

When English Won the World

1. President Ann, distinguished guests, friends one and all.
2. I thank you Ann for inviting me to deliver this annual Churchill lecture. It is an honour and privilege to follow in the footsteps of so many eminent Queenslanders, including Justice Logan last year, Professor Rolly Sussex the year previous and in the years past the Chief Justice and the Governor. I am delighted to accept this invitation to deliver this annual address.
3. The theme of tonight's conversation requires a journey through British history and a study of its major historical events. Churchill, in his four volume *History of the English Speaking Peoples* divides British history into time periods and these are broadly adopted and include the 622 years from 1066 until 1688: the defining 127 years from 1688 until 1815 and the period thereafter. I have examined some of the major events during these periods to answer the question, when did English win the world.
4. The question requires a consideration of when the seeds were planted that resulted in the germination and growth of a language that ultimately flowered and dominated. It is not a consideration of when and why Britain became a dominant economic or military power.

Churchill

5. Before I begin this conversation, I congratulate the English Speaking Union for dedicating its annual lecture to Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, the most significant and esteemed British Prime Minister of the twentieth century.
6. Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire on 30 November 1874, the son of Randolph Churchill and his American wife, Jennie Jerome. He was educated at Harrow and Sandhurst and entered the British army at age 21 years. He served in campaigns across the globe but his habit of linking his military career with journalism was disapproved by Lord Kitchener. Eventually, he resigned from the army, became a correspondent during the Boer War and later entered politics.
7. If I jump nearly four decades, and after Germany invaded the Low Countries on 10 May 1940, Churchill became the head of a coalition Cabinet. In his first speech as prime minister he delivered a sober and honest expectation of the future. He said: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."
8. In their darkest hour, he inspired and gave strength to a nation and urged his people to stand firm against tyranny. His dogged and inspirational leadership in the face of a large, well trained and organized enemy was one of the reasons why the English speaking people prevailed in their finest hour.
9. He also received international recognition for his authorship of many books, including his *History of the English Speaking Peoples*. A wonderful legacy to the English speaking world.

10. To begin this lecture, I wish to refer to a quotation written by a distinguished author and historian. He wrote about a British Prime Minister and said that he had: *designed and won a war which extended from India in the East to America in the West. The whole struggle depended on the energies of one man. He gathered all power, financial, administrative, and military in his own hands. He could work with no one as an equal.* The question I raise is: who was the author and who was he referring to.
11. At a personal level, I have a keen interest in British history but with a genealogical twist. When I read about an event in English history I ask the question – were my English forebears involved, what position did they take and what is the evidence of their involvement. These questions can probably be asked by each and every one of you here tonight! This helps to explain why I am wearing this replica General's coat. I will come to this issue later.

1066-1688

12. The first 622 year period began in 1066 with William the Conqueror's arrival. This iconic event in English history had a detrimental effect on the development of the local language as the Normans introduced their own language that was spoken in the Royal Court for hundreds of years.
13. Other major events came and went such as the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, the Battle of Agincourt in 1415 and the Hundred Years War with France. The Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, a date considered to be the end of medieval and the dawn of modern Britain, ended with Henry VII defeating Richard III and the beginning of the prosperous and romantic Tudor period.
14. This Tudor period coincided with the discovery of the Americas, the invention of the printing press, and the Reformation and growth of protestant churches. It was a period when the Spanish and Portuguese dominated the exploration and exploitation of the new world and they became the dominant European powers. This dominance was expressed in the 1588 attempt by Spain to invade England with their armada of ships.
15. After the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 the Stuart dynasty began. This tumultuous seventeenth century started peacefully but the period witnessed religious conflicts, the settlement of the Crown colonies in North America by religious people seeking to establish a puritan utopia, the execution of King Charles I in 1649 and the civil war.
16. If one moves forward to the revolution of 1688, the year the catholic King James II fled England and the parliament invited the protestant William and Mary of Orange to sit on the throne of England. This revolution established two important principles: the separation of church and state, and the subservience of the crown to parliament. These principles are equally applicable today as they were then and were arguably the reasons why the revolution in France did not spread across the channel.
17. At the time of this great revolution, English was spoken in Britain, Ireland and a few small colonies scattered on the east coast of America. Compared with French, it was a minor language.

Spain and Portugal had been in permanent decline, China had not awakened from its dark ages and the Ottoman Empire was crumbling.

