

CHAPTER TWO

A Company of Friends

Evelyn Wrench invited 15 friends to dine with him at the Marlborough Club on 28 June 1918, at which he proposed the formation of the English-Speaking Union.

Evelyn Wrench's memoirs record this occasion:

"Seated at the large round table were representatives of:

England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Victoria (Australia) and the British West Indies.

*The assembled company, despite a knowledge of the difficulties, were unanimous that the time was ripe for starting the movement. They promised their support."*¹

The Founding Members of the English-Speaking Union

Those present at this inaugural meeting were:

- Sir Algernon Aspinall (England/British West Indies)
- Mr. Boylston Beal (USA)
- Major General Ian Hay Beith (Scotland)
- Mr. John Buchan (Scotland)
- Professor MacNeile Dixon (Scotland)
- Reverend W. F. Geikie-Cobb (England)
- Sir Arthur Herbert (England)
- Mr. Francis Jones (England)
- Mr. James Keeley (USA)
- Sir George Mills McKay (Scotland)
- Mr. Henry Noyes (Australia)
- Mr. Francis E. Powell (USA)
- Mr. A. Lyle-Samuel (England)
- Sir George Sutton (England)
- Mr. Fullerton Waldo (USA)

Collectively, this group formed part of a network of supporters of an Anglo-American nexus – those of British origin linked to Evelyn Wrench and those of American origin linked to the Anglophile American Ambassador to the Court of St. James, Walter Hines Page.

Wrench's connections included colleagues who had worked with him in the Ministry of Information – Major Ian Hay Beith, John Buchan and

Professor Macneile Dixon; colleagues from the Overseas Club, founded by Wrench in 1910 – Francis Jones and Sir Algernon Aspinall; and Sir George Sutton, a press baron who had been introduced to Wrench by Lord Northcliffe, a newspaper proprietor and Wrench's peace-time employer.

Walter Hines Page's connections comprised high-profile Americans then working in London – Boylston Beal, Francis Powell, Fullerton Waldo and James Keeley.

Each of these founding members occupied prominent roles and boasted extensive personal and social networks through which they could influence decision-makers and public opinion about the desirability of a union of English-speaking peoples. Sutton was a newspaper proprietor; Buchan, Keeley and Waldo were newspaper columnists; Beith, Dixon, Buchan and Aspinall were popular authors; Beal and Herbert were diplomats; McKay was a leading City of London councillor; Geikie-Cobb was a leading clergyman; Noyes was a leading industrialist.

All were prominent in their fields of endeavour and all were committed to the cause of the unity of the English-speaking peoples.

Each one of this company of friends exercised influential roles in promoting the unity of the English-speaking peoples.

Sir Algernon Aspinall

Sir Algernon Aspinall was the British-born Secretary of the West India Committee from 1915–1929. The Committee was an English charity and a lobby group for British-based merchants and plantation owners with business interests in the Caribbean.

As part of his activities in promoting the West Indies in Britain, Sir Algernon Aspinall published popular guides to Guyana and the British Caribbean, including *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* (1907) and *The Handbook of the British West Indies and British Guiana and British Honduras* (1929).

Boylston Beal

Boylston Beal was a United States embassy official and private secretary to the United States Ambassador to Britain, Walter Hines Page. Beal was a proxy for Ambassador Page at the meeting.

Walter Hines Page

While US Ambassador Page did not attend the inaugural meeting in person, his influence was paramount.

Walter Hines Page was a seminal figure in the development of the English-speaking Union and promoted support for the idea among influential Americans.

Sir Evelyn Wrench in his autobiography revealed:

*"My idea of starting the English-Speaking Union took concrete shape from the day in February, 1915, on which I had a long talk with Walter Hines Page at the American Embassy in Grosvenor Gardens. Page was delighted with the idea and said, 'Once this darned war is over and I quit being a neutral, I will help you to get a million members for your show in the U.S.A. But while the war is on, my hands are tied. My job is to keep our folks in Washington quiet. They still do not understand that civilisation is at stake.' When I first met Walter Page nine years before and on subsequent occasions, he and his partner, F. N. Doubleday and I used to talk about the relations of the British Empire and the United States. Few men felt the importance of a frank Anglo-American understanding more deeply than Page. His services to the cause of English-speaking friendship cannot be over-estimated."*²

Page was a North Carolina-born American editor, publisher and diplomat. He was an editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and, with Frank Doubleday, founded the publishing house of Doubleday, Page and Company (later Doubleday and Company). Page actively supported Southern writers in the United States and famously promoted Thomas Dixon's works, which Doubleday published.

