Mary Soames: Patron, Mentor, Friend 1922-2014

Guns of August: World War I
Centenary 1914-2014

Pol Roger: A Churchill Tradition

Exclusive: Young Winston at Harrow, 1889-1892

Published by The Churchill Centre • www.winstonchurchill.org
You may wonder why she is not on the cover. Well, we chose this particular cover with her in mind; it would greatly appeal to her. But our dear friend Lady Soames, who died peacefully at 91, surrounded by her family, at 8:35 pm on May 31st, deserves more than a hastily concocted cover. She deserves a special edition of *Finest Hour*, and that is what she shall have, issued between our summer and autumn issues. I say this notwithstanding that I can hear her now: “Really, dear, you are going way O.T.T. [over the top]—it’s silly to make a fuss.” Never mind, Mary, we are going to make a fuss.

Barbara and I knew her since 1983, when she attended her first Churchill Tour, which began at the Churchill Hotel, London. She soon became Patron of the International Churchill Society, now The Churchill Centre, replacing Lord Mountbatten, who died in 1979, the victim of assassins. From then on she was our constant correspondent, frequent companion at conferences and tours, sometime houseguest, loyal critic, decisive mentor and personal friend. There is no one outside our own family whom we loved more, and her loss removes one of the things that make life worth living.

What her special edition will contain may not be known until we sign off on the final proof, but we do know that the thoughts of any friend of hers are most welcome. Email rlangworth@winstonchurchill.org or send by mail to the address on page 4.

What will we say in the first-ever special edition of *Finest Hour* that the world will not have said by the time it appears, we trust in time for her memorial service? Notwithstanding what she meant to Chartwell, the National Trust, the Churchill Memorial Trust, the Churchill Archives Centre and the National Theatre, we will concentrate on what we know best, the memory of her parents, because that is the mission, the role she saw as uniquely ours to play: never going “O.T.T.” with praise, but striving, as she often reminded us, “to keep the memory green and the record accurate.”

I am pleased whenever a *Finest Hour* reader refuses to declare what Churchill would do nowadays, because that was her commandment. “We don’t know, do we?” she would say. “Whenever someone announces what he would do today, I always reply: ‘How do you know?’”

To reflect on what she meant to that splendid memory, and to us, will be work aplenty, and that work begins now, so you will have to excuse me. I would however like to mention here the words of my friend Larry Arnn, President of Hillsdale College, publisher of the official biography and for forty years a fellow “toiler in the vineyard,” in Martin Gilbert’s phrase: “She knew how to be the daughter of a great man. She did this by being a good person.” To that I would only add that in doing so, she achieved greatness herself.

—Richard M. Langworth, Editor
Guns of August: World War I Centenary 1914-2014

On the centenary of Armageddon, given the bellicosity for which he seems forever remembered, it is appropriate to recall Churchill’s intense efforts to keep the peace, and to save the world from an act of self-immolation.

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COALITIONS
At random I opened my copy of the new document volume of the Official Biography, Testing Times: 1942 (FH 162: 8), to page 357, and a 6 March 1942 letter from Averell Harriman to President Roosevelt: “It is curious how, when criticism starts, a coalition government suffers from lack of party loyalty and support.” I think that is remarkably apposite in Britain at the moment!

DAVID BOLER, TONBRIDGE, KENT

NEW ZEALAND ISSUE
I just wanted to say what a superb production FH 161 is in all respects, and to thank you. Special praise to Charlotte Thibault for the cover: strong, visually arresting and appealing. She is clearly a designer of exceptional talent.

MIKE GROVES, AUCKLAND, NZ

HYBRID OR AMPHIBIAN?
Amazing! You and your authors carried off an issue on Churchill and New Zealand that works, and works well. Reading the Pacific War Council minutes, I was struck by the differences between Australians and New Zealanders in the policy statement of 1942-43. The Aussies almost formally declared they were depending on the U.S. for defense. Not so New Zealand, which Churchill saw as a “strong, loyal, positive and uncomplaining supporter,” in Mike Groves’s words. I do suspect that “uncomplaining” was the key virtue!

Granted, the Japanese threat brought American forces to protect New Zealand, but Prime Minister Fraser never threatened to call back his troops from the European theaters, as did Curtin in Australia. Instead, as Gerald Hensley astutely notes, Fraser gently and persistently pushed for Churchill to allow NZ to work more closely with the Americans. Even when his parliament wanted to bring a NZ division back from North Africa, Fraser managed to get both Roosevelt and Churchill to ask that the division stay—and his parliament agreed.

Perhaps most important in this issue are the reminders that New Zealanders fought as loyal members of the Imperial military forces throughout the North African and Mediterranean campaigns. The Australian war museum outside Canberra depicts the carnage among their forces during both World Wars, which struck me with the sense of anger and betrayal that Australians had for Britain. I’ve not been to New Zealand, but after reading FH 161 I very much doubt that such a display exists there.

Reading the postscript about the postwar years, I could only muse that, in hindsight, the not-so-great ANZUS alliance, and the flails over making NZ nuclear-free, turned out to be much ado about nothing.

Reading your statement that in combining enterprise and government New Zealand “may well be the outstanding model,” I wonder if size had anything to do with it—only 4.5 million people. But no: Canada, while vast, has only 35 million, though it too is a pretty good model. What about homogeneity—which is what makes the Swiss “model” work? No, only 70% of Kiwis are of European descent, about 15% are Maoris, the rest Asians and Pacific Islanders. That’s a hefty pile of minorities. So assuming your statement is correct, what is the key? Geographic isolation? Almost no wars (except civil against the Maoris some time ago)? But does isolation breed democracy?

You have once again demonstrated that FH is a remarkable hybrid that manages to combine anecdotes and reminiscences with solid research-based history presented in a palatable, readable form, rather than dumbing it down.

WARREN F. KIMBALL, JOHN ISLAND, S.C.

Editor’s response: Maybe more than hybrid? Or in Churchill’s words, counting both the digital and text editions, “The Great Triphibian”?

CHURCHILL AND HOLLAND
Thank-you for the “fine tuning” that you gave to my two articles in FH 161. I received from Dan Myers my author’s copies and sent one to Harry van Wijnen in Amsterdam, who was pleased with our review of his book. I also liked your article on New Zealand and the large Dutch emigration that played a continued on page 62...
Denmark Remembers
BLADON, MAY 4TH— In the annual Holger Danske Clubben ceremony, Claus Grube, Danish Ambassador to Britain, laid a wreath in commemoration of the Danish Resistance and in thanks to Winston Churchill for Denmark’s liberation. The short service, organised and attended by local British Legion groups, gave thanks for “all those who served in the Resistance and other Forces...for the life and memory of Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, who led the free world in the fight for peace during the Second World War.” —Robert Courts

Getting to Chartwell
WESTERHAM, MARCH 20TH— Chartwell opened today and through November 2nd, although the studio, exhibition room, gardens and estate are open throughout the year. Opening times are Wednesday through Sunday from 11am to 5pm, with the last house admission at 4:15 pm. Entry fees (house and gardens) are £12.50 adults, £6.25 children, £31.25 family. Visitors may opt for a small premium, “Gift Aid on Entry,” which is a donation. For the gardens and studio only, entry is £6.25 adults, £3.10 children and £15.60 family. There are no guided tours (although guides are present to help), but there is a reduced group rate of £10.70 adults for house and gardens. Telephone (01732) 868381.

By road, Chartwell is two miles south of Westerham on the A25, accessed by M25 junctions 5 and 6. We often receive queries about getting there by rail and bus: Sevenoaks Station is 6.5 miles away, Oxted Station 5.5 miles. Buses run only on Sundays and national holidays: from Sevenoaks, take bus Southlands 401. Alas, the Chartwell Explorer coach from London no longer runs.

Rail users tell us the best connection from London is out of Victoria Station using trains such as the Capital Coast Express, marked “to East Grinstead and calling at Oxted.” Though only a mile closer than Sevenoaks, Oxted is less congested, making for a cheaper taxi fare. Talk the cabbie into picking you up for the return drive to Oxted at a set time. The last person we heard from said the fare each way was around £12-15.

“Iconic” Departure
LONDON, APRIL 2ND— Churchill’s 1941 journey to the USA to meet Roosevelt for the First Washington Conference, code name Arcadia, has been featured in the top ten “iconic departures” of the last 100 years by the British public. This comes as Heathrow Airport announces the hundred most “iconic departures” from Britain to destinations abroad over the last century, by plane, train, boat or car. “Iconic” is a modern fad-word we shun here, but that is what they call the award.

Marriage Exemplars
LONDON, APRIL 18TH— Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, praised the marriage of Winston and Clementine Churchill. In criticising the “couple’s policy,” which can cost married Britons up to £7000 per year in taxes, he cites the Churchills as a model: “They were together for fifty-six years and remained deeply in love. [WSC] once said: ‘My most brilliant achievement was my ability to be able to persuade my wife to marry me.’ He knew marriage was central to a happy life....My wife and I are fast catching up to Winston and Clementine, with nearly fifty-four years on the clock. We, too, need no convincing that marriage is the absolute heart of human love and the building block of society. In saying this, I am not condemning other forms of family life, but I am firmly convinced that marriage is the best and most stable of all.” >>
Britannic Graffiti
Frinton, Essex, February 24th—A professional graffiti artist has created a tribute to Churchill at Frinton railway station. David Nash spent four hours painting a massive mural of Sir Winston. He was commissioned to create the piece by “Frinton in Bloom,” as part of an ongoing bid to boost the image of the station. It is Nash’s second work for the station.

Another Churchill
London, May 20th—Oscar-winner Jim Broadbent will portray Winston Churchill in an eight-part “West Wing”-style television series portraying, day by day, the events leading to World War II. Screenwriter Shawn Slovo has written a pilot episode and mapped other programmes for the as-yet-untitled show. The programmes will show how Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made Churchill First Lord of the Admiralty (the second time he held that post), and how he and Churchill (and other Ministers) clashed over wartime strategy. Behind-the-scenes deliberations between Churchill, top government officials, armed services departments and diplomats, and all the minutiae of taking Britain to war, will be explored.

Irish Troubles, 1943
Dublin, May 20th—Churchill was “disproportionately obsessed” with the possibility of security leaks from Ireland as D-Day approached, said Professor Eunan O’Halpin at a D-Day Colloquium at Trinity College Dublin. He had to be reassured frequently that there was no danger.

USS Winston S. Churchill
NORFOLK, MARCH 3RD—Past and present crew members, friends, and family were on hand as Cdr. Christine O’Connell of Houston assumed command of the 10,000-ton guided-missile destroyer from Cdr. Chris Stone of Duncanville, Texas. O’Connell, a 1996 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, had served as the ship’s executive officer for the last twenty months, and will command the ship for about eighteen months.

“Few crews are more dedicated or more accomplished than these extraor-
Churchill’s formula of Magnanimity in Victory.’ So I bought the donuts (Krispy Kreme, of course—much superior to Tim Horton’s).” Oh dear, another controversy started—there he goes again. —Thanks for this to Ryan Vigil.

Winston Walker

KILMARNOCK, SCOTLAND, APRIL 9TH—Johnnie Walker celebrated Britain’s Winston Churchill Day by creating a limited edition Red Label bottle and a commemorative Johnnie Walker whisky cocktail, the “Winston Walker.” Twenty bespoke bottles celebrated the man, with illustrations and quotes on the traditional square bottle. Churchill usually drank Johnnie Walker well diluted with water or soda. The Winston Walker is a blend of Johnnie Walker Red and soda, with British beer and a touch of marmalade. Exclusive to thebar.com, the ingredients are inspired by 1940s Britain.

The Winston Walker Recipe: 60ml Johnnie Walker Red Label, 40ml Spitfire beer, 15ml lemon juice, 10ml sugar syrup, 20ml soda, one tbsp marmalade, one cinnamon stick. (1) Fill a shaker with ice. (2) Using a jigger, measure Johnnie Walker Red Label, lemon juice, sugar syrup and marmalade into the shaker. (3) Shake until cold or until the surface of the cocktail shaker feels chilled. (4) Strain into a short glass. (5) Using a jigger, add beer and soda to the glass and stir thoroughly until well combined. (6) Garnish with a cinnamon stick.

Spitfire, made in Kent, is labeled the “Battle of Britain beer,” but if you can’t find it try any hearty British ale; make ours Newcastle Brown.

Hugh Lunghi

LONDON, MARCH 14TH—The loss of Hugh Lunghi severs the last link with a participant in the Big Three conferences at Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam. Those who attended ICS (UK)’s annual general meeting at Sandhurst in 2006 will have heard the riveting talk by this genial man who was one of Churchill’s Russian interpreters at meetings with Stalin in all three conferences, as well as in Moscow.
When the Soviet Union was attacked and became an ally, the British established a military mission in Moscow. Hugh was assigned to this outpost, whence his top-level existence began. At Yalta, it was Hugh Lunghi who personally informed the Russians of the Anglo-American agreement to their request to bomb Dresden. His description of eyeball-to-eyeball contacts with Stalin should be essential reading for anyone trying to write an accurate history about the Soviet dictator. Hugh is an irreplaceable loss to all who met and admired him. Dead at 93. R.I.P. —PAUL H. COURTENAY

Quiz to Website

Readers may wish to note that the “Churchill Quiz” Department has been transferred to our website, where it will continue to challenge erudite Churchillians. Our thanks to James Lancaster for his many installments herein, along with his predecessors, Curt Zoller and Barbara Langworth.

Jock VI at Chartwell

WESTERHAM, KENT, MARCH 10TH— A promise made to an aging Sir Winston was honoured when a kitten was given a home at Chartwell.

For his 88th birthday in 1962, Churchill was given a marmalade cat named Jock after one of his private secretaries, Sir John “Jock” Colville. The cat was so dear to Sir Winston that it was rumoured that meals would not start until Jock was at the table. Sir Winston and his family requested that after his death there should always be a marmalade cat named Jock, with a white bib and four white socks, resident at Chartwell. The National Trust, which was left the property in 1966, has always honoured the request and this month welcomed Jock VI, a seven-month-old rescue kitten.

