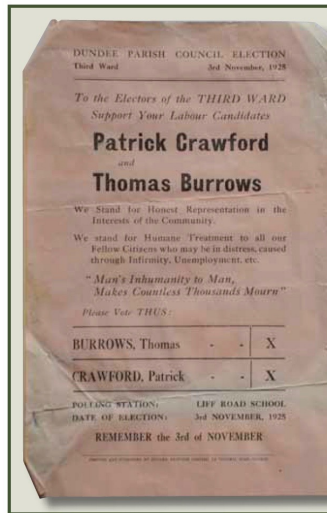
Churchill reacted to his defeat with all the class and dignity we should expect from a man of his privileged status in society, predicting that his departure would see the grass grow over Dundee's cobbled streets and that [its] industry would shrink and decay. Nice! In a more public display of nonchalance however,

he chose to comment that, "In the twinkling of an eye, I found myself without an office, without a seat, without a party, and without an appendix." Unbowed, the bold Winston regrouped and eventually found his way back into Westminster in 1924, this time as a 'Constitutionalist', in Epping. He would be re-elected in Epping in 1929, but not before rejoining the Conservatives in what was to be his final flip-flop on political allegiance. A flip-flopping Tory – who'd believe it? The rest of his political career, as they say, is history and well-documented elsewhere – this article contents itself with the fact that Dundee was 'well rid'!

One thing that Churchill apparently didn't have to contend with, as it appears to have happened during later Dundee elections, was a song in support of Neddy Scrymgeour. To the tune of *Tramp! Tramp!*, an American Civil War song later adapted by Irish nationalists (*God Save Ireland*) and also Andy Cameron (*Ally's Tartan Army*), children would sing in the streets:

Vote, vote, vote for Neddy Scrymgeour
 He's the man tae gie ye ham n eggs
 If ye dinnae vote for him
 We will pan yer windies in
 An ye'll never get the chance tae vote again!

To the victor, the spoils, and Edwin Scrymgeour remains the only Prohibitionist MP ever elected to Westminster. He served the city of Dundee as MP until 1931 when he was ousted by the magnificently named Dingle Foot as the Liberals mounted a comeback. There was more to Scrymgeour than simply his anti-alcohol, prohibitionist stance. Professor Beggs neatly summarises Scrymgeour's 1922 victory thus: "The local man the persistent, pacifist, prohibitionist, Neddy Scrymgeour had come top of the poll at his sixth attempt to become a Member of Parliament. It was said that his local support was so great that the hard-drinking voters of Dundee by then disliked Churchill so much that they trooped out of their public houses to vote for a man who supported the abolition of alcohol. Scrymgeour and the pacifist Morel had clearly benefitted from the growing support from trade unionists and others for the Labour movement in Dundee." Scrymgeour was indeed a true socialist and perhaps a man ahead of his time as he refused to compromise his beliefs by joining



Patrick Crawford memorabilia Credit: Gordon Craigie



Edwin Scrymgeour supporter's badge and rosette, worn at a General Election, 1928s

the mainstream Labour movement. Dr Walker argues that before World War One, "Scrymgeour had stood for justice for all ... after the war [he] staked his chances on such items as prohibition; adult suffrage; initiative and referendum; peace, arbitration and disarmament; and 'production for use instead of profit'." Sounds to me like the kind of politician we need now as much as we did then, though highly unlikely to be named in a BBC poll anytime soon!

Personal footnote... for any reader that is still wondering about the title of this article – what exactly is my part in Churchill's downfall? Well, I am proud to say that Edwin Scrymgeour's election agent during that momentous 1922 general election campaign was my Great Grandfather, Patrick Crawford. Patrick was a fervent trade unionist, attended the 1926 General and Municipal Workers Congress as a delegate, and stood as a socialist candidate for Dundee Parish Council. Through his political activities he became personally friendly with the then rising stars of the Labour Party – Nye Bevan, Jennie Lee and Clement Attlee, all of whom visited him at his Lochee home on several occasions. A lifelong advocate of Home Rule for Scotland I have no doubt that he would be similarly active in today's independence movement, horrified at what has become of the Labour Party, and proud that his home city of Dundee has acquired the nickname of Yes City.

And another thing... off the top of my head, here's a random selection of Scots who didn't make it into that BBC Top 100 Britons list: Robert Burns, Adam Smith, Mary Slessor, David Hume, Jane Haining, Andrew Carnegie, Jennie Lee, Keir Hardy, Mary Queen of Scots, Hugh MacDiarmid, Flora MacDonald, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Winnie Ewing, Thomas Telford, Mary Barbour...



Patrick Crawford and Jennie Lee Credit: Gordon Craigie