Page's publication of Dixon's works illustrates his influence on American popular culture and, through their common Southern connection and his support of Wilson's Presidential campaign, his influence on US President Woodrow Wilson.

Thomas Dixon's most famous work, *The Clansman*, was published in 1905, sold over three million copies and became the inspiration and source of the first movie blockbuster, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915.

When the movie was first released in 1915, Thomas Dixon's old college friend from John Hopkins University, Woodrow Wilson, was President of

the United States. As a result of this friendship, on 18 February 1915 *The Birth of a Nation* became the first motion picture ever to be shown in the White House. President Wilson commented after viewing the film: "It is like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is that it is all so terribly true."



Figure 2.1: Griffith's movie masterpiece, *The Birth of a Nation*.³

In the first two years of its showing, *The Birth of a Nation* played to an audience of over 25 million people in the United States. Estimates are that total box office revenue exceeded \$100 million. In fact, it was the first movie to earn the 'blockbuster' title.

D. W. Griffith was infuriated that he personally had to lobby government bodies like the Virginia State Legislature to allow the showing of his great masterpiece. He produced a mass pamphlet, entitled *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech*, which argued against attempts to censor his cinematic adaptation of *The Clansman*. This supposed "intolerance" (a word repeated throughout his pamphlet) toward Griffith's Confederate view of history was to become the subject of Griffith's next motion picture extravaganza, *Intolerance*.

As a result, D.W. Griffith can not only be credited with the creation of the first Hollywood blockbuster movie, but also with the first public campaign to enforce the free speech clause of the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Through the agency of Walter Hines Page, Dixon's literary work and subse-

quently the epic movie based on his work, influenced the American public.

Page, like Woodrow Wilson and Thomas Dixon, was also a graduate of John Hopkins University. All three shared a Southern outlook and sympathy and a common view about the need to respect the links with their English-speaking forebears.

Page actively supported Woodrow Wilson's presidential campaign in 1912.

A grateful President Wilson appointed Page the United States Ambassador to the Court of St. James in London in 1913. Page, an ardent supporter of Anglo-American unity, subsequently played a critical role in successfully advocating American entry into the First World War on the side of the British Empire.

Page's partner, Frank Doubleday, later became one of the governing directors of the ESU when it was formally established in the United States in 1920.

Page's successor as Ambassador to Britain, the Hon. John W. Davis, became the first Chairman of the ESU of the United States. The first President of the ESU of the United States was former US President William Howard Taft.

Page himself did not live to see the ESU established in his native America, dying in North Carolina on 21 December 1918.

Walter Hines Page is today still commemorated in the scholarship program run by the ESU of the United States to fund the continuing exchange of American and British university students. This scholarship was first established in 1923 to honour Page's contribution to Anglo-American relationships.

John (Ian) Hay Beith



Ian Hay Beith

Figure 2.2: Major General John (Ian) Hay Beith.⁴

Major General John Hay Beith is best remembered as a novelist, playwright and historian. He wrote his novels and plays under the pen name Ian Hay Beith.

Beith served as an officer in the British army in France, receiving the Military Cross in 1916. His war novel, *The First Hundred Thousand*, an account of the first 100,000 troops of General Kitchener's British Expeditionary Force in France, was a best-seller.

In 1917, he worked in the information section of the British War Mission in Washington, DC, reporting to Evelyn Wrench.

While in the US, Beith contributed a series of six articles to *The Times*. Under the title of 'The New America', written between 7–21 July 1917, they described American life and outlook for British readers. A second series of articles, 'America at War', appeared in March 1918.

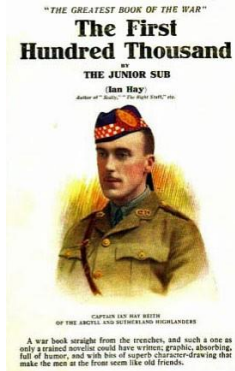


Figure 2.3: Ian Hay Beith's popular war novel, *The First Hundred Thousand*.⁵

John Buchan

John Buchan, 1st Baron Tweedsmuir, was a Scottish novelist, historian and politician who later served as Governor General of Canada.

Buchan embarked on a career in diplomacy and government after graduating from Oxford. In 1901, Buchan became the private secretary to Alfred Milner, then the High Commissioner for Southern Africa, Governor of Cape Colony and colonial administrator of Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In his memoirs, Buchan described his dream "of a world-wide brotherhood with the background of a common race and creed, consecrated to the service of peace; Britain enriching the rest out of her culture and traditions, and the spirit of the Dominions like a strong wind freshening the stuffiness of the old lands."⁶

On Buchan's return to London, he entered into a partnership in the Thomas Nelson & Son publishing company, becoming editor of *The Spectator*. In 1910, Buchan wrote *Prester John*, the first of his adventure novels, set in South Africa.

