

## CANTERBURY FASCISTS

Emblem of the  
British Union of  
Fascists



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*Note: 'We Marched with Mosley' refers to the authorised history of the BUF written at Mosley's request in the 1960s by Richard Reynell Bellamy, published by Black House Publishing in 2013.*

The British Union of Fascists, or BUF, was formed in 1932 by Oswald Mosley. It provided a focus for those with pro-German and anti-Jewish attitudes<sup>1</sup>, and built up a membership of over 30,000<sup>2</sup>. It was disbanded in 1940, when it was proscribed by the British Government<sup>3</sup>.

During the 1930s, a particularly active BUF group in Whitstable and Tankerton advertised whist drives, talks and marches<sup>4</sup>. Their activities sometimes strayed into Canterbury - two of their members were fined 2/6d each in 1934 for putting up BUF posters in Ivy Lane, Broad Street and Lady Wootton Green<sup>5</sup>. Lady Grace Pearson<sup>6</sup> organised a local group in Sandwich, based on her Elizabethan home Hollingbourne Manor. In Canterbury the BUF public meetings took several forms: When Oswald Mosley addressed a gathering in July 1937, disorder broke out and police were called<sup>7</sup>; a follow-up open-air meeting held outside Canterbury cattle market and addressed by Olive Hawks, Chief Women's Organiser, attracted a crowd of 'nearly three hundred' and went off peacefully<sup>8</sup>. Mosley returned the following year to address a lunchtime meeting at the Royal Fountain Hotel, sharing the platform with Lady Pearson<sup>9</sup>.

Official records released in recent years, including MI5 files<sup>10</sup> and the 1939 census<sup>11</sup>, tell us a good deal about Canterbury residents with fascist sympathies. Details follow for three of them<sup>12</sup> - Ralph Dawson, Richard Bellamy

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<sup>1</sup> the BUF magazine *Action* is clearly supportive of Hitler and Mussolini, and denigrates Jews (particularly 'Jewish financiers'), and black races; *Action* appeared weekly between 1936 and 1940; the staff at the Beane Library considered subscribing to *Action* but decided against; copies of *Action* and *Blackshirt* (not a full set) can be seen at the British Library

<sup>2</sup> estimates vary between 30,000 and 40,000; probably at its highest in the mid 1930s but dwindling in the lead up to WW2

<sup>3</sup> around 1,000 BUF supporters were arrested and interned without trial during the weeks following 18 May 1940 - numbers are disputed but a list was compiled by the Friends of Oswald Mosley (FOM) Society and issued in November 2008 - currently downloadable via <http://www.oswaldmosley.com/category/articles/>

<sup>4</sup> see Whitstable Times 23 December 1933 (Fascist local Weekly Orders); 6 January 1934 (letter column supporting Mosley); also 16 February 1935, 6 April 1935, and 26 October for whist drives and other activities

<sup>5</sup> *Whitstable Times* 3 March 1934

<sup>6</sup> see footnotes 11 and 17 below

<sup>7</sup> *Kent & Sussex Courier* 16 July 1937

<sup>8</sup> *The Blackshirt* 17 July 1937 p6

<sup>9</sup> *Whitstable Times* 25 June 1938

<sup>10</sup> Bellamy file KV 2/1748 (180 pages) and Dawson file KV 2/2970 (203 pages) both downloadable from *The National Archives* for a small fee

<sup>11</sup> the 1939 'census' was held 29 September 1939 to provide an administrative basis for rationing food, identifying those evading military service, and overseeing exercises of mass evacuation; it covered 41 million people of all ages; those serving in the forces were not included; known as the 'National Register', it can be viewed (with data suppressions to protect those who could be living) via the *Find My Past* website; fees apply

and Alfred Smith. These were detained under the new Defence Regulation 18B. This gave the Home Secretary powers to keep individuals suspected of being Nazi sympathisers in internment. There was no normal process of trial, courts, weighing of evidence, rights of appeal, etc.

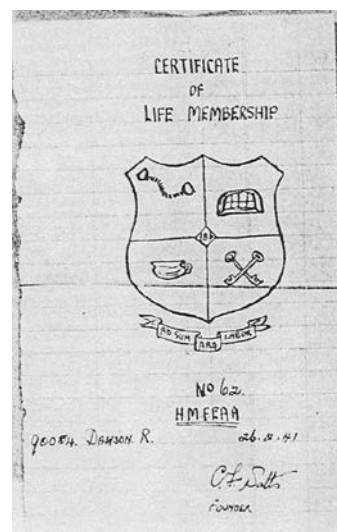
**Ralph Murrell Dawson** (1904-1983) was several things - an antique dealer, an occasional actor, a soldier manning anti-aircraft guns in Kent, and a fascist. He joined the BUF in 1939, having met Lady Grace Pearson<sup>13</sup>, leader of the Sandwich branch of the BUF, as a client. He lived in Tudor House in Palace Street with his artist wife Phyllis<sup>14</sup>, and ran his antique business from there. MI5 were well aware of his pro-German and anti-war views before he applied to join the 138th Battery as an anti-aircraft gunner. They reasoned that, under surveillance, his presence would help them flush out other fascist sympathisers in the unit. Within weeks, Dawson was distributing copies of the fascist magazine *Action*, inviting colleagues to celebrate German war victories, and generally promoting the views of Oswald Mosley. In May 1940 he was interned in a camp on the Isle of Man as a fascist sympathiser, his army file marked 'SNLR' or Service No Longer Required. Police found in his wallet a certificate of membership of the HMFEA Association, 'Hail Mosley Fight 'em All'. In some versions the 'Fight' was apparently substituted with a more robust word with the same initial letter. Heraldic devices consisted appropriately of handcuffs, prison window bars, gaol keys and chamber pot. His MI5 file is annotated 'a self-satisfied embittered man'. In May 1941 Dawson was temporarily released as a result of the hiatus following the Bentinck Budd decision<sup>15</sup>. After a brief stay back in Canterbury, during which he repeatedly publicly aired his defeatist views on the war, he was (in early June 1941) detained under a fresh Detention Order. He was, however, released on compassionate grounds by the Home Secretary in March 1942, to be with his dying mother in Finchley. This decision ran counter to all the advice from MI5, camp staff and the police. He spent the remainder of his life unnoticed, with occasional acting engagements, and died in Canterbury in 1983 aged 79.