1688 – 1815

18. The second period from 1688 until 1815, a period Churchill described as the age of revolution, was evidenced by three revolutions: The revolution in England of 1688, the US War of independence in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789.
19. This period witnessed dramatic change. The institutions such as the Bank of England, the East India Company and their National debt were blossoming. Britain was becoming a commercial nation reliant on overseas trade rather than a class based agricultural community. Money rather than land was becoming the index of wealth and the industrial revolution was taking hold. In England the construction of canals, the Enclosure Acts, the movement of people from rural areas to the cities and the growth of a consumer, commercial and money class were all making an impact. By comparison, France did not enact the Enclosure laws, remained predominately an Agrarian Society and had not developed a significant commercial class.
20. This second period witnessed the Jacobite wars. The exiled James II with the support of the French King Louis XIV and their allies sought to reinstate a catholic king in Britain. Many of the wars over the next fifty years were motivated by this objective. The battle of the Boyne in Ireland in 1689 and Culloden in Scotland in 1745 were battles fought for this reason. They were European battles fought on Irish and Scottish soil and they had no bearing on the spread of the language.

The Seven Years War - the first real World War

21. The second period also witnessed the first true world war. A life and death struggle between the French and the English speaking people for world dominance. It was France's desire to defeat Britain in Europe, to invade Britain and install a Jacobite crown and finally to knock them out of the colonial race in America.
22. This struggle between the French and the British was fought in almost every part of the globe, in Europe, India, Africa and America. It had two main theatres, called the Seven Years War in Europe and the French and Indian War in America. They were fought for different reasons, at different locations though at the same time. It was the first true world war.
23. Churchill in his third volume of his *History of the English Speaking Peoples* dedicated a chapter to this 1750s war under the heading, The First World War. The road leading to the supremacy of the English language was built during this war. The one year that is more important than any other was 1759, one very successful year and the year English won the world.
24. This conflict in the new world was the defining event that determined the dominance of the language. It is the period I wish to concentrate on. However, before I do so I wish to provide a brief account of the war in Europe.

25. It is often incorrectly stated that first true World War began on 28 July 1914 with the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the heir to the throne of Austria and Hungary by Yugoslav nationalist Gavrilo Prinap. This murder triggered the many alliances that had been signed decades earlier and started a terrible conflagration that did not end until 11 Nov 1918. But it was not the First World War.

On the continent

26. I will quickly give a brief outline of the war in Europe, as France believed it would win the war in the colonies by firstly defeating Britain in Europe, by invading the British homeland and installing a Jacobite crown. This was their plan.
27. To begin with, I should note that the names and boundaries of the European countries in the eighteenth century bear little resemblance to the names and boundaries of today. Prussia, Saxony, Bohemia and Hanover were separate countries and it was not until 1871 that they and others were unified under a German banner. As the family of George II, the King of England was Hanoverian, Britain and Hanover were close allies and British troops were stationed there.
28. Like most wars of the time, it arose out of the claims and counterclaims over disputed territory and the alliances formed. Britain had been allied to Austria, and the Austrians wanted British help to recover Silesia from Prussia. Britain refused. Austria approached its long term enemy France for assistance and consequently Britain formed an alliance with Frederick the Great of Prussia called the Westminster Convention. This change was happily accepted in London.
29. Before the war, the island of Minorca was British. They sent a fleet under Admiral Byng to Minorca to protect it from the prying French. When Byng and his fleet arrived the French were already in port and after a short battle Byng withdrew the fleet to Gibraltar and Minorca was lost. Byng returned to London with his ships, was court marshaled and executed by firing squad for “not doing his utmost.”
30. The war in Europe exploded when Frederick the Great of Prussia attacked and overran Saxony, an Austrian ally and then attacked Bohemia. Within a short period Prussia was being attacked on four fronts: Austria from the south, France from the west, Russia from the east and Sweden from the north. Britain bound by its treaty was reluctantly forced into the war on the Prussian side.
31. The British troops defending Hanover were overwhelmed by the French forces. The Duke of Cumberland (The King’s son) surrendered and signed a treaty with the French, but this treaty was criticized in London and eventually revoked.
32. At this time, the French had prepared detailed plans to invade Britain, plans authored by the French Chief Minister, Duc Choiseul. They had planned to send 50,000 troops across the channel on flat bottom boats, land them in Portsmouth and the invasion be supported by the French Navy and a Jacobite rebellion in Britain. The flat bottom boats were stationed at Quiberon Bay and the French Atlantic navy was anchored at Brest.

