

Pakenham, Francis Aungier ('Frank')

by Patrick Maume

Pakenham, Francis Aungier ('Frank') (1905–2001), 1st Baron Pakenham and 7th earl of Longford, writer and politician, was born 5 December 1905 at 7 Great Cumberland Place, London, the third of six children (and the second son) of Thomas Pakenham (1864–1915), 5th earl of Longford and 4th Baron Silchester in the UK peerage, and his wife Mary Julia (née Child-Villiers; d. 1933), daughter of the 7th earl of Jersey (her sister married the writer Lord Dunsany (qv)). Much of his childhood was spent at Pakenham Hall, Co. Westmeath, which he visited regularly throughout his life and which laid the basis for his strong emotional attachment to Ireland; when attending official functions in the African colonies in the late 1940s he recorded that the cordoned-off crowds reminded him of the childhood experience of sitting on the dais at the Dublin horse show near Lord (qv) and Lady Aberdeen (qv). He later claimed: 'There has never been a moment of my life when I was not proud of being an Irishman'; this statement was treated with some scepticism by his siblings.

Pakenham's father died in battle at Gallipoli on 21 November 1915. Pakenham's personality was deeply affected by his relationship with his mother, who suffered from ill health and showed a decided preference for her elder son, Edward Pakenham (qv). Edward subsequently made himself unpopular at school and university by outspoken advocacy of Sinn Féin and the Gaelic revival; Pakenham saw the experience of defending his brother as laying the foundation for his later Hibernophilia. The bulk of the family fortune went to Edward; Francis was brought up in the expectation that he would have to work for his living and might well never be in a financial position to marry. These prospects were eventually mitigated by an inheritance from his great-aunt and godmother Caroline Pakenham, who left him her country house at Bernhurst, Sussex, in 1938; after the second world war it became his principal residence.

Pakenham was educated at Furzie Close preparatory school, Hampshire, at Eton College (1918–23), and at New College, Oxford, where he took a first in greats (politics, philosophy, and economics), with a particular specialism in banking and currency, before studying for a law degree (1927–9). At Oxford he developed a close friendship with Hugh Gaitskell, and his inherited conservative beliefs were first challenged by his acquaintance with the future labour minister Evan Durbin. He also became friends with the Birkenhead family, whose politics were a brand of swashbuckling toryism; until Lord Birkenhead's death in 1930 Pakenham regarded him as a substitute father. After a brief and costly experience as a stockbroker in 1929, Pakenham became a Workers' Educational Association tutor in the Stoke-on-Trent district of Staffordshire. He had already come into contact with working-class living conditions through his favourite maternal uncle, the banker Arthur Villiers,

who founded and ran a youth club at Hackney Wick in the East End of London; the experience of living in the Potteries moved his views further to the left, though for some time he continued to believe inequality necessary to provide incentives for economic growth, and to hope that some form of 'tory democracy' committed to social justice could be developed. In 1930 Pakenham became a lecturer and politics tutor at Christ Church, Oxford. Between 1930 and 1932 he was a member of the Conservative Research Department established by Neville Chamberlain.

On 3 November 1931 Pakenham married Elizabeth Harman, a Labour Party activist, who later became known as a historian under the name Elizabeth Longford. He was further influenced by her left-wing views and by the acquaintanceship that he formed from 1932 with Éamon de Valera (qv). Having visited de Valera out of curiosity, Pakenham was impressed by his belief in a universal moral principle, and was distressed to discover that his conservative friends regarded de Valera with an unflinching contempt impermeable to reason. His lifelong friendship with de Valera, whom he thought the greatest statesman he had ever known (with the possible exception of Clement Attlee), puzzled some labour colleagues. It helped to inspire *Peace by ordeal* (1935), the standard scholarly account of the negotiation of the 1921 Anglo-Irish treaty, which was commissioned from Pakenham with the assistance of members of the Birkenhead family and which drew on personal contact with Austen Chamberlain and the papers of Robert Barton (qv). In 1938–9 Pakenham made several public statements against partition; after being barred from addressing a meeting at QUB he delivered a speech denouncing partition and anti-catholic discrimination at a meeting in Newry.