Ralph Murrell Dawson<sup>16</sup>  
'a self-satisfied embittered man'



the Tudor House in Palace Street



Dawson's HMFEA membership card

<sup>12</sup> news reports also refer to the arrests in Canterbury in June 1940 of Harold Elvey (of 26b Artillery Street, East Kent bus driver born 1910); also 'a soldier and a woman in St Dunstan's Street'

<sup>13</sup> Lady Pearson was sister of Lord Croft, Under-Secretary for War, and there were press suggestions that she should be interned - see *Western Morning News* 12 July 1940

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis A Smith was an artist - she married Ralph Dawson in 1931, Hendon Registration District

<sup>15</sup> Bentinck Budd (KV 2/2312) was released from Defence Regulation 18B detainment in May 1941 following a legal challenge in the form of a writ for Habeas Corpus; a judge ruled that the original reliance on an omnibus order was illegal

<sup>16</sup> this copy of Dawson's passport application form appears in KV 2/2970

**Richard Reynell Bellamy** (1901-1988)<sup>17</sup>, joined BUF in December 1933 and two years later became a paid official<sup>18</sup>, rising to the rank of National Inspector, leader of the Canterbury group and election agent for Lady Pearson. He'd also had a mixed career, including spells with the Royal Irish Constabulary, British Red Cross, as a farm hand, as a seaman, writer and (in Australia) work on a sheep farm and on a cotton plantation. At the time of the 1939 census he lived at the party offices and bookshop at 6 St Alphege Lane with his wife Hilda and their three children. Police raided this address (and others) in early June 1940. At 6 St Alphege Lane they seized correspondence, files, membership cards, diaries, and a German dictionary. They also arrested Richard Bellamy and, after a short spell in Walton Prison near Liverpool, held him in a camp on the Isle of Man. He was released in July 1941 and seems to have retained his fascist opinions but had no active role on the political scene. Bellamy titled his autobiography '*Memoirs of a Fascist Beast*'. He also, in later life, and at the request of Mosley, wrote an authorised history of the BUF. He died in Stevenage in 1988 aged 87 years<sup>19</sup>.



Richard Reynell Bellamy  
wrote '*We marched with Mosley*'



BUF shop and office was here in 1939  
(6 St Alphege Lane)

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<sup>17</sup> according to *We Marched with Mosley* and 1911 census, born to a Manchester family of eight children - father born in Brazil but with British parentage, General Export Merchant; mother's family were closely related to major local trade and commerce

<sup>18</sup> Bellamy's high standing in the BUF was confirmed in May 1937 when 'pressures from concealed sources' on BUF financial backers led to a massive loss of income; paid staff were reduced from 140 to 101 and Bellamy was one of only two Inspectors to survive - see *We Marched with Mosley* p133

<sup>19</sup> Lady Pearson outlived both Dawson and Bellamy in years - she was 92 when she died in London in 1972

**Alfred Smith** born 1910<sup>20</sup> was arrested with Bellamy and Dawson on 3 June 1940, and all three went initially to Walton Prison near Liverpool. Known as 'Smithie', Alfred had served in the Army Service Corps from May 1915 until the end of the First World War. During 1925 to 1940 he had been licensee of the King William IV pub in Union Street. He and his family were instructed by the brewers (apparently following an order from the Home Office) to leave their home at a few days' notice. As a result, Alfred Smith was staying temporarily at 6 St Alphege Lane on the day of the Canterbury arrests. Despite his internment, there does not seem to be an MI5 file on him.



the pub in Union Street in June 2001<sup>21</sup>



now converted to student accommodation

One feature of the legal processes surrounding Detention Regulation 18B cases was the guarantee of anonymity to all informants. This inevitably encouraged snooping on workmates, acquaintances and neighbours, some of which was later shown to be malicious or simply absurd. A Mrs Robert Burk, living in Herne Bay, was surprised when police demanded to search her home. They seemed pleased when they found a paper message referring to 'back Italian' - surely evidence of a seamstress running up black shirts for BUF members. It turned out that 'black Italian' was routinely sold by a local draper as an effective black-out fabric. One anonymous informant had been over-zealous in their patriotism.

DRL 9 January 2016

<sup>20</sup> most of the little known about 'Smithie' is based on Bellamy's *We marched with Mosley*

<sup>21</sup> taken from <http://canterburypubs.co.uk>