Buchan was also president of the Scottish Historical Society and a trustee of the National Library of Scotland.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Buchan wrote pamphlets for the British War Propaganda Bureau and worked as a correspondent in France for *The Times*. In 1915 he published his most famous work, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, a spy thriller set just prior to the First World War, later adapted for cinema.

Buchan was appointed Director of Information in 1917 under Lord Beaverbrook, and in that capacity worked closely with Evelyn Wrench.

In 1935, by then Baron Tweedsmuir, he was appointed Governor General of Canada.

Also in 1935 Alfred Hitchcock released the adaptation of Buchan's popular spy thriller, which screened as *The 39 Steps*. Buchan's book was coincidentally adapted for the screen by Ian Hay Beith, a fellow inaugural member of the ESU.

The British Film Institute recently ranked *The 39 Steps* as the fourth best British film of the 20th century.

Professor MacNeile Dixon

William MacNeile Dixon was professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Glasgow from 1904 until 1935.

Professor Dixon published popular and academic works of poetry, history, literary criticism and philosophy, and was one of the best-known British authors of his day.

He also worked closely with Evelyn Wrench at the Ministry of Information in 1918.

Reverend William Frederick Geikie-Cobb

Reverend William Frederick Geikie-Cobb was an Anglican priest and author, who wrote his famous religious work *Mysticism and the Creed* in 1914.

Reverend Cobb was notable for his preparedness to remarry divorced people in church, and was forthright in expressing theosophical ideas.⁷

He was also one of the few members of the Anglican clergy to voice the view that eugenics and religion were complementary concepts.⁸

Geikie-Cobb was educated at Trinity College, Dublin and was rector of St Ethelburga's Bishopsgate from 1900 until his death in 1941.

St Ethelburga's was a medieval city church, which survived the Great Fire

of London in 1666. The church was rebuilt in the 15th century and a small square bell turret was added in 1775.

Sir Arthur Herbert

Sir Arthur Herbert was a British diplomat who served as the first British envoy to the newly independent Norway, which in 1905 severed its long-standing union with Sweden and declared independence.

His grand title, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, befitted his arrival in Christiania (now Oslo) as the first foreign envoy to Norway, following its recognition by Britain as an independent state.



Figure 2.4: Norwegian independence postcard 1905, at the time of Sir Arthur Herbert's service as British envoy to Norway (translation: "Yes, we love this country!").⁹

One of Sir Arthur Herbert's earlier consular postings was with the British Embassy in Washington, DC.

Francis Jones

Francis Jones was the secretary of the Overseas Club in 1918.

With Wrench, he was closely involved in the club's campaigns to support the British war effort during the First World War by providing funds and supplies for British and Empire forces.

During the First World War, the Overseas Club's Tobacco Fund raised £1million for tobacco and other 'comforts' for British and Empire troops, bought 350 aeroplanes for the Royal Flying Corps and funded a hospital for flying officers.

James Keeley

James Keeley was a London-born American newspaper editor and publisher. He was managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune* from 1898–1914.

In 1914, Keeley bought two papers, the *Chicago Record Herald* and *Chicago Inter Ocean*, and named the combined paper the *Chicago Herald*. The *Herald* was subsequently bought by William Randolph Hearst's *Chicago Examiner* in 1918, and renamed the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*.

Keeley reported on the First World War from London and France, and was appointed the US representative to the Inter-Allied Conference on Propaganda in Enemy Countries in 1917–18.

Sir George Mills McKay

Sir George was a Sheriff of the City of London in 1921–22 and was knighted at Buckingham Palace in 1922.

The title of sheriff, or shire reeve, evolved during the Anglo-Saxon period of English history. The reeve was the representative of the king in a city, town or shire, responsible for collecting taxes and enforcing the law. The sheriffs collected London's annual taxes on behalf of the royal exchequer; they also had judicial duties in the city's law courts.

Two sheriffs were elected annually for the City of London by the Liverymen of the City Livery Companies, which comprised London's ancient and modern trade associations and guilds. It is customary for the Lord Mayor of London to have previously served as a sheriff.

McKay became the first Treasurer of the ESU in 1918.

Henry Noyes

Victoria was directly represented at the founding of the ESU in London by Henry Noyes, an English-born Melbourne industrialist.

During the war, Noyes's company supplied steel for the war effort.

Henry Noyes was a member of the Iron and Steel Institute of Great Britain, as well as being a member of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers and the American Institute of Mechanical

Engineers.