Jock VI, or “Malley” as he was previously known, was rescued by Croydon Animal Samaritans before being adopted by Chartwell’s house and collections manager, Katherine Barnett. Trust officials said he takes afternoon naps, eats tuna and lounges on Persian rugs. Chartwell has a green cat-flap, approved by an historic buildings inspector.

“Jock VI has had a difficult start to his life, but as the saying goes, a cat will always land on its feet,” says Ms. Barnett. “I’m delighted with Jock. He’s a very caring, loving cat and I think our visitors will get lots of enjoyment from seeing him around the property for many years to come.”
Anna Nikolic, a trustee and senior fosterer with Croydon Animal Samaritans, said: “We’re delighted to have found such a loving home for Jock and know Katherine and the team at Chartwell will provide for all his needs. We hope to give all our rescue cats this happy-ever-after ending, and would encourage anyone looking for a family cat themselves to get in touch with us.”

The new cat’s predecessor, Jock V, left Chartwell when its owner, the former house and collections manager left. A Trust spokesman said: “The pair had such a close bond, they stayed together and are both now living in the Scottish countryside.”

—MATTHEW HOLEHOUSE, DAILY TELEGRAPH

Errata, FH 161

Page 5: We misquoted the Duke of Windsor’s unintended insult. The correct wording is: “...thank-you so much for sending me a copy of your latest book. I have put it on the shelf with all the others.” Reader Mark Epstein wondered if the writer was not the Duke of Gloucester, as stated by William Manchester (Last Lion, vol. 2) and Sarah Churchill (A Thread in the Tapestry). Our information comes from Lady Soames and Anthony Montague Browne. (The book, by the way, was one of the Marlborough volumes in the 1930s.)

On the evidence, we believe that the writer was the Duke of Windsor, not Gloucester. It is only fair, however, to quote the Duke’s rather more positive letter upon receipt of his copy of Churchill’s Arms and the Covenant in August 1938 (Churchill Papers 1/324): “It was unpacked and placed in a bookshelf, and it was only on taking it out to-day that I discovered you had, as usual, signed this copy for me. I therefore apologise sincerely for the delay in writing to thank you for the book, and assure you I shall lose no time in reading it.”

Churchill’s “Naval Holiday”: His Plan to Avert the Great War

JOHN H. MAURER

In the spring of 1914, Winston Churchill’s arms-control initiative was, in the eyes of the German government, nonsense. As the war that broke out that summer would show, Berlin would have better served its own interests and the well-being of the German people had it worked with Churchill, rather than thwarting him.

Mr. Churchill: “I want 2 to 1.” Admiral Tirpitz: “Well, I’ll make it 16 to 10.”
Mr. Churchill: “Right, I’ll take you.” Leonard Raven-Hill in Punch, 19 February 1913.

Winston S. Churchill is best remembered as a valiant leader in times of war. He should also be remembered for his efforts to prevent the catastrophic great wars that would dominate and scar the history of the 20th century. While largely forgotten today, on the eve of the First World War Churchill made a remarkable and persistent attempt to halt the head-to-head competition in naval armaments that was turning Great Britain and Germany into adversaries.

In a bold and unconventional initiative as First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill publicly invited Germany’s rulers to take a “holiday” from the competitive building of battleships, on three separate occasions before 1914. Behind the scenes, he pressed for negotiations, with this proposal as the starting point. It was Churchill’s earnest hope that the Naval Holiday would stop the action-reaction dynamic of the arms race—what statesmen of that era called “the sea war waged in the dockyards.”

Dr. Maurer is the Alfred Thayer Mahan Professor of Sea Power and Grand Strategy at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and the author or editor of books examining the outbreak of the First World War, military interventions in the developing world, naval arms control between the two world wars, and Churchill’s views on British foreign policy and grand strategy. A longer version of this article appears in the Naval War College Review, Summer 2014.
than Britain and Germany being arrayed in opposing camps, he wanted to promote cooperation between Europe’s two leading powers.

Churchill’s advocacy of a shipbuilding pause generated a great deal of commentary and had an extended life. But Germany’s rulers were ranged against the proposal, along with many in Britain—opposition leaders, a hostile press, and even members of the government. The Tory opposition labeled Churchill’s plan unworkable, while Britain’s foreign-policy decisionmakers also stood against arms-control negotiations with Germany. It is interesting that the same establishment which would deride Churchill’s calls for disarmament in 1912-14.

The noted historian A. J. P. Taylor believed that “probably only Churchill took it seriously,” but the Naval Holiday was viewed quite soberly by Germany’s leaders. The German ambassador in London, Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky, reported that Churchill “meant the Naval Holiday to be taken completely seriously and he considered the idea as entirely practicable.” Churchill realized that major impediments stood in the way. Nonetheless, he argued that it was “a profound British interest to procure a halt” in the arms competition.

Germany’s Quest for Naval Parity

Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty on 25 October 1911, when the rise of what Germans called their “High Seas Fleet” posed an immense threat to Britain’s security. In the summer of 1911 Germany had provoked an international showdown with France over Morocco—the so-called Agadir Crisis—Britain’s leaders had feared at one point that a war might erupt, with the Germans launching a surprise attack on the British fleet, scattered among its peacetime bases in home waters. As the minister responsible for naval defense, Churchill was gravely concerned. “Of all the dangers that menaced the British Empire,” he later wrote, “none was comparable....If the Fleet or any vital part of it were caught unawares or unready and our naval preponderance destroyed, we had lost the war, and there was no limit to the evils which might have been inflicted upon us.” To Churchill, Germany’s battle fleet, concentrated in German home waters and poised to launch a first-strike surprise attack, represented an “ever-present danger.”

Churchill’s determination to ensure Great Britain’s naval preparedness for war did not mean he considered a conflict between Britain and Germany to be inevitable. “I do not believe,” he told a political associate, “in the theory of inevitable wars.” War, he was convinced, would serve neither country’s interests. In a 1908 speech he had derided the notion that Anglo-German rivalry meant a clash of arms. “I think it is greatly to be deprecated,” he stated, that persons should try to spread the belief in this country that war between Great Britain and Germany is inevitable. It is all nonsense....[T]here is no collision of primary interests—big, important interests—between Great Britain and Germany in any quarter of the globe....Look at it from any point of view you like, and I say you will come to the conclusion in regard to relations between England and Germany, that there is no real cause of difference between them, and...these two great people have nothing to fight about, have no prize to fight for, and have no place to fight in.

Churchill looked forward to “the peaceful development of European politics in the next twenty years”—a result of “the blessed intercourse of trade and commerce [which] is binding the nations together against their wills, in spite of their wills, unconsciously, irresistibly, and unceasingly weaving them together into one solid interdependent mass.” What Churchill called “the prosaic bonds of commerce” were dampening international crises, promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes between “civilized and commercial States.” The danger of international economic collapse, he contended, imposed “an effective caution and restraint even upon the most reckless and the most intemperate of statesmen.” To buttress his point of view Churchill could point to the fact that during the previous forty years “no two highly-organized commercial Powers have drawn the sword upon one another.”

But the relentless buildup of the German High Seas Fleet, along with Berlin’s unwillingness to reduce its naval program, led Churchill reluctantly to conclude that German ambitions did indeed pose a serious threat to the peace of Europe. The naval competition in 1908-12 between Britain and Germany in building modern capital ships—battleships and battle cruisers—is often considered the classic example of an arms race. In those six years Britain launched twenty-nine capital ships and Germany seventeen. To pay for them, Germany’s naval budget practically doubled, while Britain’s increased by over 40 percent. Churchill thought the greatest military power in Europe now aimed to “become at the same time at least the second naval Power...an event of first magnitude in world affairs.”

Churchill bluntly expressed these views in conversations with Ambassador Lichnowsky: “It was no good shutting one’s eyes to facts,” he stated, “and that however hard Governments and individuals worked to make a spirit of real trust and confidence between two countries they would make very little headway while there was a continually booming naval policy in Germany.”
Churchill’s “Naval Holiday”...

The buildup of a German battle fleet stood as a major obstacle to Anglo-German cooperation. Germany could remove this obstacle, reducing the danger of war.

When Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty, he settled on a program of warship construction to give Britain a decisive lead in the arms race. The number of British battleships would be based on German construction. If Germany increased its output, Britain would automatically follow suit and outstrip the Germans. This strategy, Churchill thought, would impress upon Germany’s leaders the futility of trying to overcome Britain’s naval lead. “Nothing, in my opinion,” Churchill wrote, “would more surely dishearten Germany, than the certain proof that as the result of all her present and prospective efforts she will only be more hopelessly behind-hand.”12 To the newspaper editor J.L. Garvin, Churchill wrote, “As long as we do not relax our exertions, and proceed on the sober lines I have laid down, we shall—in absence of any new development—break these fellows’ hearts in peace or their necks in war.”13

By frustrating German naval ambitions, Churchill hoped to make Berlin more amenable to settling any differences. To the Admiral Lord “Jackie” Fisher, Churchill maintained that British naval construction could be changed to permit “England and Germany to agree upon proportionate reductions.”14 Winning the naval arms race was not an end in itself but a way to convince the German government that cooperation, not rivalry, would benefit the core interests of both countries.

The Stick and the Carrot

To unveil his Naval Holiday scheme, Churchill chose a dramatic setting: his annual presentation to Parliament of naval estimates for the upcoming year, on 18 March 1912. Interest in his speech had been heightened by rumors of impending increases in Germany’s shipbuilding program, threatening another costly round in the naval arms race, and by the fact that it was his first presentation as First Lord.

Churchill did not disappoint them. Before a packed House of Commons he bluntly declared that Britain’s naval efforts were directed at defeating Germany’s challenge with naval construction linked to German shipbuilding. Furthermore, he warned, for every additional capital ship started by Germany, Britain would build two. His intentions were abundantly clear. That was the stick—then came the carrot:

To break the naval competition Churchill called for the introduction of “a blank page in the book of misunderstanding….Any retardation or reduction in German construction will…be promptly followed here…by large and fully proportioned reductions.”

In 1913, for instance, if Germany dropped its plans for three new capital ships, Britain would “blot out” the corresponding five capital ships it planned for that year. “The three ships that [Germany] did not build,” Churchill said, “would therefore automatically wipe out no fewer than five British potential super-Dreadnoughts [the latest generation of battleships]. By taking a holiday from building for a year or even two, Germany would obtain substantial savings,” Churchill argued: “Here, then, is a perfectly plain and simple plan of arrangement whereby without diplomatic negotiation, without any bargaining, without the slightest restriction upon the sovereign freedom of either Power, this keen and costly naval rivalry can be at any time abated.”15

Kaiser Wilhelm, who had met Churchill personally during the 1909 German army maneuvers, sent him a
Germany’s fleet of heavy, slower battleships of early 1900s, like the behemoth SMS Deutschland (above), were eclipsed by Britain’s Dreadnoughts, convincing Admiral von Tirpitz and Kaiser Wilhelm to streamline and speed up the High Seas Fleet (below).

“courteous” message that a Naval Holiday “would only be possible between allies.” To his intimates the Kaiser was much less courteous, branding Churchill’s speech “arrogant.” Germany’s Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, though no fan of higher military spending, also dismissed the initiative. “Churchill’s speech did not come up to my expectations,” he wrote; Churchill “really seems to be a firebrand past praying for.” Germany declined even to give Churchill’s proposal an official response.

Churchill persisted. Britain, he said, “ought never to allow the discussion of this vital question to be stifled just because it is unwelcome to the ruling classes in Germany.” He had a further reason to continue his offer: toward the end of 1912, the Admiralty had received intelligence indicating that Germany intended another increase in naval construction, entailing still further increases in British naval spending.

Churchill would repeat his Naval Holiday proposal on two separate occasions during 1913. On 26 March, in his second speech on naval estimates, he offered to drop the four battleships Britain would begin during 1914 if Germany canceled or delayed the two capital ships it was scheduled to start. Surely, Churchill argued, a “mutual cessation could clearly be no disadvantage to the relative position” of Germany.

This time Berlin responded officially. Bethmann Hollweg told the Reichstag that Germany had yet to receive formal proposals from the British government. That was disingenuous, since behind the scenes, German leaders were working to discourage any deal. Berlin instructed Lichnowsky privately to tell Sir Edward Grey, Britain’s foreign secretary, that it did not welcome further public mention of the holiday proposal. The Kaiser made it known that he took personal affront at the whole idea. “The Emperor said that he did not wish to make a fuss,” reported Sir Edward Goschen, the British ambassador in Berlin, “but that he wished his words repeated quietly and privately in the proper quarter.” Germany’s navy secretary, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, went even farther, suggesting that Anglo-German relations would not improve but deteriorate if Churchill persisted, telling Captain Erich von Müller, the German naval attaché in London, to say “that Churchill can now only injure the tender plant of a German-English détente by his holiday proposal.” When the German naval attaché reported back that Churchill intended nonetheless to renew the holiday offer later in 1913, Germany’s leaders braced themselves to reject it. The Kaiser wrote on the attaché’s message, “We are on our guard!”

The German naval attaché’s information proved to be correct. Churchill renewed the holiday proposal in Manchester on 18 October 1913, in a speech giving the fullest public account of what he meant by the entire scheme. If Great Britain would delete four new battleships and Germany two capital ships, Britain would save £12 million and Germany £6 million over the following three years.

Churchill’s “modest proposal” created a storm of protest in Germany. British Ambassador Goschen reported it was covered “in all the more important German newspapers and has been received with almost universal disapproval,” varying only in the degree of rudeness by which they reported it. For example, Count Ernst von Reventlow, the prominent foreign-affairs editor of the conservative Deutsche Tageszeitung, said Churchill should take a holiday from making speeches.