Pakenham finally joined the Labour Party after being beaten up at a Mosleyite fascist meeting in June 1936. In 1937 he became an Oxford city councillor, and as secretary of the Oxford City Labour Party he supported the leftist faction led by Sir Stafford Cripps in advocating a 'popular front'; although Pakenham believed that the Versailles treaty had been unjust to Germany (a view reinforced by analogy with his opinion of the Anglo-Irish treaty) from 1935 he grew increasingly convinced that war with Hitler was inevitable. In April 1939 Pakenham joined the 5th (territorial) battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire light infantry and was commissioned second lieutenant on the outbreak of war, but was invalided out in 1940 because of mental and physical ill health; he subsequently joined the home guard. During the remainder of the war Pakenham was a regular contributor to the *Irish Press*. In late 1939 he visited de Valera on behalf of the ministry of information in an attempt to secure the abandonment of Irish neutrality. Privately Pakenham regretted the Irish state's failure to join the struggle against fascism, while accepting de Valera's view that no other policy was possible under the circumstances. From 1965 he worked on de Valera's official biography (published 1970) with T. P O'Neill (qv), who did most of the research and writing; Longford's principal contributions concerned British politics and de Valera's spiritual life.

After a spiritual crisis in 1925 Pakenham maintained a determined but unspecific Christian belief. In 1938, seeking a more concrete faith, he began discussing religion with local catholic clerics, and the prospect of military service led him to seek formal instruction; he converted to catholicism in January 1940. His conversion was at least partly motivated by a feeling that catholicism was linked to Irishness and by his lifelong desire to identify with the poor and disadvantaged (as a child in Ireland he was taught to regard the local catholic church as ‘the dirty church’).

Between 1941 and 1944 Pakenham worked as personal assistant to Sir William Beveridge, and played a prominent role in publicising the 1942 Beveridge report on social insurance. After unsuccessfully contesting Oxford in the 1945 general election he was ennobled as Baron Pakenham of Cowley to strengthen Labour's representation in the upper house; his reluctant agreement was influenced by the increasing likelihood that he would inherit his brother's peerage and by the knowledge that his catholicism effectively excluded him from his long-standing ambition of becoming prime minister. Pakenham served successively in non-cabinet ministerial positions as lord-in-waiting (1946), under-secretary of state for war (1946–7), chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster with responsibility for the British zones of Germany and Austria (April 1947 to April 1948), minister for civil aviation (1948–51), and first lord of the admiralty (May–October 1951). In exercising his responsibility for post-war Germany, Longford's conciliatory attitude made a very favourable impression in Germany (he liked to present German politicians with copies of *Peace by ordeal* as a guide to the difficulties of peacemaking), and on leaving office he was elected chairman of the Anglo–German Association. De Valera later told Pakenham that he believed him well suited for the position on the grounds that as an Irishman he could sympathise with a conquered people; Pakenham initially travelled on an Irish passport until he was informed that such behaviour was anomalous in a minister of the crown. In 1949 he threatened to resign his ministerial post in protest against the Ireland Act's reinforcement of partition, but was dissuaded by John Dulanty (qv).

After a brief return to lecturing at Oxford, in 1955–63 Pakenham served as chairman of the National Bank; he was chosen because he combined an Irish identity with acceptability to the British establishment and availability for business in the bank's London headquarters. He renewed a long-standing interest in prison visiting and the causes of crime, publishing two books on this subject – *The causes of crime* (1958) and *The idea of punishment* (1961). In 1955 Pakenham co-founded and chaired a pioneering association for the care and rehabilitation of ex-prisoners, the New Bridge; the involvement in this organisation of several individuals who had become interested in prison reform while serving sentences for homosexual offences, together with Longford's motion in the lords in 1957 calling for the decriminalisation of homosexuality (which he nevertheless made clear that he regarded as a serious sin), gave rise to scurrilous rumours about the nature of his interest in prisoners and ex-prisoners. In 1960 he helped to negotiate a compromise over the ownership of the Lane Bequest paintings and received an honorary degree from the NUI.