33. The French were keen to force a quick victory against the Prussians so they could reassign the troops for the British invasion. France speedily captured the strategic town of Minden as a necessary prerequisite for an attack on Prussia and Hanover.
34. At this time, the war for Britain was performing very badly, partly because of a lack of political leadership and direction from London. In 1754 the Duke of Newcastle became the Prime Minister. Newcastle was a supporter of the European war and was criticized by the bullish, William Pitt, leader of the Patriot Party. The need for change was evident. In 1757 in a political masterstroke, a partnership was formed between these two protagonists, Newcastle became the head of the administration but Pitt became the Secretary of State and War Minister and gained control of military strategy. He became the Prime Minister.
35. It was Pitt who gave the war direction and strength, and within a short period of his involvement the course of the war changed. He appointed new and aggressive generals and resourced them appropriately. His obsession was to defeat France in North America and India, though Newcastle and King George II were still keen to first win in Europe.
36. William Pitt was originally opposed to the European war but eventually realized that this theatre tied down French troops that could have been sent to the colonies.
37. William Pitt, or Pitt the Elder and in terms of the spread of the English language, is the greatest British leader of them all. He was Britain's greatest asset during the Seven Years War even though his aloofness and arrogance alienated many. He bragged '*I am sure that I can save this country and that nobody else can.*'
38. In 1759 three major battles in Europe were defining.
 - a. On 1 August 1759 the decisive European land battle was held. The British and its allies under General Brunswick began an offensive to retake Minden. They quickly broke through the French lines, forced them to retreat and the French ultimately abandoned any further attempts to overtake Prussia.
 - b. More significantly, the French plan to invade Britain was finally abandoned after two famous naval battles, both in 1759. France had two fleets, the Toulon Fleet in the Mediterranean and the Brest Fleet in the Atlantic and it was planned that these two fleets were to rendezvous in the Atlantic in preparation for the invasion. The British spies discovered this plan, and consequently, the British Navy attempted to blockade the French navy and prevent them from leaving port.
 - c. The British Admiral Boscawen was detailed to watch the Toulon fleet in the Mediterranean. In August 1759 he caught them slipping through the Straits of Gibraltar and after a short chase destroyed five vessels and drove the rest into Cadiz Bay and they were blockaded for the rest of the war.
 - d. More significantly, on 14 October 1759, the French navy was ordered to leave Brest and join up with the troop ships in preparation for the invasion. The patrolling British

Admiral Hawke saw the French ships and ordered a pursuit. Fortunately for the British, a wild, violent storm intervened and the French ships were forced to race towards Quiberon Bay for protection against the storm. The Royal Navy attacked and the French fleet was destroyed and Quiberon Bay became an English Naval Station for the rest of the war.

39. The complete victory of the British in Europe smashed the French plan of defeating Britain at home before they dealt with the colonies. If the French plans had succeeded, the war in the colonies and the spread of the language could well have turned out differently.

On the American frontier

40. The French were the first Europeans to settle in Canada and by the 1750s they had taken a dominant position both in Canada to the north and Louisiana in the south. The British, though greater in population were confined to the eastern seaboard and they were agitating to expand westward into the American interior.
41. The territory most prized was Ohio, country claimed by France.
42. In 1753 the French sent an expedition south from Montreal and began constructing forts on the Ohio River. The British feared that if the French could link Canada with Louisiana in the south any expansion west by the English speaking people would not be possible and the British would be confined to the coastal strip and westward expansion would be blocked. Ohio was extremely important strategically.
43. In response, the British sent an expedition to establish a fort at the confluence of two rivers, known as the “Forks of the Ohio” under a young officer named George Washington. The French had arrived earlier and established nearby Fort Duquesne, later named Pittsburgh after the Prime Minister. After skirmishes, Washington was forced to surrender.
44. The French continued to expand into the Ohio region and this encouraged the British Government to respond with greater force. In 1754 General Braddock was sent from England to establish English authority west of the Alleghenies and to dislodge the French. This new forces was also defeated near Fort Duquesne and Braddock was killed.
45. The position in the colonies became dire for the British. Their communities lay vulnerable to attack down the Hudson Valley; their Forts on the Great Lakes were defeated; they lost the battle of Fort Oswego and lost Fort William Henry. Louisburg, a strategic town located on the mouth of the St Lawrence River was pivotal and the British attempts to take it failed.
46. The war in North America had reached a stalemate. France held the majority of the territory, including Ohio but they were not strong enough to defeat the 13 British colonies. The English speaking peoples were confined to the coastal strip.
47. After William Pitt came to power, the British sent resources and the shift in power was immediate.