In February 1914, von Tirpitz explicitly rejected Churchill’s Manchester proposal in a speech to the >>
budget committee of the Reichstag, rolling out the previous excuse that it was not an official offer. Tirpitz said he had read of the proposal only “in the newspapers, for I have received no further intimation of the matter.” Tellingly, he added that even if the British government formally proposed it, Berlin would reject it.28

The Germans really wanted to shunt arms control to the side. Their policy was made clear by Lichnowsky, who told British leaders that Germany sought to create “a thoroughly good and healthy atmosphere between the two countries and then they would see that it was perfectly absurd to continue this competitive race in defensive arms.”29 In Lichnowsky’s opinion, “it was possible to arrive at an understanding in spite of the [German] fleet and without a ‘Naval Holiday.’”30 Before Germany would agree to limits on naval building, it wanted a political understanding with Britain to improve Germany’s strategic position.

Churchill in German Eyes

The German government viewed the holiday scheme as an attempt at political warfare. Goschen in Berlin noted that Germany’s leaders “cannot get it out of their heads [that] the First Lord has something up his sleeve, something that would be advantageous for the British, and detrimental to the German Navy.”31 Highly suspicious of Churchill, Tirpitz called him an “extraordinarily energetic English navy minister,” committed to defeating Germany’s naval challenge.32 These arms control efforts were an attempt to paralyze the growth of the German battle fleet and limit Germany’s aspirations to achieve world-power status. In his memoirs, Tirpitz complained of the “untiring efforts of British diplomacy [which] aimed...at sickening us of the fleet, and at picking holes in the Navy Bill, if possible in order to wreck it.”33

Churchill’s tenacious promotion of the scheme infuriated the Kaiser and his naval leaders. For some, he had acquired the reputation of a bully. German Naval Attaché von Müller, reporting on Churchill’s naval estimates speech in March 1914, commented: “Mr. Churchill departed from his former habit, and in his speech this year avoided making hostile remarks about the German Navy—only because he realizes that his former habit of ‘plain speaking’ resulted in the opposite of the intimidation that he hoped for.”34 Müller’s report was typical in viewing Churchill as habitually rude when speaking about the German navy, breaking this habit only when he intended some deception.

Nor were internal German politics to be discounted. Arms control, Tirpitz feared, might give an opening to domestic political enemies who opposed his program of battleship building, some of them inside the German government. Bethmann Hollweg and the Foreign Office, for example, wanted to curtail shipbuilding to improve relations with Britain. To them, battleships were bargaining chips—but not so to Tirpitz, who saw the battle fleet as the instrument to improve Germany’s security.
against a hostile Britain. Successive German treasury officials also wanted to trim the navy’s budget. Treasury secretary Adolf Wermuth resigned in 1912 rather than go along with increases in naval spending. His successor, Hermann Kühn, proved just as resolute in opposing more spending on the High Seas Fleet.

Tirpitz also feared the holiday scheme might galvanize opposition within the Reichstag. In late spring 1913, Tirpitz complained that “the defense proposals with their immense demands on the German taxpayer, and... the general demand for a lasting understanding with England will pave the way for Churchill’s plans....the mood in the Reichstag is...not now so unfavorable toward [a Naval Holiday].” Following the general elections of January 1912 the Social Democrats, who opposed naval increases, emerged as the largest party in the Reichstag.

Another consideration was economic: a Naval Holiday might dislocate the German shipbuilding industry, bringing about an increase in unemployment and social unrest. From Tirpitz’s perspective, Winston Churchill’s public arms-control appeals could undermine domestic political support.

Churchill faced an implacable foe in Tirpitz. When Colonel Edward House, the confidante of President Woodrow Wilson, met the Admiral in Berlin during the spring of 1914, he recorded in his diary that Tirpitz “evidenced a decided dislike for the British, a dislike that almost amounted to hatred.” The Naval Holiday threatened Tirpitz’s life’s work of rivaling Britain at sea. Rather than go along with it, Tirpitz would have resigned.

Behind Tirpitz stood the Kaiser, who was equally adamant. The German naval buildup was also his creation, his settled ambition. He reacted angrily to anyone who would curtail it. Within Germany’s ruling oligarchy, Wilhelm consistently sided with Tirpitz when disagreements occurred over armaments strategy and foreign policy. He pushed for additional warships even in the spring of 1914, after Tirpitz had concluded that further construction would prove counterproductive, only strengthening Churchill’s ability to keep Britain ahead of Germany in the arms race. Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, the Kaiser discounted the baneful contribution of the naval buildup to the deterioration of Germany’s strategic situation. “If England only intends to extend her hand to us under the condition that we must limit our fleet,” he declared, “that is an unbounded impudence which contains in it a bad insult to the German people and their Emperor. This offer must be rejected a limine [at the threshold]....I have shown the English that, when they touch our armaments, they bite on granite. Perhaps by this I have increased their hatred but won their respect.”

Churchill in British Eyes
Opposition to the Naval Holiday was not confined to Germany; political opponents at home attacked Churchill as well. Arthur Lee, the principal spokesman on naval matters for the opposition Conservatives, saw “almost insuperable obstacles in the way of any attempt to carry that into practice.” The opposition National Review thought it “really stupifying” that the Liberal government appeared obsessed with “the Disarmament craze,” and it poured scorn on “the mountebank at the Admiralty” for his “platform performances [which] are as idiotic to us as they are offensive to Germany, and play into the hands of the vast army of Anglophobes [in Germany] who preach a jihad [sic] against this country. Politicians of this calibre will say anything to get themselves reported.” Critics considered it undignified for Britain to repeat an offer that Germany had already spurned. Churchill, by repeating it, only encouraged Germany’s leaders to think that Britain might tire of the naval competition.

The permanent staff at the Foreign Office and Britain’s high-level diplomats likewise objected. Sir Eyre Crowe, an assistant under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, thought that any arms-control proposal put forward by Britain would “not be treated straightforwardly in the negotiation, and I regard any such negotiation with so unscrupulous an adversary as highly dangerous.” Goschen in Berlin observed: “One cannot help thinking that a determined execution of what [Churchill] outlined in 1912 [to keep decisively ahead of Germany] would have a far greater effect upon German shipbuilding than what he has now done....the best way of taking the wind out of the sails of the Big Navy Party in Germany is to state frankly that if threatened with further efforts to reduce our supremacy we shall make a big effort, by loan if necessary, to render that supremacy unassailable.” King George V concurred with the view of his cousin the Kaiser that Churchill should drop the search for an arms-control agreement, adding to Goschen’s report: “I entirely agree with the hope expressed by the Emperor.”

But domestic political imperatives had played a large part in Churchill’s calculations. He needed a consensus within the governing Liberals on naval spending, a subject on which they were anything but united. Arms control reassured pacifist Liberals that the government was doing everything in its power to dampen the naval rivalry. Many political commentators regarded Churchill’s plan as an attempt to appease such Liberals, who wanted less naval spending. Reacting to Churchill’s speech in Manchester, the influential Lord Esher observed: “Winston was playing to the radical gallery >>
in his recent speech, as it is inconceivable that so clever a fellow should have been silly enough to imagine that he had any chance of obtaining a favourable reply.”

Churchill had sound reasons to “play to the gallery”: Germany’s naval challenge posed a painful dilemma for the Liberal government: either to spend ever larger amounts to keep ahead of Germany, or to relinquish superiority at sea. Given these options they ultimately chose to increase naval spending, which rose by over £18 million during the Liberal government’s tenure. But this choice did not sit well with Liberals who found the naval race an appalling waste. To David Lloyd George, Britain’s dynamic Chancellor of the Exchequer, arms competition amounted to “organised insanity.” Lloyd George received considerable support among fellow Liberals when he pressed Churchill for reductions in the Admiralty’s spending during the winter of 1913–14. The complex interplay of domestic political and strategic factors required that Churchill secure acceptance of his naval building program within the government and the Liberal party at large. Arms control offered this opportunity.

One Last Try

In the spring of 1914, when the prospects for the holiday proposal seemed finished, a new chance suddenly presented itself: a visit to Kiel by a squadron of British battleships, invited by the German government to take part in Kiel’s annual regatta. If Churchill accompanied the warships, he might meet with the Kaiser and Tirpitz. Here was a golden opportunity for the statesman who always believed in personal contacts.

Albert Ballin, director of the Hamburg-America Line and intimate of the Kaiser, acted as an intermediary in obtaining an invitation for Churchill to accompany the British squadron. According to his biographer, Ballin “clung to his favourite idea that the naval experts of both countries should come to an understanding.” Working outside of government channels, Ballin contacted Churchill’s friend, the influential banker Sir Ernest Cassel. Churchill welcomed the opportunity, but naturally wanted to know “whether Tirpitz really wanted to see me and have a talk.” Cassel assured him that “this was so.” Churchill clearly welcomed a chance for direct, high-level talks with Germany’s leaders.

Despite the assurances of Ballin and Cassel, Kaiser Wilhelm was as opposed as ever. He “remarked very decidedly that he had not asked the First Lord to the Kiel regatta, but that the First Lord seemed to have a habit of turning up uninvited, as he had done at the ‘Kaiser Manoeuvres’” (referring to Churchill’s attendance at German army maneuvers in 1909). The British naval attaché reported: “The Emperor remarked that he did not know how to take the First Lord, what he said to him he thought Mr. Churchill transposed later. He was a man who could not be trusted.” Wilhelm also described Lord Haldane’s visit to Germany in 1912, attempting to arrange a naval settlement, at the initiative of Ballin and Cassel, as a “fiasco.”

The prospective arrival of British battleships—a visit the German government wanted—made it difficult for Wilhelm to reject out of hand an attempt by Churchill to come along as well. “An invitation would not be opportune,” the Kaiser instructed the German Foreign Office, but “an official enquiry by the British as to whether Mr.
Churchill and his colleagues in the Admiralty would be welcome…would be received with pleasure.”

Making a virtue of necessity, Wilhelm even offered to invite Churchill through his brother, Grand Admiral Prince Henry of Prussia. “The Emperor wishes it to be understood,” Prince Henry told the British ambassador, “that he has invited the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Sea Lords to Kiel officially, and that he hoped that at all events both Mr. Churchill and [First Sea Lord] Prince Louis of Battenberg would be present during the Kiel week.” This sudden reversal was reported to Churchill by the British naval attaché in Berlin:

[What Prince Henry] wanted me to convey to you clearly was that the Emperor would undoubtedly be hurt if you and at least another of the Board [of Admiralty] do not appear. Prince Henry indicated that the Emperor would like to welcome H.R.H. Prince Louis of Battenberg, and gave me to understand that His Majesty is straightforwardly anxious to exhibit every friendliness on this occasion. To make a long story short, what is evidently hoped for is that you and the First Sea Lord will both be at Kiel in the [Admiralty yacht] “Enchantress.”

With every intention to press his luck, Churchill worked up a four-point arms-control agenda, topped by the Naval Holiday proposal. He thought the two nations might further agree to limitations in the size of capital ships and, to reduce the danger of surprise attack, a way to lower “the unwholesome concentration of fleets in Home Waters.” Another discussion topic was the development of confidence-building measures—formal procedures for mutual inspections—which “would go a long way to stopping the espionage on both sides which is the continued cause of suspicion and ill-feeling.” Churchill later wrote that these topics, if discussed and “agreed upon, would make for easement and stability.”

But Churchill’s agenda stood no better chance than before. Neither Tirpitz nor Kaiser Wilhelm had changed their views in the slightest. Indeed they wanted to make additionalsoff to German naval strength during the spring of 1914, Tirpitz to increase readiness for a “lightning-fast offensive.” Tirpitz was asking for an extra 150–200 million marks over and above the budget already allotted. Bethmann Hollweg, citing both diplomatic and financial considerations, fended off these requests. But Tirpitz and the Emperor were only waiting for a suitable occasion to beat down his opposition and increase the threat posed by the German fleet to Britain.

The Kaiser made this clear when he wrote Bethmann Hollweg in the spring of 1914: “I wish to see the whole endless and dangerous subject of limitation of armaments rolled up and put away for good. What it comes to finally is that England is protesting against my right to decide on the sea power required by Germany.”

British Ambassador Goschen reported that Churchill’s scheme was not liked “ostensibly because the idea is unworkable—but really I expect, because it is an offer which they can’t very well accept—and which may make them liable to be told later by us—‘We have made you an offer and you wouldn’t accept it.”

Ambassador Lichnowsky, reporting back from London, warned his government on 10 May 1914: The First Lord “will probably come [to Kiel] on board his yacht, accompanied by a few Sea Lords and his beautiful and charming wife,” he wrote. “Churchill is an exceedingly crafty fox and is sure to try to spring some proposal or other on us…. As a politician he is somewhat fantastic and unreliable.” Nevertheless, Lichnowsky could not “imagine that it would do any harm, unless we start discussing unnecessary stuff with him.” Lichnowsky volunteered to warn Churchill that it would be better for him not to refer to the Naval Holiday or other nonsense of that kind.

One can imagine Churchill’s response to Prince Lichnowsky’s characterization of his number-one agenda item. But the German ambassador’s opinion accurately reflected German government opinion.

Churchill, of course, was a realist who harbored few illusions. “I do not expect,” he admitted, “any agreement on these [holiday proposals], but I would like to strip the subject of the misrepresentation and misunderstanding with which it has been surrounded, and put it on a clear basis in case circumstances should ever render it admissible.” If he could not convince the Germans, he could still use their refusal to help beat back political opposition to naval spending. “I hope,” Churchill wrote Grey and Prime Minister H.H. Asquith, “in view of the very strong feeling there is about naval expenditure and the great difficulties I have to face, my wish to put these points to Admiral Tirpitz…may not be dismissed.”