As Vice-Chairman of the Victorian Recruiting Committee, a body responsible for recruiting volunteers from Victoria to serve in the Australian forces in the First World War, Henry Noyes consulted closely with Sir John Monash, the Victorian-born Australian general who was himself an accomplished engineer.



Figure 2.5: General Monash, 1918.¹⁰

Noyes's presence in England in 1918 was directly related to his role in supporting Australia's war effort, assisting in campaigns to recruit further volunteers to join Australia's troops in France.

Under the heading 'Men urgently wanted for Australia's Army', newspapers in July 1918 reported that Mr. Donald MacKinnon, Australia's Director-General of Recruitment, had received through Mr. Henry Noyes a message from Sir John Monash, the general officer commanding the Australian Army Corps. The message, addressed to the people of Australia, read:

"The men of Australia, wherever and whenever they have entered this mighty conflict, have invariably brought the enemy to a standstill, and have made him pay dearly for each futile attempt to press them on the roads to Amiens and to the Channel ports. Their reputation as skilful, disciplined, and gallant soldiers has never stood higher throughout the empire than it does to-day. Those who are privileged to lead in battle such splendid men are animated with a pride and admiration which is tempered only by concern at their waning numbers. Already some battalions, which have made, historic traditions, have ceased to exist as fighting units, and others must follow unless

the Australian nation stands by us and sees to it that our ranks are kept filled. We refuse, to believe that the men and women of Australia will suffer their famous divisions today, or that the young manhood still remaining in our homeland will not wish to share in the renown of their brothers in France. Nothing matters now but to see this job through to the end, and we appeal to every man to come, and come quickly, to help in our work, and to share in our glorious endeavour.”¹¹

The association between an Australian industrialist of English birth with American industrial interests perfectly positioned Noyes to comprehend and support the aim of the incipient English-Speaking Union – to promote cooperation and understanding between the English-speaking peoples.

Noyes had professional and patriotic associations with both Herbert Brookes and Donald MacKinnon, both of whom featured as significant leaders in the formation and early development of the English-Speaking Union in Victoria.

Francis E. Powell

Powell was the Chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in London, and a friend of US Ambassador Page.

The American Chamber of Commerce occupied offices in Aldwych House in the Strand, opposite the site of Australia House, the Australian High Commission’s London premises. Aldwych House subsequently became part of the London School of Economics.

Alexander Lyle-Samuel

Alexander Lyle-Samuel was a Birmingham businessman, lawyer and Liberal member of the House of Commons.

He had travelled extensively in America, residing there from 1913 to 1915, when he returned to Britain to serve in the First World War.

In 1918, he was appointed Honorary Secretary of the English-Speaking Union soon after its establishment. He was 35 years old at the time he served as ESU’s first Honorary Secretary.¹²

Sir George Sutton

Sir George Augustus Sutton, Chairman of Amalgamated Press Limited, was a close friend of Lord Northcliffe, Wrench’s boss and a fellow press baron.

Northcliffe appointed Sutton as trustee of his estate in his will.

Amalgamated Press published a series of popular pictorial books about the First World War. Contributors to the series included H.G. Wells, David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

In his early years, Sutton had a diabolical appearance which gave rise to the nickname 'Satan'.¹³

Mischievous minds could accordingly legitimately contend that the inaugural meeting of the ESU had a distinct satanic presence.

Fullerton Waldo

Fullerton Waldo was a journalist on the staff of the *Philadelphian Public Ledger*, and a popular author.

In 1918 Waldo published *America at the Front*, about the role of American military forces in France in 1918.

From 1918 to 1921, former President William Howard Taft was also part of the *Public Ledger*'s staff as an editorial contributor. As mentioned previously, Taft was to become the first President of the English-Speaking Union of the United States.

When the ESU was initially being established in America in 1919, its head office was located in Philadelphia, Taft's home state.

The head office of the ESU of the United States moved to New York in 1920 with the official launch of the ESU of the United States.

Sir Evelyn Wrench – ESU's founding father



Figure 2.6: Sir Evelyn Wrench, the founding father of the ESU.¹⁴

Evelyn Wrench's career began as private secretary to Lord Northcliffe, a British press baron, and Wrench soon became editor of the overseas edition of the *Daily Mail*.