48. In a three prong plan they sought to take Fort Carillon, Fort Duquesne and Louisburg:
- a. In 1758 the French were driven out of the contested Ohio and they abandoned Fort Duquesne leaving the British in control of the Ohio River Valley.
 - b. After a long siege in 1758, Louisburg in Nova Scotia finally fell and this paved the way for the British advance on Quebec in 1759.
 - c. The French still had its successes as they defeated Abercrombie's much larger force in its attempt to take Fort Carillon. A victory short lived.
49. However, it must be repeated that 1759 is the year of miracles for the British; it is the year of *Annus Mirabilis*.

In Canada

50. In July 1759 General Ahmerst defeated the French at Fort Carillon and also at Fort Niagara gaining a frontier to the Great Lakes.
51. The most significant event was General James Wolfe's victory over Marquis de Louis Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham just on the outskirts of Quebec City. Quebec was strategically constructed on the almost impregnable heights overlooking the St Lawrence River. The British were searching for a weakness in the French defences and they located a narrow track up the slopes of the heights to the plains. Late on a dark night in September 1759, the British army landed with equipment and climbed the steep slopes and the poor French must have had heart failure when they awoke early in the morning to see the red coats all standing in formation on the plains adjacent to the city. Wolfe won the engagement and both leaders died in the encounter.
52. The following spring the French unsuccessfully tried to retake the city and a British victory was made complete when Montreal was taken that year.
53. In September 1760, surrender terms were negotiated and all the French possessions in Canada were ceded to the British. America was made safe for the English

West Indies and Africa:

54. In 1758 the British Expedition under Pergrine Hopson sailed from Portsmouth for the French West Indies. They first failed in an attempt to take the rich sugar producing colony of Martineque, but succeeded in taking Guadeloupe, a jewel in the sugar producing crown.
55. In Africa the British won the French trading stations of Fort Louis on the Senegal River and Goree,

India

56. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century the French, Dutch, Portuguese and English vied for control of the various trading posts in India. The Europeans raised trading companies and for the British it was the East India Trading Company.
57. The Indian states generally aligned themselves with either Britain or France. In Calcutta the Nawab of Bengal supported the British but when his son *Siraj ud-Daulah* came to power, he supported the French and resented the British presence. In 1756, the Nawab's troops stormed the British, Fort William and captured the city. Later they confined a large group of British citizens into a small guard room and many died, and this tragedy became known as the Black Hole of Calcutta – an expression that reverberates to this day.
58. In response, the British hero in India, Colonel Robert Clive and his army arrived from Madras and liberated Calcutta. Then in June 1757 at Plassey, the Nawab led a force of 50,000 troops against a smaller Anglo-Indian force under the command of Clive and the locals were routed.
59. Following Clive's victory, the French dispatched forces to India to help protect its interests and to challenge the British claims. In December 1758, a large French force descended on and laid siege to Madras, one of the British headquarters. The force of 8,000 French soldiers far exceeded the 4,000 British defenders in Fort St George. After a 3 months siege the French abandoned the siege when reinforcements under Colonel Clive arrived.
60. Over the following months Clive attacked and defeated the French Trading Posts and captured the French Fort at Pondicherry. Finally the French were driven out of Bengal and eventually they departed India.
61. When Clive sailed to England in the 1760s, Britain was the dominant European power remaining in India and this dominance led to the British Raj many decades later. It was a term of the Treaty of Paris that the French possessions in India were to be returned to them but they again never exercised significant power in India.
62. On the subcontinent today, the population is multi-lingual. However, English is the dominant second language and it is the common link between the many divergent communities across the country who have other languages as their first language. The seeds for the dominance of the English language in India stems directly from the military victories in 1759.

Spain

63. Spain was alarmed by the 1759 British successes and entered the war against them. Britain declared war on Spain in January 1762 and won the battles to gain Cuba and the Philippines and others.

Treaty of Paris

64. The war in America ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 10 February in 1763. The British gained Canada, the islands in the West Indies, India and parts of Africa from the French, and Cuba and Manila from the Spanish.