His colleagues were unconvinced. Although Grey had been informed of the back-channel attempt by Ballin and Cassel to open talks, and approved the British squadron’s visit to Kiel, he was taken aback when Goschen’s telegram arrived inviting Churchill. “This will never do at the present moment,” Grey wrote on the telegram, “and there was, so I understood, no question of the First Lord and the First Sea Lord going with the fleet.” Only two weeks before, Grey had received a note from Churchill saying that a visit by him to Germany during the Kiel festivities was “impracticable.”

So Grey applied the brakes. Instead of a summit at Kiel, Grey suggested that the two sides explore ways to reduce the naval rivalry by opening talks at a much >>
Churchill’s “Naval Holiday”... lower level, involving the naval attachés in London and Berlin. If these negotiations showed promise, then, Grey thought, higher-level meetings could take place.

Of course Grey also saw in Churchill’s initiative a challenge to his control over Britain’s foreign policy. And he didn’t like it. Grey had proven a shrewd turf fighter, holding on to the reins of power for over eight years, including previous efforts by Churchill to get around the Foreign Office. In his reply to Churchill’s request to negotiate with German leaders, a glimmer of testiness is evident: “I put this [alternative approach, i.e., talks between naval attachés] forward with diffidence as it is out of my sphere.”

Prime Minister Asquith backed Grey in rejecting a visit by Churchill to Germany. Goschen was duly instructed to inform the Germans that Churchill and Battenberg would not accompany the British squadron. “His Majesty quite understood the situation,” Goschen reported, “and expressed his regret that [they] could not come in the most friendly manner.”

Well aware of Churchill’s reputation for persistence, the German government remained unsure whether a visit might occur. According to Ballin, “Churchill sent word that, if Tirpitz really wanted to see him, he would find [a] means to bring about such a meeting.” The Germans even reserved a mooring spot for Enchantress, just in case the First Lord crossed over the North Sea. But the Kaiser and Tirpitz, wanting to avoid negotiations, made no further effort to entice Churchill into a visit that would likely have caused a Cabinet uproar.

In Retrospect

German intransigence doomed Churchill’s Naval Holiday from becoming the basis for serious negotiations. Undoubtedly, domestic politics played a role. Yet Churchill had sought to rescue German leaders from a strategic trap that they had made for themselves. It was logical, he believed, to address head-on the naval rivalry that drove the antagonism between the two countries. But Berlin refused to consider restrictions on its naval buildup. Germany’s security and international standing depended on it, and that meant threatening Britain’s longstanding position as the world’s leading sea power.

The devotion of Wilhelm and Tirpitz to a powerful High Seas Fleet caused great harm, antagonizing even moderate British Liberals who generally opposed military spending. It brought Britain into the lists of countries that sought to contain the rise of German power. “With every rivet that von Tirpitz drove into his ships of war,” Churchill later wrote, “he united British opinion throughout wide circles of the most powerful people in every walk of life and in every part of the Empire. The hammers that clanged at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven were forging the coalition of nations by which Germany was to be resisted and finally overthrown.” Germany’s rulers would have better served their own interests, along with the well-being of the German people, had they worked with Churchill rather than trying to thwart him.

The opportunity for Britain and Germany to reach an agreement ended with the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914. Churchill’s proposal to visit Kiel, as it turned out, would have represented a last chance for high-level, face-to-face talks between British and German leaders. Instead, the two powers and others would settle their rivalry by fighting the greatest war up to that time of which history had record. To Churchill’s great credit, he had sought to prevent a clash—to negotiate a fair settlement to the naval competition and ways to make both countries more secure. At the same time, in preparing the Royal Navy for the coming trial of strength, Churchill made a vital contribution to the ultimate victory of British arms.

Endnotes

11. Churchill to Grey, 9 September 1909, enclosing a note on a conversation with the German ambassador, Companion II/1, 958–61.
13. Churchill to J. L. Garvin, 10 August 1912, Garvin Papers,
The “Kingly Conference,” 1914: Churchill’s Last Try for Peace

MAX E. HERTWIG

Churchill’s faith in personal diplomacy—in solving intractable problems by meetings at the highest level—was famously expressed during his World War II meetings with Stalin and Roosevelt. It surfaced again in 1953-55, when he strove unsuccessfully to promote “a meeting at the summit” with Eisenhower and Stalin’s successors.

Far less widely known, however, is Churchill’s proposal for a “conference of sovereigns” or heads of state (including, it seems, the French president) in the last days of peace before the world was convulsed by war in 1914. Like his “Naval Holiday,” the scheme failed, but certainly not for Churchill’s lack of trying.

Heads of State who might have attended Churchill’s “Kingly Conference” are represented by contemporary postage stamps. The only non-royal among them was Raymond Poincaré, France’s president from 1908 through 1920. (Author’s collection.)
A at this stage in his career, even Churchill did not have the temerity to suggest himself as Britain’s plenipotentiary, although as Professor Maurer has shown, he was quite ready to meet personally with his counterpart von Tirpitz, head of the German Navy. That having failed, Churchill tried in the final days to promote an even higher-level meeting, between the kings and emperors themselves. This was not unprecedented; some sources state that Kaiser Wilhelm proposed a peace conference after the Sarajevo assassinations, and private messages were being exchanged between the Kaiser and Czar Nicholas in the days before war was declared.

There is little on this episode in the literature. There is no reference to it in Churchill’s The World Crisis, Asquith’s Memoirs, Randolph Churchill’s and Martin Gilbert’s official biography, Gilbert’s Churchill: A Life or In Search of Churchill, or the biographies by Manchester, Jenkins, Rose, Charmley and Birkenhead, though Ted Morgan provides a brief reference:

War plans were under way, but Churchill still believed in an orderly Europe under the leadership of kings who would not permit a conflict to break out. At the Wednesday [29 July] Cabinet meeting, he urged Asquith to call for a conference of kings to avoid the appalling calamity that civilized nations were being forced to contemplate, but the idea came to nothing.1

The “kingly conference” was actually proposed two days earlier, in the cabinet of Monday the 27th. There is no evidence that Asquith mentioned it in his report to the King (the only written record of cabinets in those days). But Professor David Dilks suggests that he might well have written of it to his lady friend, Venetia Stanley, in whom the Prime Minister confided a great deal.

If he did, it is not in Asquith’s published letters. On the morning of July 28th, he wrote Venetia: “Winston on the other hand is all for this way of escape from Irish troubles, and when things looked rather better last night, he exclaimed moodily that it looked after all as if we were in for a ‘bloody peace.’”2 Asquith tended often to put the least charitable spin on Churchill’s machinations—but why had things looked “rather better” on the 27th?

The reason may have been the “kingly conference”: the editors of the Asquith-Stanley letters write: “Lichnowsky [the German ambassador] told Grey on the afternoon of 27 July that the ‘German government accept in principle mediation between Austria and Russia by the four powers, reserving, of course, their right as an ally to help Austria if attacked. France and Italy also accepted the conference proposal.’”3

Alas, this hope was quickly dashed. On the evening of 27 July the British ambassador in Berlin telegraphed:

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs says that conference you suggest would practically amount to a court of arbitration and could not, in his opinion, be called together except at the request of Austria and Russia. This reversal seems to have resulted from [German Chancellor] Bethmann-Hollweg’s belief, which the Kaiser did not share, that Russia would not intervene to save Serbia if this were known to risk war with Germany.4

That was the end of the “kingly” initiative, although Churchill, who had “all his war paint on,” according to Asquith, still wanted it to go forward. On July 28th Churchill wrote his wife from the Admiralty, showing his continued wish for peace while gearing up for war:

Everything tends towards catastrophe and collapse. I am interested, geared up and happy. Is it not horrible to be built like that? The preparations have a hideous fascination for me. I pray to God to forgive me for such fearful moods of levity. Yet I would do my best for peace, and nothing would induce me wrongfully to strike the blow. I cannot feel that we in this island are in any serious degree responsible for the wave of madness which has swept the mind of Christendom. No one can measure the consequences. I wondered whether those stupid Kings and Emperors could not assemble together and revivify kingship by saving the nations from hell but we all drift on in a kind of dull cataleptic trance. As if it was somebody else’s operation!

The two black swans on St James’s Park lake have a darling cygnet—grey, fluffy, precious and unique. I watched them this evening for some time as a relief from all the plans and schemes. We are putting the whole Navy into fighting trim (bar the reserve). And all seems quite sound and thorough. The sailors are thrilled and confident. Every supply is up to the prescribed standard. Everything is ready as it has never been before. And we are awake to the tips of our fingers. But war is the Unknown and the Unexpected!

God guard us and our long accumulated inheritance. You know how willingly and proudly I would risk—or give—if need be—my period of existence to keep this country great and famous and prosperous and free. But the problems are very difficult. One has to try to measure the indefinite and weigh the imponderable.

I feel sure however that if war comes we shall give them a good drubbing....5

Endnotes
3. Asquith Letters, 130, n.2.
4. Asquith Letters, 130, n.3.
“The Terrible ‘Ifs’ Accumulate”: The Escape of the Goeben

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

“In a feat of seamanship even Churchill was forced to admire, the German battlecruiser Goeben eluded Royal Navy hunters and sailed to Constantinople, where she was presented to the Ottoman Navy and renamed Yavuz Sultan Selim, usually shortened to Yavuz. By bombarding Russian Black Sea facilities she brought Turkey into the war on the German side. Remarkably, she remained the flagship of the Turkish Navy until 1950, and was not scrapped until 1973, after the West German government declined an invitation to buy her back.

The event which would dominate all others, if war broke out, was the main shock of battle between the French and German armies. We knew that the French were counting on placing in the line a whole army corps of their best troops from North Africa, and that every man was needed. We were informed also that they intended to transport these troops across the Mediterranean as fast as ships could be loaded, under the general protection of the French Fleet, but without any individual escort or system of convoys.

The French General Staff calculated that whatever happened most of the troops would get across. The French Fleet disposed between this stream of transports and the Austrian Fleet afforded a good guarantee. But there was one ship in the Mediterranean which far outstripped in speed every vessel in the French Navy. She was the Goeben.

The only heavy ships in the Mediterranean that could attempt to compete with the Goeben in speed were the three British battle-cruisers. It seemed that the Goeben, being free to choose any point on a front of three or four hundred miles, would easily be able to avoid the French Battle Squadrons and, brushing aside or outstripping...
their cruisers, break in upon the transports and sink one after another of these vessels crammed with soldiers. It occurred to me at this time that perhaps that was the task she had been sent to the Mediterranean to perform.

For this reason as a further precaution I had suggested to the First Sea Lord as early as July 28 that an additional battle-cruiser, the New Zealand, should be sent to reinforce our squadron. When it came to the pinch a few days later, Admiral Boué de Lapeyrière, the French Commander-in-Chief, adopted a system of convoys; and on August 4 he prudently delayed the embarkation of the troops until he could organize adequate escorts. But of this change of plan the Admiralty was not advised.

On July 30 I called for the war orders of the Mediterranean command and discussed them fully with the First Sea Lord. These orders, issued in August 1913, had had to take into consideration a variety of political contingencies, viz. Great Britain at war with Germany only, with Germany and Austria only, or with Germany, Austria and Italy; and Great Britain and France allied together against each or any of the three aforesaid opponents. The course to be followed differed somewhat in each case. Briefly, if Britain found herself single-handed against the whole Triple Alliance, we should temporarily have to abandon the Mediterranean and concentrate at Gibraltar. In all other cases the concentration would be at Malta, and if the French were allies our squadrons would join them for a general battle. It now seemed necessary to give the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean some more specific information and directions.

Admiralty to Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.
July 30, 1914:

It now seems probable should war break out and England and France engage in it, that Italy will remain neutral and that Greece can be made an ally. Spain also will be friendly and possibly an ally. The attitude of Italy is however uncertain, and it is especially important that your Squadron should not be seriously engaged with Austrian ships before we know what Italy will do. Your first task should be to aid the French in the transportation of their African army by covering and if possible bringing to action individual fast German ships, particularly Goeben, which may interfere with that transportation. You will be notified by telegraph when you may consult with the French Admiral. Except in combination with the French as part of a general battle, do not at this stage be brought to action against superior forces. The speed of your Squadrons is sufficient to enable you to choose your moment. You must husband your force at the outset and we shall hope later to reinforce the Mediterranean.

Earlier that same day the following, initialled both by the First Sea Lord and myself, was also sent to Sir Berkeley Milne from the Admiralty: “Goeben must be shadowed by two battle-cruisers. Approaches to Adriatic must be watched by cruisers and destroyers. Remain near Malta yourself. It is believed that Italy will remain neutral, but you cannot yet count absolutely on this.”

At 12.50 a.m. on August 3, I emphasized the importance of the Goeben compared with all other objectives by a further telegram, which I drafted myself, to Sir Berkeley Milne: “Watch on mouth of Adriatic should be maintained, the Goeben is your objective. Follow her and shadow her wherever she goes and be ready to act on declaration of war, which appears probable and imminent.”

Early on the morning of August 4 we were delighted by the following news from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, to the Admiralty: “Indomitable, Indefatigable shadowing Goeben and Breslau 370 44’ North 70 56’ East.”

We replied: “Very good. Hold her. War imminent.” (This to go now.) “Goeben is to be prevented by force from interfering with French transports.” (This to await early confirmation.) “If Goeben attacks French transports you should at once engage her. You should give her fair warning of this beforehand.”

The Goeben of course did not attack the French transports. In fact, though this we did not know at the time, she was steaming away from the French transport routes when sighted by the Indomitable and Indefatigable. Even if, however, she had attacked transports, the decision of the British Cabinet would have prevented our battle-cruisers from interfering. This decision obviously carried with it the still more imperative veto against opening fire on the Goeben, if she did not attack French transports, during the hours when we had her in our power. I cannot impeach the decision. It is right that the world should know of it. But little did we imagine how much this spirit of honourable restraint was to cost us and all the world.

At about the same time I received the following minute from the First Sea Lord: “First Lord. August 4. In view of the Italian declaration of neutrality, propose to telegraph to Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, acquainting him and enjoining him to respect this rigidly and not to allow a ship to come within six miles of the Italian coast. B [Prince Louis of Battenberg].”