In February 1961 Pakenham inherited the Longford title on his brother's death; the Irish property and family fortune passed directly to his eldest son, Thomas, to minimise death duties and because Longford saw himself as too old to begin a new life in Ireland. On the passage of legislation in 1962 allowing hereditary peers to disclaim inherited titles, Longford sought to leave the lords and return to the commons; further legislation would have been required to allow him to disclaim the peerage created for him in 1945, and the death of Hugh Gaitskell in 1963 removed the strongest backer for such a provision while simultaneously ending Longford's hopes of major office. On the formation of Harold Wilson's first government in 1964 Longford became lord privy seal and leader of the house of lords; but Wilson attached little importance to the lords and Longford did not, as he had hoped, receive a prominent role in coordinating policy and chairing cabinet committees. He rapidly came to be seen by his colleagues as an eccentric, with a habit of threatening resignation; in 1966 he annoyed his colleagues by appearing on the platform at the Dublin commemoration of the Easter rising. He was colonial secretary for three months in 1965–6, and was disturbed by the use of internment in Aden because it was reminiscent of Irish history. Again lord privy seal from 1966, he continued as leader of the house of lords. In February 1968 Longford finally resigned over the cabinet's decision, as part of a programme of economy measures, to postpone for two years (until 1973) the raising of the school leaving age to sixteen. He was proud of the Wilson government's penal reforms – including the abolition of capital punishment, a measure which he had long advocated – and its economic record, but he opposed some of the permissive legislation of the later 1960s associated with Roy Jenkins, such as the legalisation of abortion and the introduction of no-fault divorce.

Longford returned to working with New Bridge and founded a London-based agency for homeless youth (New Horizon). In 1971, after developing concern about some of the material produced by the relaxation of literary and theatrical censorship, he became involved with anti-pornography campaigners and put together a commission of inquiry with the aim of educating public opinion; instead, he was widely ridiculed as 'Lord Porn'. Although Longford's work helped to expose corrupt dealings between policemen and pornographers, and temporarily reduced the availability of some forms of pornography, it had little long-term impact on the growth of sexual permissiveness.

Between 1970 and 1980 Longford was chairman of the publishing firm Sidgwick & Jackson, remaining a director until 1987. He published numerous books, including three volumes of memoirs and a study of John F. Kennedy as a catholic statesman, which became a best-seller in Ireland but was received with hilarity elsewhere; in fact he preferred research and compilation to the actual business of writing. Longford continued to advocate Irish unity, and the prisoners whom he visited included many IRA members, but he outspokenly condemned the IRA's campaign of violence. He continued his prison visiting activities until the end of his life; he was sometimes (unfairly) accused of excessive attention to celebrity prisoners and (more plausibly)

of excessive credulity towards professions of repentance. His fond comments on the Kray brothers in *The grain of wheat* (1974) were widely criticised, as was his persistent campaign for the release on parole of the child-murderer Myra Hindley.

On the removal of most hereditary peers from the house of lords in 1999 Longford, as a peer of first creation, was given a life peerage. He died of heart failure at a London hospital on 3 August 2001. The Longfords had four sons and four daughters, including the historians Thomas Pakenham and Antonia Fraser.

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Francis Pakenham, *Born to believe: an autobiography* (1953); Francis Pakenham, *Five lives* (1964); Lord Longford, *The grain of wheat* (1974); Elizabeth Longford, *The pebbled shore* (1986); Mary Craig, *Longford: a biographical portrait* (1978); Peter Stanford, *Lord Longford: a life* (1994); *Who's Who* (2000); *ODNB*

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