A 'Secret Society'

In 1906, Northcliffe sent Wrench to the US and Canada to study newspaper methods. While Wrench was in Canada, Earl Grey, the Canadian Governor-General and a Rhodes Trustee, shared a copy of Rhodes's political will and testament, with its vision of a 'secret society' to further the British Empire. In Wrench's words: "[I] determined then and there to devote my life to an attempt to give effect to Rhodes's idea, only I did not see any necessity for secrecy".¹⁵

The Overseas Club

Wrench launched the Overseas Club to promote Rhodes's vision. The objectives of the Overseas Club were: "to draw together in the bond of comradeship British citizens the world over; to render individual service to the British Empire; to maintain the power of the British Empire and to hold to its best traditions; to help one another".¹⁶

At the club's first meeting on 27 June 1911, Wrench spoke of "how largely the future of the world's progress lies in the hands of the Anglo-Saxon race".¹⁷

In 1912–13, Wrench undertook a world tour to attract support for the Overseas Club, covering 64,000 miles, and addressing more than 250 meetings. During this tour, Wrench visited Australia and made contacts who subsequently supported the establishment of Wrench's new organisation, the English-Speaking Union, in Australia.

The First World War

During the First World War, Wrench organised a campaign called the 'Overseas Aircraft Flotilla', gathering funds to purchase aircraft for the British army. This campaign resulted in the Overseas Club and Patriotic League presenting the Royal Flying Corps with 350 aeroplanes and seaplanes costing £278,630.¹⁸

Wrench also served as secretary of the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, which he formed in 1914 to fundraise among Britons who lived

in foreign countries.

In 1917, Wrench became deputy to Lord Rothermere at the Air Board and in April 1918, he transferred to the British Empire section of the Ministry of Information, working under press baron Lord Beaverbrook. One of the key aims of this ministry was garnering support in America for the war effort. Wrench now saw this as a vital role: "I recognised that the race centre of the English-speaking peoples was now on the North-American continent where two-thirds of its number were to be found".¹⁹

On 28 June 1918, he launched the English-Speaking Union. The first formal meeting of the ESU took place on 4 July 1918, a date chosen because of its significance as American Independence Day. Lord Balfour presided over this meeting.

The objects of the English-Speaking Union were set out in its original leaflet, published in July 1918:

"The English-Speaking Union aims at increasing the knowledge of one another possessed by the English-speaking peoples. The English-Speaking Union aims at no formal alliances and it has nothing to do with Governments, but is merely an attempt to promote good-fellowship among the English-Speaking democracies of the world. In their common language, common sympathies, common traditions and common ideals, the English-Speaking peoples possess a great common heritage, which nothing can alter. The sacred task to which we now set our hands is to perpetuate the existing sense of comradeship and brotherhood for all time.

*Practical Objects: To establish branches wherever the English language is spoken, with the view of promoting locally every movement which makes for the friendship of the English-Speaking peoples. To extend the hand of welcome in every country to English-Speaking visitors."*²⁰

In 1919, the ESU absorbed the Atlantic Union, founded in 1897 by Sir Walter Besant, to promote understanding and friendship between the peoples of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the United States of America.

Among the early vice-presidents Wrench recruited were Winston Churchill, who became the ESU's chairman in 1919, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, then assistant-secretary to the Navy who had been in Britain in 1918. As Wrench wrote in *The Story of the English-Speaking Union*:

"As soon as the British organisation was established, I wrote to various American friends, outlining the (ESU's objectives). Among these were the late Professor G L Beer author of the English-Speaking Peoples; Mr Sinclair Kennedy of Boston, author of the Pan-Angles; Mr F N Doubleday of Doubleday, Page and Co".²¹

Wrench met with US President Woodrow Wilson in the US Embassy in London in 1919. Wrench defined the ESU's purpose as "founded in no narrow attitude of race pride, in no spirit of hostility to any people. It does not aim at formal alliances, nor has it anything to say to the relationship of Governments. It is simply a movement to draw together in the bonds of comradeship the English-speaking peoples of the world".²²

Wrench remained secretary of the Overseas Club, which merged with the Patriotic League and became the Over-Seas League in 1919. Wrench remained editor of the ESU's London newsletter, *Landmark*, until the 1930s.

In his professional life, Wrench became a director of the *Spectator* magazine in 1923. In 1925, he bought a controlling interest in that magazine, which he edited from 1925 to 1932.

A New Movement

This gathering of friends led to the creation of a new movement, but the Pall Mall diners did not originate the concept of Anglo-American unity.

What impelled this idea of a union of English-speaking peoples and why did the idea garner such immediate support?

The following chapter explains the germination of this idea and identifies some of its influential public advocates in America, the British Isles, Australia, Canada and New Zealand in the 1890s and 1900s.

These advocates advanced the prospect of uniting the English-speaking race – the peoples who founded America, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Their ideas and ideals laid the foundations for the eventual formation of the English-Speaking Union.

Endnotes

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