Bearing in mind how disastrous it would be if any petty incident occurred which could cause trouble at this fateful moment with Italy and approving of the First Sea Lord’s precaution, I replied in writing: “So proceed. Foreign Office should intimate this to Italian Government.”

Thereupon at 12:55 p.m. the following telegram was sent by the Admiralty to the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean: “Italian Government have declared >>
neutrality. You are to respect this neutrality rigidly and should not allow any of His Majesty’s ships to come within six miles of Italian coast.” This certainly as it turned out was destined to complicate the task of catching the Goeben; but not, as it will appear, in a decisive manner.

Throughout this long summer afternoon three great ships, hunted and hunters, were cleaving the clear waters of the Mediterranean in tense and oppressive calm. At any moment the Goeben could have been smitten at under 10,000 yards range by sixteen 12-inch guns firing nearly treble her own weight of metal. At the Admiralty we suffered the tortures of Tantalus.

At about 5 o’clock Prince Louis observed that there was still time to sink the Goeben before dark. In the face of the Cabinet decision I was unable to utter a word. Nothing less than the vital safety of Great Britain could have justified so complete an overriding of the authority of the Cabinet. We hoped to sink her the next day. Where could she go? Pola seemed her only refuge throughout the Mediterranean. According to international law nothing but internment awaited her elsewhere.

The Turks had kept their secret well. As the shadows of night fell over the Mediterranean the Goeben increased her speed to twenty-four knots, which was the utmost that our two battle-cruisers could steam. She increased her speed still further. We have since learned
“At any moment the Goeben could have been smitten at under 10,000 yards range by sixteen 12-inch guns firing nearly treble her own weight of metal. At the Admiralty we suffered the tortures of Tantalus.”

Admiral Souchon, the German Commander, having outdistanced our shadowing cruisers in the darkness of the night, pursued his course to Messina, where he arrived with the Goeben and Breslau on the morning of August 5. He had already received, as we now know, a telegram sent from Nauen at 1:35 a.m. on the preceding day by the German Admiralty. This message gave him all-important information. It stated that an alliance had been concluded between Germany and Turkey, and directed him to proceed to Constantinople immediately. Of this treaty we knew nothing. All our reports were of an entirely different tenor; nor was it till long afterwards that we learnt the true attitude of Turkey at this hour.

The British Commander-in-Chief had left the Malta Channel in his flagship the Inflexible after midnight of August 4, and at about 11 a.m. on August 5 he had assembled all his three battle-cruisers and two light cruisers off Pantelleria island, midway between Sicily and the African coast. According to his own published account, he had learned on the 4th that the German mail steamer General was remaining at Messina at the disposition of the Goeben. He therefore believed throughout >>
“The only three antagonists...were already far astern. By 6 o'clock therefore on the morning of August 7 the Goeben, already the fastest capital unit in the Mediterranean, was steaming on an unobstructed course described, every one of the three British battle-cruisers was otherwise engaged. Thus when the German Admiral rounded the Southern point of Italy and turned Eastward, the only three antagonists whose combination of power and speed he had to dread were already far astern.

By 6 o'clock therefore on the morning of August 7 the Goeben, already the fastest capital unit in the Mediterranean, was steaming on an unobstructed course for the Dardanelles, carrying with her for the peoples of the East and Middle East more slaughter, more misery and more ruin than has ever before been borne within the compass of a ship.

Again, it has been urged that the sentence, “Your first task should be to aid the French in the transportation of their African army,” imposed upon Sir Berkeley Milne the duty of placing all three of his battle-cruisers west of Sicily. Thus wrested from their context and from the whole series of Admiralty telegrams, these directions have been made to serve as an explanation. Against them must be read the full text. On July 30, “Your first task should be to aid the French in the transportation of their African army by covering and if possible bringing to action individual fast German ships, particularly Goeben.” And again, on August 2, “Goeben must be shadowed by two battle-cruisers.” And again, on August 3, “Goeben is your objective. Follow her and shadow her wherever she goes, and be ready to act on declaration of war, which appears probable and imminent.”

Certainly if the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean had in reliance upon these dominant and reiterated instructions managed to put one battle-cruiser each side of the Straits of Messina, instead of all on one side, and if in consequence he had brought the Goeben to action, as would have been inevitable, and if he had thus protected the French transports in the most effectual manner by fighting the Goeben, no one could have found fault with him on the score that he had exceeded his orders.

The reader is now in a position to form his own judgment on this affair. I have indicated plainly the point on which the Admiralty was in fault, namely, in not spontaneously lifting the prohibition to enter Italian waters the moment we learned the Goeben was at Messina. The conduct of Rear-Admiral Troubridge was subsequently investigated by a Court of Inquiry...
course for the Dardanelles, carrying with her for the peoples of the East and Middle East more slaughter, more misery and more ruin than has ever before been borne within the compass of a ship.”

composed of the three Commanders-in-Chief of Portsmouth, Devonport and Chatham. As the result of their report, he was tried by court-martial at Portland in September and honourably acquitted of all blame. His career in the Navy was, however, at an end, the general feeling of the Service not accepting the view that the four armoured cruisers and other vessels at his disposal ought not to have fought the Goeben. In view of his acquittal he was appointed to take charge of the naval guns which we sent with a mission to Serbia. In this capacity his work was distinguished and successful. He gained the confidence and respect of the Serbians and their Government, and he proved on various occasions that whatever might be thought of his reasons for not attacking the Goeben, want of personal courage was not among them.

In all this story of the escape of the Goeben one seems to see the influence of that sinister fatality which at a later stage and on a far larger scale was to dog the enterprise against the Dardanelles. The terrible “If’s” accumulate. If my first thoughts on July 27 of sending the New Zealand to the Mediterranean had materialized; if we could have opened fire on the Goeben during the afternoon of August 4; if we had been less solicitous for Italian neutrality; if Sir Berkeley Milne had sent the Indomitable to coal at Malta instead of Biserta; if the Admiralty had sent him direct instructions when on the night of the 5th they learned where the Goeben was; if Rear-Admiral Troubridge in the small hours of August 7 had not changed his mind; if the Dublin and her two destroyers had intercepted the enemy during the night of the 6th-7th—the story of the Goeben would have ended here. There was, however, as it turned out, one more chance of annulling the doom of which she was the bearer. That chance, remote though it was, the Fates were vigilant to destroy.

At 1 a.m. on August 8 Sir Berkeley Milne, having collected and coaled his three battle-cruisers at Malta, set out at a moderate speed on an Easterly course in pursuit of the Goeben. At this juncture the Fates moved a blameless and punctilious Admiralty clerk to declare war upon Austria. The code telegram ordering hostilities to be commenced against Austria was inadvertently released without any authority whatever. The mistake was repaired a few hours later; but the first message reached Sir Berkeley Milne at 8 p.m. on August 8 when he was half-way between Sicily and Greece. His original war orders had prescribed that in the event of a war with Austria he should in the first instance concentrate his fleet near Malta, and faithful to these instructions he turned his ships about and desisted from the pursuit of the Goeben.

Twenty-four hours were thus lost before orders could reach him to resume it. But the Goeben herself had come to a standstill. Admiral Souchon was cruising irresolutely about the Greek islands endeavouring to make sure that he would be admitted by the Turks to the Dardanelles. He dallied thirty-six hours at Denusa and was forced to use his tell-tale wireless on several occasions. It was not till the evening of the 10th that he entered the Dardanelles and the Curse descended irrevocably upon Turkey and the East.

Souchon’s ships made it to Constantinople and were admitted into the harbour by the Turks. The German diplomats reminded the Turks that Great Britain had recently broken a contract to supply two new battleships to the Turkish government (which the British Admiralty had decided to keep for its own use as war loomed), and offered to sell them the Goeben and the Breslau. The Turks agreed on August 16 and eventually joined Germany’s side on October 30. The ships were renamed the Yavuz Sultan Selim and the Midili, retaining their German crews; Souchon was made commander-in-chief of the Turkish Navy. Milne served out the rest of the war on half-pay and retired in 1919.

Despite being outclassed by the German warships Troubridge still intended to engage them, but was convinced otherwise by his flag captain, and allowed them to escape to Constantinople. He and his commanding officer were heavily criticised for their failure to intercept the German ships, particularly when it appeared that they became influential in the Turkish decision to enter the war. Troubridge was court-martialled and acquitted, but his reputation had been damaged. Troubridge never had another seagoing command, but did command naval detachments and flotillas on the Danube during the Balkan campaigns, winning the respect of Serbian Crown Prince Alexander. ✽
The Empire Goes to War: Changes Churchill Didn’t Foresee

RAYMOND A. CALLAHAN

There are few more dramatic descriptions of the coming of World War I than Winston Churchill’s account, in The World Crisis, of the moment when Sir Edward Grey, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, broke into the Cabinet’s interminable discussion of the intractable “Irish Problem” to read the text of Austria-Hungary’s ultimatum to Serbia. There follows a matchless account of the end of the long European peace and the war’s opening stages. Matchless—but not comprehensive.

Churchill was not, of course, writing a general history of Britain’s war but his account was, it is safe to say, more widely read and influential than that of any other British politician or general—so the omissions are of some consequence. And no omission is more striking than the imperial dimension of the British war effort, especially the role of the Indian Empire. India’s role would set in train changes that would powerfully affect Churchill’s career in the 1930s and the shape of the world war he would wage in 1940-45.

The King-Emperor’s declaration of war on Germany automatically committed the Raj to war as well. That vast structure, supervised by what in retrospect seems a remarkably tiny cadre of British officials, possessed its own army, and had done so since its 18th century origins under the “Honourable Company.” In 1914 that army was 150,000 strong, its soldiers drawn from the “martial races”—a Victorian invention that in practice meant from the Punjab and the North West Frontier. There were also Gurkha regiments recruited from the client kingdom of Nepal, widely thought of (not the least by their officers) as the Indian Army’s equivalent of the Brigade of Guards.

All Indian Army officers were British. A tentative (and rather half-hearted) prewar effort at commissioning Indians, the Imperial Cadet Corps, had not produced a

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was obsolescent. Its supply, transport and medical services, adequate for small scale frontier warfare, were incapable of sustaining largescale overseas campaigning. The heavy officer casualties the Indian Army would sustain were very hard to replace—the language skills and knowledge of the men they commanded simply could not be quickly replicated. The Indian “Viceroy Commissioned Officers,” a category unique to the Indian Army, intermediary between British officers and Indian NCOs and sepoys, were not trained to assume command responsibilities. Thus heavy officer casualties soon experienced in France and Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) could quickly degrade unit efficiency and morale. There was no mechanism in place for expanding the army rapidly or replacing heavy casualties. Finally the general officers of the Indian Army, products of a seniority-based promotion system, were a mixed lot (something that could of course also be said of virtually every European army in 1914). Taken together, these facts would indicate that the Indian Army would not fare well in large-scale industrialized European-style warfare.

Nor, initially, did it. Two divisions were rushed to France (and, in a telling commentary on their inadequate equipment, some units were issued with bayonets only on the train from Marseilles to the front). Their combat performance was good but their casualty levels were high, much higher than in frontier campaigns and especially high among the irreplaceable regular officers. In addition to combat losses, they suffered severely from the cold, wet northern European winters—a climate to which they were unaccustomed and against which their uniforms and equipment, designed for very different conditions, offered inadequate protection.

Finally, British officials fretted continually about the possibilities of off-duty sexual contact with European women, a violation of one of the Raj’s most deeply held taboos (although the French, on whose soil they were stationed, seemed quite untroubled by this issue).

Eventually, both Indian divisions were redeployed to Mesopotamia, where they could more easily be supported from India (and where they presented no social problems in the minds of officialdom). Still, until 1918, large numbers of Indian cavalry remained on or behind the Western Front, an enduring testimony to Douglas >>
An Empire Goes to War...

Haig’s stubborn refusal to recognize that the age of horsed cavalry was all but over.

It was in the Middle East that the Indian Army would make its major contribution to the imperial war effort. It garrisoned Egypt, provided much of the army Allenby led to victory in Palestine in 1918 and carried the burden of the war in Mesopotamia. One can argue about the need for that campaign as well as about its strategic direction by Delhi and London. But without the Indian Army it simply would not have been possible.

After a clumsy start in April 1916, which produced the surrender of an entire Indian division at Kut, south of Baghdad, a reorganized army, many of its initial weaknesses remedied, carried the campaign to a successful conclusion, ending the war on what ultimately became the Iraqi-Turkish border. That grueling four-year struggle trained the men who would lead the Indian Army in World War II. Claude Auchinleck, who would stop Rommel’s drive on Cairo in 1942 and serve as the Indian Army’s last and greatest British commander-in-chief, spent his war there, as did the great Bill Slim (after nearly dying at Gallipoli). Others, less well known, who would play key roles in the Indian Army during World War II, learned their trade in the aptly named “bastard war.”

This had an important consequence in 1939-45. The British’s Army approach to war by then was conditioned by the experience of the Western Front, where virtually every senior World War II British officer had served. That approach, based on the bloody lessons of 1915-16 and the successes of 1917-18, which featured massive artillery preparation and limited objectives, is seen at its most effective in Montgomery’s Alamein victory and Alexander’s 1944 “Diadem” offensive in Italy. Indian Army generals, who had not been conditioned by the Western Front, proved to be more innovative and flexible, especially Slim, whose 1944-45 reconquest of Burma is considered a masterpiece of the general’s art.2

By 1918 the 150,000-man Indian Army was a force nearly a million strong, plus nearly a half-million non-combatant labor units, voluntarily enlisted (although in some cases, officials used a great deal of “unofficial” pressure to reach district recruiting quotas). It had fought in France, Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, as well as Gallipoli, Salonika and East Africa.