65. Surprisingly, the French attached very little value to its American colonies and they regarded the sugar islands of more significance. The effect of the treaty was that the sugar islands were returned to France but Canada and all of America east of the Mississippi were ceded to the British.
66. The Spanish territories were returned and Spain traded Florida for Cuba, so Florida came into British hands. Spain gained Louisiana including New Orleans from France as compensation for its losses but later it was transferred back to France. It was retained by them until 1803.

Consequences of the War

67. Pitt had won Canada and destroyed the French dreams of French colonies stretching from Montreal to New Orleans. The British now had control of all Canada and the Americas to the east of Mississippi.
68. However, the Seven Year's War was extremely expensive for both France and England. They both were on the verge of bankruptcy and the seeds were planted for two revolutions: the American War of Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789
69. The war had doubled Britain's national debt and to raise funds the British parliament introduced the Stamp Act 1765 that resulted in riots in the streets in America. British troops were used to quell the disturbances and eventually, with the assistance of the French, the colonies achieved independence in 1776.
70. For France the military defeat and the financial burden of the war weakened the monarchy and contributed to the French Revolution of 1789 when the principles of equality, liberty and the rights of man were proclaimed.
71. Even though it was not occupied by many French people, the vast areas of land to the west of the Mississippi River were claimed at times by Spain and after the turn of the century it was claimed by France. In 1803 the US Government paid \$50m francs plus cancelling debts for this territory, about 15% of modern day United States. This transaction, known as the Louisiana Purchase, removed the final hurdle for the westward expansion of English speaking people to the Pacific. The French would never have sold this vast area of land to its old enemy Britain but it was happy to do so to the United States.
72. A dramatic consequence of the Seven Years War was the almost total destruction of the influence of the French speaking peoples in America and the commensurate increase in influence of the English speaking people. The British were now unfettered in its march westward to the Pacific. The inevitable growth in population and economic power of the United States had the consequence that the English language became dominant

1815 and thereafter

73. If I can comment on 1815, the end of Churchill's second period, a time when Britain had just experienced two great military successes against France. The sea battle by Nelson in his ship the *Victory* at Trafalgar in 1805 and ten years later the defeat of Napoleon by Lord Wellington and his allies at Waterloo. They were great military successes but the battles had no bearing on the spread of the English language in Europe. If Napoleon had won at Waterloo, the French tri-colours would still not be flying on the Tower of London as he had still not defeated Britain on its own soil. Also he had not defeated the Prussians, Austrians or Russians in their own backyard. By 1815, the French had long departed the colonies and the seeds for the spread of English had long been planted and were beginning to bloom.
74. If I jump to the third period for a moment. If Germany had won WWI or WWII the supremacy of the English language in world affairs would not have changed very much. English would still be spoken in North America and in all the former British colonies. In Europe, German may have become the second language but English would have remained dominant elsewhere.
75. In summary, the important year is 1759, when Britain defeated France in every quarter of the globe. It is the year English won the world.
76. The quote that I mentioned earlier was written by Churchill and it was describing William Pitt, the Prime Minister who did more than anyone to help English win the world.

Genealogy

77. In the mid-seventeenth century, my Sheaffe forbears were puritan migrants to Massachusetts. In 1688 when the revolution was taking place in England, members of my family were baptizing their children in the Puritan Church in Charlestown. Two generations later, they were present in Boston when the Seven Years War broke out. During the period when the 1765 Stamp Act was being introduced, my direct forbear, William Sheaffe was the Deputy Commissioner for taxation in Boston. He was caught up in the controversy as he was required to enforce its provisions. His eighth child, Roger was born in 1763. The family was royalist during the war of independence and when Earl Percy arrived in Boston in charge of the British troops he resided for a time with the Sheaffe family. Lord Percy took a liking to young Roger, and took him back to England and funded his education in a military academy and purchased his commissions. In time, Roger became a General in the British Army and was posted to Canada to help resist an American invasion in 1812. He resisted the Americans at the Battle of Queenston Heights on 13 October 1812 and was made a baronet.
78. For the bicentenary of this battle in 2012, we were invited to Canada for the celebrations. The Sheaffe family in Australia transferred the General's memorabilia to the Ontario Government and I was invited to deliver lectures to community groups on a pre-arranged lecture tour and a replica coat was presented to me for this purpose. I am wearing it tonight.

Stephen Sheaffe