This huge war effort came at a very high cost. India put more divisions in the field than all the “white dominions” combined. The expectations of political India were that India’s loyalty and massive contribution would be rewarded by movement toward Dominion status. The statement by the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, to the House of Commons in August 1917 that “responsible government” was the goal of British policy in India was a response to these expectations, and one that set in train irrevocable changes in the Raj.

Along with triggering political change, World War I set in motion a fundamental alteration in the Indian Army. By 1918 it had become clear that the opening of its commissioned ranks to Indians could no longer be avoided. The process of “Indianisation,” as it was dubbed, would be slow and marked by false starts and foot-dragging, but, like the promise embodied in Montagu’s declaration, it was a process that, once started, was impossible to reverse or abandon. Even more than the Montagu declaration, Indianising the officer corps meant the end of the Raj.

What does all this have to do with Winston Churchill? His enormous energy and drive, his intense focus on the task at hand, his capacity quickly to absorb masses of information relevant to that task—all these are well-known qualities. During World War I he was absorbed successively at the Admiralty, with weathering the shock of his fall from power in 1915, and with the rebuilding of his career. In The World Crisis it is remarkable how little there is about any imperial subject, let alone India (which merits no listing in the index of any of the volumes). What this meant was that the image of the Raj, already fixed in his mind, remained undisturbed by the radical changes wrought by the war. That image had, of course, been formed during the last years of Victoria’s reign, when Churchill had spent a few years in India as a subaltern in the 4th Hussars.

Officers of British cavalry regiments had a rather isolated existence during their tours in India. The cavalry comprised the most aristocratic regiments of the British Army. They had little contact with the Indian Army and tended to regard it as infra dig (indeed they thought of much of the British Army in similar terms). British “civilians” (the administrative personnel of the Raj) tended to be kept at arm’s length as well. They had little contact with Indians, either, except for servants (or, in the case of comparatively impecunious officers like young Winston Churchill, money-lenders).

The one exception was the Indian princely order, whose lavish hospitality was socially acceptable, whose facilities for sport were excellent—and whose hostility to budding Indian nationalism was intense. All this produced a picture of India based largely on what amounted to clichés: the loyal princes, the sturdy peasantry (grateful for the protection of the Raj), the brave sepoys (utterly dependent of course on their British officers, and needing...
to be watched carefully, lest 1857 come again), the “manly” frontier tribesmen, the sinister Hindu priesthood, and the “unrepresentative” westernized Indian. It was possible in fact for British Army officers to do a tour in India while learning very little about it.

Churchill, whose agenda in those years was self-education and progress, via journalism, toward the political career he wanted (with polo thrown in), was no exception to this. The India he saw in the late 1890s was slowly changing before 1914; the war, the rise of Gandhi for which the war opened the way—changed it more dramatically, and more rapidly. Focused intently on the European war, Churchill paid little attention to any of this. When he turned his attention to India again in the 1930s, he saw developments through the filter of the India over which Lord Elgin had presided as Viceroy. This may account for the gap that separated much of his rhetoric in the 1930-35 fight over the India Bill from the realities of India—assuming India, not toppling Stanley Baldwin, was his real concern during that contest.

Similarly, in 1940-45, it is clear that Churchill, while recognizing the need for a much expanded Indian Army (which grew from 180,000 to 2.2 million by genuinely voluntary enlistment), never understood or trusted it. In 1941 he asked Auchinleck whether Indian soldiers, if equipped with modern weapons, would point their guns in the right direction, a tactless remark that reflected attitudes born of Mutiny memories, still widespread in the 1890s. Auchinleck, Slim and most other senior Indian Army officers understood that “Indianisation” was both necessary and irrevocable; that their Army would have a steadily growing number of Indian officers (rising from about 500 in 1939 to 12,000 in 1945); and that this made postwar independence certain, despite the Prime Minister’s hankering to “keep a piece of India.”

The Empire that marched off with Britain to war in 1914 was changed fundamentally by that conflict. Much has been written about the impact of the war on the growth of a sense of themselves as independent nations in the Dominions—most dramatically in Australia, where “Anzac Day,” commemorating Australian sacrifice at Gallipoli, remains the great national patriotic celebration.

But no part of Britain’s global empire escaped the transformative effect of the mobilisation of manpower and resources that World War I enforced. A new world emerged in 1919, one in which the Empire no longer rested on the solid (or so it seemed) foundations taken for granted in the late Victorian and Edwardian years.

And therein lies one of the paradoxes of Winston Churchill’s career. He was very perceptive about (though not necessarily welcoming of) the changes the war had wrought in British politics, the structure of Europe, and Anglo-American relations. But he never really understood either how much India had changed—that there was no choice but to continue along the road signposted by the Montagu declaration—or that the Dominions, especially Australia, felt very differently about themselves as a result of their 1914-18 experiences.

That is why it is useful to take note of the vast changes in the British Empire taking place in the background of the titanic European struggle that absorbed Churchill for four intense years, and fills the vivid pages of The World Crisis. For those changes would shape and constrain many of his actions as he led Britain and its Empire in their last great war. A passionate believer in the benign nature of the Empire—as well as its necessity for the continuation of Britain’s global power—it was Churchill’s fate to become prime minister at a time when the imperial tide was ebbing rapidly—as the changes set in motion by the world crisis of 1914-18 reached their inevitable conclusion.

Endnotes


SINKING THE LUSITANIA, AND OTHER CONSPIRACY THEORIES

“In defeat, defiance.” L-R: a recruiting poster after the sinking; a defiant 1915 postcard, a sticker deployed by British companies to reassure customers.

Q My book on Churchill and the Lusitania (which FH will reprise in a future issue —Ed.) will rebut the allegations that Churchill conspired to cause her sinking. I am wondering if you know of any other “conspiracies” he was accused of, like knowing about Pearl Harbor but keeping mum.

—DAVID RAMSAY, INDIAN WELLS, CALIF.

A This and other alleged conspiracies are on our “Myths” web page, http://bit.ly/1JvWSme. The Pearl Harbor story was refuted by Ron Helgemo (ex-CIA), and is the best we’ve read on the subject. Also dismissed is the claim that Churchill conspired to starve occupied Europe by withholding food shipments. Then there are...

• The Jutland Plot, 1917, wherein Lord Alfred Douglas, poet friend of Oscar Wilde, accused WSC of manipulating stock prices by making announcements about the 1916 Battle of Jutland to benefit his friend Sir Ernest Cassel (Lord Alfred was convicted of libel). Martin Gilbert covered this in his talk to one of our Churchill Tours, “Churchill’s London: Spinning Top of Memories”: http://bit.ly/1j0plj.

• In Churchill’s Deception (1994), Louis Kilzer claimed that Churchill secretly tricked Hitler into attacking the Soviet Union, “leading to the deaths of millions.” Our review is in Finest Hour 84 (scroll to page 22): http://bit.ly/1uJBX7V.

• In The Greatest Story Never Told (also 1994), the aptly-named Pat Riott claimed that Churchill engineered the 1929 Stock Market crash. How he managed to profit by this after losing all his money is not explained.

• Michael Smith, in the Daily Telegraph, said Churchill was paid by the CIA to finance a postwar campaign for a United Europe.

What about football conspiracies? According to Andy Harris in Sunday Sport of 12 September 1993, England’s manager Graham Taylor had a visit from Sir Winston, who spoke to him through the medium Mystic Maria, equating the World Cup with fighting the World Wars. Maybe that is not a conspiracy, since WSC’s ghost didn’t conspire to place any bets.

FILMING LOCATIONS

Q I am an editor on a Russian historical TV programme about World War I, wherein we discuss Churchill’s policies. I have to find places connecting Churchill with the war for shooting our film. Do you know about any for this period?

—LEV MOISEEV (LEVANDR26@GMAIL.COM)

A Churchill in World War I could make for a dramatic documentary. We are surprised no one has produced one yet.

There are many suitable places in London, such as the former London Magazine at the Serpentine in Hyde Park, which Churchill rushed to defend during the 1911 Agadir crisis.

GUNS OF AUGUST 1914-2014

The First World War: Riddles, Mysteries, Theories

FINEST HOUR 163 / 32
Rafal Heydel-Mankoo reports “it is now open to the public, having been refurbished by the Royal Parks and Serpentine Gallery. It contains the Serpentine Sackler Gallery and a restaurant. I live a short walk from the building and it has become a popular destination for residents.”

Churchill spent the first eight months of the war at the Admiralty, a Grade 1 listed building currently used for government functions and ministerial flats. Whether it (and other government property mentioned herein) could be used for filming would depend on the government. We suggest you contact the British Embassy in Moscow, perhaps the military attaché.

His next official location was near Ploegsteert, Belgium, where he commanded a battalion in early 1915, after he had left the government. What is there for filming we don’t know. Contact Belgian local authorities.

Churchill returned to London in April 1915. In July 1917 he became Minister of Munitions and his headquarters was the Metropole Building, which is today part of the Ministry of Defence. Again permissions would depend on government departments.

WHENCE HIS PC?

By World War I Churchill, barely forty, had been a Privy Counselor seven years—why so early, even before he joined the Cabinet in 1908?

—RONALD FERGER, VIA EMAIL

A

All Cabinet ministers become PCs, but the Privy Council is not confined to Cabinet ministers. Junior ministers are sometimes appointed, either as a mark of approval (suggesting eventual promotion) or on retirement before reaching Cabinet rank. Other prominent people are also appointed, such as senior judicial figures, archbishops and other eminent persons. The current total is about 500. The Council hardly ever meets as a whole, government business being regularly conducted by the Queen and about six PCs. The only time that all 500 (or a sizeable number) meet is on the death of the Sovereign, as an “Accession Council” to declare the new Sovereign.

Churchill was appointed in 1907, probably because of his unusual prominence as Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office (his Secretary of State being in the House of Lords). An interesting example is Sir Winston’s grandson, Sir Nicholas Soames. He was a junior minister under John Major, but was not given a government post under David Cameron. Perhaps he didn’t want one, but in any case he was appointed PC in 2011.

In the matter of assigning prefixes and post-nominals, one needs to be careful. Consider for example prefixes for peers, who have the following designations whether or not they belong to the Privy Council:

Duke His Grace
Marquess The Most Hon
Earl The Rt Hon
Viscount The Rt Hon
Baron The Rt Hon

The only way to denote one of these as a PC is to use “PC” as a post-nominal. A lesser mortal, appointed PC, can use the prefix “The Rt Hon” or the post-nominal “PC”—but not simultaneously. Thus Churchill would normally have been denoted as: “The Rt Hon Sir Winston Churchill KG OM CH TD FRS MP.” If, however, for any good reason, the prefix was omitted (perhaps in a list of names), he would have been shown as: “Sir Winston Churchill KG OM CH TD PC FRS MP.” The designation “MP” would have been omitted after he retired from the House of Commons in 1964.

—PAUL H. COURTENAY
Saved from Destruction: Unique Images of Churchill at Harrow

PETE BOSWELL

Save Photo Ltd. have discovered seven of the earliest surviving original images of Winston Churchill. They were found in the Hills and Saunders Harrow Collection, whose private owner asked Save Photo to digitise, conserve and catalogue. The collection was uncovered in poor condition in the barn of a dairy farm outside Cirencester, Gloucestershire in 2012. The owner and Save Photo rescued the collection and relocated it to a secure, climate controlled storage at Save Photo’s headquarters in Warwickshire, England.

For over ninety years, between 1860 and 1970, Hills and Saunders, photographers by Royal Appointment, captured memorable images of Harrow schoolboys, their families and the surroundings of this public school in

Mr. Boswell is the owner of Save Photo Ltd. Photos reprinted by kind permission.
As she was matching individual students to the plates using original ledgers and documents, Save Photo’s archivist, Lizzie Davies, found seven images of Winston Churchill, aged between 13 and 17. They span 1889-1892, when he was in the Head Master’s House under House Master the Rev. James Welldon. Six are from Head Master’s House group photographs, one featuring young Winston in the Harrow School Rifle Corps. 

Harrow-on-the Hill, Middlesex, north of London. The collection of over 90,000 glass plate negatives is possibly the largest surviving archive of its kind in the world. The photographs include every member of staff, pupil and sporting team from Harrow School between 1860 and 1965. Glass plates rarely survive because they are so fragile, and many English public schools have long since sold off or disposed of their collections.
**Saved from Destruction...**

In the group photographs (four pictured on these pages), Churchill seems to alternate between unhappiness and contentment, reflecting his ambivalence towards his school years. Though he didn’t excel there, he revisited Harrow many times in later life and came to love its traditions. The photos display his schoolboy maturation, in both mufti and military garb with the Harrow Rifle Corps, which he joined early. There is a keen alertness in his expression, pointing towards illustrious days to come.

Biographer Sir Martin Gilbert offers a valuable insight into those years: “When, at the height of the Blitz in 1940, Randolph accompanied his father to Harrow for the annual school songs, Churchill told him, ‘Listening to those boys singing all those well-remembered songs, I could see myself fifty years before singing those tales of great deeds and of great men and wondering how I could ever do something glorious for my country.’”

As managing director of Save Photo, I was pleased to respond to the editor’s request to allow *Finest Hour* to publish all seven of these rare and historic photos. We have been very privileged to work with such a
unique collection of historical significance. Our team has
developed an intensive programme of conservation and
archiving. We have been lovingly inspecting each photo-
graphic plate to ensure it is carefully cleaned, recorded
and stored in high quality archival sleeves. With the First
World War centenary events beginning this year, I am
delighted that we have been able to add these amazing
lost images to the portfolio of known Churchill photo-
graphs, along with many of his famous contemporaries.

The Churchill plates that form part of the Hills and
Saunders Harrow Collection will be offered for sale at
auction later this year; details will be announced by the
private owner in due course. For more information about
Save Photo and the collection, please contact archivist
Lizzie Davis, telephone (+44) 01926-810604, or visit our
himself added: “I am very tender all over my body…I hope you will excuse my writing as I am rather shaky.”

Later that summer there was an outbreak of measles at Harrow and many parents took their sons out of school. Winston wrote to his mother asking to be sent home as well. “300 Boys have gone, 32 out of our house alone. I have never had the measles. But I would so like to come home. There will be about 5 boys left on Monday…I should have imagined that as 300 Mamas & Papas like to have their ‘offspring’ home You would like to have me. Please, please do.” He then went on helpfully to draft a wire to his mother for her to send to Head Master Welldon: “I have remembered that Winston has not had measles so please allow him to come this evening.” He added: “I can sleep anywhere. Do please, as all the friends I have made have gone, & it isn’t very nice to see them all going.”

On the same day, Churchill wrote his wife a letter which contains a well-known passage often cited to prove he was a warmonger: “Everything tends towards catastrophe & collapse. I am interested, geared up and happy. Is it not horrible to be built like that?” Usually omitted is what followed: “Yet I wd do my best for peace, & nothing wd induce me wrongfully to strike the blow.” He concluded urging privacy in phone calls: “...this is a vy good plan of ours on the telephone...But talk in parables—for they all listen.”

Less than a week later, on August 3rd, German troops crossed into France and Belgium. Britain’s ultimatum to Germany expired at midnight on 4 August, whereupon Churchill sent a signal to the Royal Navy: COMMENCE HOSTILITIES AGAINST GERMANY.
day, Camrose’s Daily Telegraph, like many other leading publications, had urged Chamberlain to bring Churchill into the government: “No step would more profoundly impress the Axis Powers with the conviction that this country means business.” The Prime Minister disagreed, writing to his sister that refusing to send for Churchill did not mean abandoning the idea of convincing Hitler “that it would not pay to use force....In fact, I have little doubt that Hitler knows quite well that we mean business.”

If the dictators just had patience, Chamberlain went on, “I can imagine that a way could be found of meeting German claims while safeguarding Poland’s independence and Economic Security. I am thinking of making a further proposal to Mussolini that he should move for a twelve months truce to let the temperature cool down.”

It wasn’t just the English press that wanted Churchill. On July 6th, Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax had received reports from several sources of conversations with Count Schwerin von Krosigk, Germany’s Minister of Finance and Hitler’s longest-serving cabinet member. A non-Nazi whose relatives were later involved in plots against Hitler, von Krosigk had been appointed by Hitler’s predecessors. The Count told two British military figures: “Churchill is the only Englishman Hitler is afraid of. He does not take the PM and Lord Halifax seriously, but he placed Churchill in the same category as Roosevelt. The mere fact of giving him a leading ministerial post would convince Hitler that we really meant to stand up to him.” Von Krosigk later said: “Hitler thinks Churchill is the only dangerous Englishman” and might make Hitler “realize that Great Britain really intends to fight if there is any further aggression.”

Churchill, meanwhile, was publicly urging an alliance between Britain, France, and Russia, but the Prime Minister would not contemplate one. “I am so skeptical of the values of Russian help,” he wrote his sister in early July “that I should not feel that our position was worsened if we had to do without them.”

By July 23rd Chamberlain was sure Hitler had realized “the time is not ripe for the major war. Therein he is fulfilling my expectations. Unlike some of my critics I go further and say the longer the war is put off the less likely it is to come at all as we go on perfec ting our defences and building up the defences of our allies.”

The next day at Chartwell, Churchill told General Ironside that it was “too late for any appeasement....Hitler is going to make war.” WSC predicted “the crippling or annihilation of Poland” and a German alliance with Russia. A month later, on 23 August, Germany and Russia signed a non-aggression pact. Eight days after that, Germany invaded Poland.

On that same day, September 1st, Chamberlain asked Churchill to join a small war cabinet as minister without portfolio. Churchill agreed. For the next forty-eight hours he heard nothing more as Chamberlain continued to battle reality. On the 2nd, as the terror bombing of Warsaw approached its second day, the PM told Parliament: “If the German Government should agree to withdraw their forces, then His Majesty’s Government would be willing to regard the position as being the same as it was before the German forces crossed the Polish frontier,” and “open to discussions” between Germany, Poland and Britain.

As he had at Munich, Chamberlain had not advised the Cabinet of what he intended to do or say. Then, the Cabinet had acquiesced. Now, they rebelled. Aghast at his statement, five ministers went to see him to insist on an ultimatum to Germany, which in due course was sent on the morning of 3 September. Hitler ignored the ultimatum and, thereafter, Chamberlain broadcast to the country that they were at war with Germany.

Later that day, Chamberlain again contacted Churchill to make a new and more specific offer: the Admiralty, with a place in the war cabinet.

Churchill accepted at once, which led in due course to an alleged signal to the Fleet, which official biographer Martin Gilbert has alas been unable to track: WINSTON IS BACK.

50 YEARS AGO
Summer 1964 • Age 89
“Congratulations and Happiness”

Churchill’s grandson and namesake Winston was married June 27th. He was unable to attend the wedding so the newlyweds visited him at 28 Hyde Park Gate later that day. Winston wrote to his mother:

“I paid a visit to Grandpa C who has been ill for the last ten days, but today he was in spanking form. He was sitting looking at a book of sculpture in the garden of 28 HPG. It was a lovely sunny afternoon and he greeted me with the words ‘Congratulations and Happiness.’”

A month later, on July 27th, Churchill visited the House of Commons for the last time. The next day, Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home and Labour leader Harold Wilson led a delegation to Hyde Park Gate to presented him with a unanimous resolution on the occasion of his forthcoming retirement: “That this House, putting on record its unbounded admiration and gratitude for his services to Parliament, to the nation and to the world, remembers, above all, his inspiration of the British people when they stood alone, and his leadership until victory was won.”

FINEST HOUR 163 / 39
It’s baseball season in America, but you will be wondering what it has to do with Sir Winston. Well, enough for this Churchillian fan of the “National Pastime” (which has been sadly eclipsed nowadays by football—just another of those team games played against a clock).

How is it that the son of Jennie Jerome, a woman born in Brooklyn, at the epicenter of early professional baseball, just three miles from the future home of the fabled Brooklyn Dodgers, never attended a Major League baseball game? Despite Winston Churchill’s deep pride in his American roots, he never showed up at a ballpark during his sixteen trips to his mother’s land. The oft-quoted cultural historian Jacques Barzun would consider it a colossal missed opportunity. As he put it, “whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules and reality of the game.”

Barzun’s advice doesn’t apply as much now as it once did, but during Churchill’s lifetime baseball was a crucial part of American culture. What might he have learned about America at the ballpark? He enjoyed writing and talking about “what if?” scenarios. Baseball is full of them. What if he saw a game? Would people have heard him bellowing “dog and a beer” to a roving vendor? Would his understanding of America have increased? Would he have enjoyed sitting in the open air, smoking a cigar—that sort of thing was allowed back then—amid the raucous, colorful crowd? But could a man famously averse to boredom sit through nine innings?

While Churchill was more sportsman than sports fan, I think he would have appreciated the athletic skill and grace of the grand old game—its elegance and pace, its tenacious adherence to traditions. Described as “keenly watchful” and a “master in tactics and strategy,” he would likely have been impressed by the managers’ moves during a ball game.

Although some of Churchill’s visits didn’t coincide with the baseball season, several of his trips to New York or Washington might have allowed him to catch a game. (To get to Yankee Stadium, fans took

CHRISTOPHER SCHWARZ

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If You Don’t Find Baseball, Baseball Will Find You

Eminent Churchillians on and off the Ball Field

MANAGED BY CHURCHILL: The 1935 Bismarck, North Dakota team, manager Neil Churchill front and center, future Hall of Fame pitching great Satchel Paige standing behind him. Bismarck broke baseball’s color barrier twelve years before Jackie Robinson did it with Brooklyn in the major leagues. We think Winston Churchill, who deplored segregation in the U.S. Army during World War II, would have approved. PHOTOGRAPH: NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO
the subway to Woodlawn and Jerome Avenues; Churchill would have noticed his maternal family’s name.) His good friend FDR enjoyed baseball immensely. Roosevelt, in fact, holds the record, constitutionally protected now, for most ceremonial first pitches tossed by the chief executive.

Consider what Churchill missed over the sixty-year span of his visits to America.

He first arrived in the United States in 1895, the same year a Churchill (his first name is lost to history) appeared in professional baseball, playing for the Port Huron Marines. A future First Lord of the Admiralty might have rooted for such a team.

Baseball is a game where we keep track of everything. We know, for example, of a minor league baseball manager named Neil Churchill, who happens to have done something extraordinary: he headed the first integrated professional baseball team twelve years before Jackie Robinson broke the major league color barrier.

And we know of fourteen players named Churchill, though none of them made the majors. One of these, Robert, was Churchillian in his efforts, never, never, never giving in as he toiled in the minor leagues for a dozen years, batting .239.

Perhaps Churchill’s 1900 visit with Mark Twain, a prominent baseball fan, would have gone better in the summer rather than the late autumn. Cigars in hand, they could have watched the Brooklyn Superbas—progenitors of the Dodgers—on their march to the National League championship.

Imagine Twain regaling young Winston with the mythical baseball game in his fantasy, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, as they watched the Brooklyns win in “superb” fashion. And if Churchill had stuck around for the summer of 1901, he might have witnessed the debut of one of the best English-born players, Hobe Ferris of the Boston Americans. The pride of Trowbridge, Wiltshire, Ferris played nearly 1300 games over nine seasons.

Churchill, his brother and their sons traveled to North America in August 1929, passing through many minor league cities but but not arriving in Chicago, their first major league city, until October 2nd. Had they started in the south and east, they could have seen the Philadelphia Athletics and Chicago Cubs slug their way to respective pennants. Alas Cubs fans were disappointed (again), losing the World Series four games to one. >>

**WINSTON CHURCHILL ON BASEBALL**

“Millions of men and women are in the market, all eager to supplement the rewards of energetic toil by ‘easy money.’ From every part of its enormous territories the American public follows the game. Horseracing, baseball, football, every form of sport or gambling cedes its place to a casino whose amplitude and splendours make Monte Carlo the meanest midget in Lilliput.”

—“What I Saw and Heard in America,” 1929

“Broadly speaking, human beings may be divided into three classes: those who are toiled to death, those who are worried to death, and those who are bored to death. It is no use offering the manual labourer, tired out with a hard week’s sweat and effort, the chance of playing a game of football or baseball on Saturday afternoon.”

—“Hobbies,” in *Thoughts and Adventures*, 1932

“The news bulletin is coming through on the broadcast. The telephone bell rings—your wife asks you if you remembered to post that letter—and by the time you can again give your attention to the announcer, he has passed to another item. Without the newspaper you will never know the result of that baseball match, or the President’s latest message to Congress.”

—“You Get It in Black and White,” 1935

Mr. Fenner Brockway (Lab.): “Is [the Prime Minister] aware that...the Iver Heath Conservative Party held a fete to raise money for party purposes to which it invited American service baseball teams to participate for a ‘Winston Churchill’ trophy...and had a note from him saying he was honoured...?”

Mr. Churchill: “I had not, I agree, fully realized the political implications that might attach to the matter, and in so far as I have erred I express my regret.” [Laughter.]

Mr. H. Hynd (Lab.): “While Hon. Gentlemen opposite may try to laugh this one off, may I ask whether the Prime Minister would contemplate the attitude of his Hon. Friends if this incident had happened in connection with a Labour Party fete?”

WSC: “I hope we should all show an equal spirit of tolerance and good humour.”

Mr. Brockway: “Can the Prime Minister estimate what would be the reaction of Mr. Eisenhower if British Forces participated in a Democratic Party celebration?”

WSC: “I certainly should not attempt to add to the many difficult questions which are pending at the present time by bending my mind to the solution of that question.”

—Question Time, 21 July 1952, Paul Courtenay, *FH* 115, Summer 2002
October did not go well for Churchill either: he lost £10,000 in the Stock Market Crash, a little over two weeks later. The need for money brought him back to the U.S. in 1931-32 on an ambitious speaking tour, most notable for his nearly being killed by a car in New York in December.

He wouldn’t return until December 1941. While he had graver matters on his mind the previous summer, he missed one of the truly glorious baseball seasons. While Operation Barbarossa and the see-saw North Africa battle between Rommel and the Desert Rats made the front pages, Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams used all the ink on the sports pages for their respective 56-game hitting streak and assault on the elusive .400 batting average.

That summer was also notable for the death of a baseball player known for Churchillian resilience and a memorable speech, when Lou Gehrig, Pride of the Yankees, succumbed to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. On subsequent wartime visits Churchill didn’t miss much, since thirty-two stars including Williams and DiMaggio left to serve in the military.

Churchill visited the United States four times in the Fifties and had four more opportunities to watch stellar baseball. New York was by far the best place to see a game: in that halcyon decade New York baseball teams would play in nine and win eight World Series, five of the encounters pitting New York clubs against each another. “The Boys of Summer,” Roger Kahn’s lyrical name for the Brooklyn Dodgers, who played in four, might have been familiar to Churchill from the poem of that same name by Dylan Thomas.

And here is another odd bit of trivia: On 2 October 2012, as the now-Los Angeles Dodgers were watching their play-off hopes fall to the now-San Francisco Giants, their immortal announcer Vin Scully (voice of the Dodgers since 1950) invoked a line from another Dylan Thomas poem: “Do not go gentle into that good night.” Churchill’s 1954 visit was a near miss in both baseball and historic terms. Had he delayed his return from New York just a few days until after the Fourth of July, he could have gone to Yankee Stadium for a four-game series against the Washington Senators and met (the mind boggles!) another great wordsmith: Yogi Berra.

Ponder the lost opportunity: those two men are possibly the most quoted—or misquoted—figures in history. Yogi once explained, “I never said many of the things I said.” Churchill would commiserate.

Frail and in ill health, Sir Winston Churchill made his last journey to America with a brief stop in New York in the spring of 1961 at the very beginning of another auspicious baseball year. By season’s end, one of the sacred records would fall to Roger Maris as he passed Babe Ruth’s season record of sixty home runs. A little more than a week after Churchill left America for the final time, Maris clouted the first of his sixty-one homers.

While we can only speculate as to whether attending a ballgame would have deepened his understanding for the United States, it was best for all that Churchill spent his time in America on more serious matters. There wasn’t enough free time for this indispensable man. Baseball, in a way, also has means to measure indispensability. Known as Sabermetrics, it is the intricate statistical analysis of empirical data used to measure skill and overall talent, sophisticated math that might have tantalized Churchill’s scientific adviser, Lord Cherwell. Stats like the UZR (Ultimate Zone Rating) measure overall defensive prowess, a skill Churchill thrived at. Or, even more appropriately, the WAR stat (Wins above Replacement) measures the overall value of a player in terms of victories compared to a less able counterpart in the same position. It is amusing to consider what Churchill’s World War II WAR stat would be.

In more counterfactual terms, what would have happened if Chamberlain had remained prime minister in May 1940? It would have been a whole ’nother ballgame.
Please tell me how to get a copy of all the original Chartwell Bulletins as written by Winston Churchill.
—W.B. STONECYPHER, VIA EMAIL

The Churchill Centre published twelve Chartwell Bulletins in book form in 1989 with an introduction and footnotes by Martin Gilbert and photos from Lady Soames’s albums. Bookfinder.com lists numerous copies as low as $23. Search their site or see this page: http://bit.ly/1rT2r4h.

Churchill sent many such bulletins from time to time, but these, to his absent wife during her 1935 South Seas voyage, are the most cohesive and entertaining. They are reproduced in Document Volume 12 of the official biography, but our booklet gathers them with family photos and more detailed notes by Sir Martin. Anyone interested should have a copy.

1 January 1935

My darling one, I send you Chartwell Bulletin No. 1 which will conclude like Napoleon’s famous bulletin after his Russian catastrophe, “The health of the Emperor is excellent.”

The pool has now been raised another fifteen inches. It is filling gradually from the spring through the old filter and is absolutely clear and limpid owing to the algae being asleep for the winter.

I have arranged to have one of those great mechanical diggers which is working close by to come here in a few days at a cost of £25 a week. In this one week he will do more than forty men do. There is no difficulty about bringing him in as he is a caterpillar and can walk over the most sloppy fields without doing any harm. His first task will be to make your “haha.” He will cut a four foot trench all along a line a few yards behind where the temporary fence runs now. He will throw the earth on the water garden side thus making a two foot higher slope. This gives a six foot depth sloped off on each side in a V shape. At the bottom of this the new run of permanent fox-proof fence will be erected, and when you walk down to the swimming pool you will not even see its nose showing over the top of the ground. Your eye will plunge, as you desire, across a valley of unbroken green.*

*The digger proved a mistake, as WSC related in Chartwell Bulletin 7: “The digger has involved me in a chapter of accidents and I doubt if I shall get out of it under £150, as it broke down at a critical moment through its cogwheels tearing. It was more than a week before it was repaired. This was due largely to the fact that the original contractors with whom I dealt rented the machine from another contractor, who borrowed it from a third, with the result that not one of them seemed to have the responsibility for making things go. Meanwhile the weather changed and downpours of rain occurred. The digger sunk deeper into the mud and finally walled himself into an awful pit. It became necessary to bring four hydraulic jacks, which though they are quite small things and one man can handle them, can lift thirty tons. Then railway sleepers had to be sunk in the ground under the digger to make a foundation for these jacks, and as the jacks hoisted the digger, of course the sleepers sunk deeper.

However after nearly a week the animal emerged from his hole and practically finished the job, though there is still a fortnight’s tidying up for five men. This animal is very strong with his hands but very feeble with his caterpillar legs, and as the fields are sopping, they had the greatest difficulty in taking him away. They will have to lay down sleepers all the way from the lake to the gate over which he will waddle on Monday. I shall be glad to see the last of him.

Mrs. Donkey Jack** will very likely never be able to walk again as it is unlikely her fractured ankle will knit together at her age. She was knocked down by a workman on a push bicycle and no compensation of any kind can be obtained for her in this desperate misfortune. Should the worst be realised I shall try and get her into a decent home for the rest of her days at some small cost.

Meanwhile her savage dog (the little one) still stands a faithful sentry over her belongings. He allows Arnold to bring food at a respectable distance and consents to eat it, but otherwise he remains like the seraph Abdiel in Paradise Lost: “Among innumerable false, unmoved, Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified; His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.”

**Mr. and Mrs. ‘Donkey’ Jack were gypsies who lived on the common near Chartwell with their donkey. After Mr. ‘Donkey’ Jack died, Churchill, who with his romantic nature was captivated by gypsy life, gave Jack’s widow permission to camp in the Chartwell wood, where she eventually died.
Mr. Peter Ochs is developing a theatre piece, “Churchill and Hitler in Their Own Words,” which he hopes will open in Vienna in August. Among Churchill’s lines are: “Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail.” Hitler, he assures us, is more prosaic: “Germany will even survive me!” (Did he really say that?) But Mr. Ochs wished to include a much earlier Churchill speech, forty-five years before World War II—his first ever, in November 1895, in the promenade at the Empire Palace of Varieties in Leicester Square.

Churchill was quite taken with the promenade, situated just behind the dress circle. Not so London’s prudes, led by the formidably named Mrs. Ormiston Chant. The congregating of men and women, including ladies of the evening, and the drinking of alcohol, had elicited Mrs. Chant’s opprobrium. In response to her protests the London County Council ordered the theatre to erect a canvas screen between the promenade and the outer bars.

Churchill, then a Sandhurst cadet, was having none of this. On Saturday, 3 November, he was part of a crowd which rushed and destroyed the flimsy symbolic separation. “In these somewhat unvirginal surroundings,” he recalled, “I now made my maiden speech. Mounting on the debris and indeed partially emerging from it, I addressed the tumultuous crowd.” The Countess of Aberconway, who was there, recalled him saying: “Ladies of the Empire: I stand for liberty!”

“No very accurate report of my words has been preserved,” Churchill himself wrote later. “I discarded the constitutional argument entirely and appealed directly to sentiment and even passion, finishing up by saying ‘You have seen us tear down these barricades tonight; see that you pull down those who are responsible for them at the coming election.’ These words were received with rapturous applause, and we all sallied out into the Square brandishing fragments of wood and canvas as trophies or symbols. It reminded me of the death of Julius Caesar…”

Rather chuffed by the experience, Churchill wrote his brother Jack four days later: “Did you see the papers about the riot at the Empire last Saturday. It was I who led the rioters—and made a speech to the crowd. I enclose a cutting from one of the papers, so that you may see.”

While we do not have a transcript of Churchill’s exact words, I was able to produce the text of a letter written by Churchill on 18 October and published in the Westminster Gazette the following day, which prefigured the rebellion of November 3rd:

Sir,—In your article of the 17th inst, entitled “The Plimsoll Line in Respectability,” you are somewhat inclined to belittle the arguments of the “anti-prudes.” The improvement in the standard of public decency is due rather to improved social conditions and to the spread of education than to the prowling of the prudes.

Nature’s law metes out great and terrible punishments to the “roué and libertine”—far greater punishments than it is in the power of any civilised State to award. These penalties have been exacted since the world was young, and yet immorality is still common. State
intervention, whether in the form of a statute or by the decision of licensing committees, will never eradicate the evil. It may make it more dangerous for the evildoer. But such a policy, while not decreasing immorality, only increases its evil effects.

Now, Sir, I submit that the only method of reforming human nature and of obtaining a higher standard of morality is by educating the mind of the individual and improving the social conditions under which he lives. This is a long and gradual process, the result of which is not to be obtained in our generation. It is slow, but it is sure. If mankind is allowed to work out its own salvation the improvement of the last forty years will be steadily maintained, until we finally realise Mrs. Ormiston Chant’s ideal.

In the meantime it is the plain duty of every Government to endeavour, as far as possible, to localise and minimise the physical effects of the moral evil. It is not a case of legalising and officially sanctioning immorality. The State should protect each member as far as possible from harm, and must govern men as they are and not as they ought to be. This is a duty which is recognised by every European nation. In England we have too long obeyed the voice of the prude. Well-meaning but misguided people, of which class Mrs. Ormiston Chant is a fair specimen, have prevailed upon Government to disclaim a responsibility which it was their bounden duty to accept.

This, then, Sir, is the point of view from which the “anti-prudes” approach the question. The difference between the disputants is one rather of method than of degree. Both are anxious to see England better and more moral, but whereas the Vigilance Societies wish to abolish sin by Act of Parliament, and are willing to sacrifice much of the liberty of the subject into the bargain, the “anti-prudes” prefer a less coercive and more moderate procedure.

If our impetuous reformers could only be persuaded to wait, and to take a broader and perhaps a more charitable view of social problems, they would better serve the cause they have at heart. But these “old women in a hurry” will not have patience, but are trying to improve things by repressive measures—a dangerous method, usually leading to reaction.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant
WLSC


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Mullahs of Moment

WILLIAM JOHN SHEPHERD


Churchill’s role in the 1907 campaign in Somaliland, against Mohammed Abdille (or Abdullah) Hassan, the rebellious so-called “Mad Mullah,” has been understated. It was scarcely mentioned by Churchill in his memoirs, or in the 1923 standard work on the subject, by colonial administrator Sir Douglas Jardine. Irons corrects this with elegant writing and pithy chapter epigrams from western luminaries, including Churchill (referred to throughout as “The Giant”) and even from the Book of Ecclesiastes. He provides excellent maps and photographs, a comprehensive bibliography, and extensive endnotes sourcing letters and reports of contemporaries including serving British officers.

The British Empire’s extensive trade routes, maintained by the Royal Navy, included the port of Berbera in northern Somaliland. Here the inhabitants, devout Muslims with powerful oral traditions, belonged to patriarchal clans which constantly engaged in feuds. The “Mad Mullah” was a radical Sunni preacher, so named by his more moderate countrymen, though his followers called him “Sayyid” or Master. Responding to his resistance, British officers led Somali levies augmented by Sikhs from India and former enemies like the Sudanese and Boers. They inflicted massive casualties on the Mullah’s followers, though he always escaped, often hiding in Italian Somaliland.

In 1907, Churchill, then Britain’s Undersecretary for Colonies, wrote >>
a memo described by Irons as “disastrous” (93), arguing that Britain withdraw to a coastal line of ports based on Berbera. This policy was carried out in 1910 after Colonial Secretary Lord Crewe won approval from the Cabinet, including Prime Minister Asquith. It was, says Irons, a forerunner of Munich—a betrayal under the guise of prudence, morally equivalent to forsaking Czechoslovakia in 1938. But Irons grossly overstates Churchill’s responsibility for the decision, taken two years after he had left the Colonial Office, while ignoring those responsible in 1910: Asquith, Crewe and the Cabinet.

Following World War I, the government considered eliminating the newly formed Royal Air Force (RAF), owing to financial concerns and the advent of peace. The Chief of the Air Staff, Hugh Trenchard, whom the author cleverly calls “Deus Ex Machina,” offered the RAF as a minimalist force, which he was certain could manage colonial wars cheaper than the army. British Somaliland was the demonstration case. Under bizarre circumstances evocative of the television series “Yes, Minister,” the Air Ministry won approval from Prime Minister Lloyd George and the Cabinet, well aware that the War Office would not object, since Churchill headed both War and Air.

Accordingly, in 1920, the RAF’s “Z Force,” supported by ground troops, assaulted and destroyed the Mullah’s power base, returning relative peace to British Somaliland and preserving the RAF as an independent entity. (Mohammed Abdille Hassan escaped yet again, but died a few months later from influenza.)

Though this is a well-written military history, Irons vastly overstates Churchill’s influence before World War I and argues unconvincingly that this early “betrayal” in his career prompted Churchill to redeem himself in 1920 by taking down the Mullah, and in the 1930s by opposing Nazism. This is a fundamental misreading of Churchill, a lifelong opponent of tyranny in all its forms.

More a Monitor Than a Dreadnought

ROBERT COURTS


Richard Freeman sets out to persuade his reader that Churchill’s First World War career was one of unequivocal triumph, without a hint of tragedy. Squarely aiming at the casual reader, he argues that the Churchill of the Great War was full of “energy, imagination and courage,” developing his argument with flair, humour and engaging style.

The praise is comprehensive, including such relatively obscure episodes as Churchill’s prophetic 1911 memorandum predicting how the first few weeks of a German attack in the West would develop. We read of Churchill’s work to deploy aircraft and armoured cars at Dunkirk. There is an excellent passage on WSC’s focus on “machines not men”—arguably his greatest contribution to the war. Churchill’s work at the Ministry of Munitions, often-overlooked, is well-handled in good detail, especially the political battles against colleagues.

Freeman mounts a spirited defence of Churchill’s doomed mission to Antwerp, explaining how, as so often in the war’s early months, actions later decried as rash were strongly supported by Kitchener, the war minister, who sent troops and promised Churchill a field command. A triumph of the book is its lucid explanation of how political factors conspired against Churchill during the Dardanelles episode in 1915, and the degree to which Conservative animus—Lord Derby’s most colourfully—caused his fall, delayed his return, and hampered his performance once back in office.

Despite Freeman’s overwhelmingly positive thesis, he does not shun criticism. At the Admiralty, he writes, Churchill’s management style “blurred the boundary between the political role of the First Lord and the professional role of the First Sea Lord” (Fisher), which ultimately led to friction. Churchill’s management of the Goeben chase (see page 22), was marked by a confusion between policy and implementation that struck at the established tradition of the Admiralty and stored up trouble for the future. More stridently, Freeman describes Churchill’s deployment of the Naval Brigades at Antwerp as “totally irresponsible.” Churchill, he says, had

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“seen the battlefield and knew that it was proving beyond the powers and endurance of well-trained men, yet he nonchalantly plunged his untrained brigades into the battle.”

While engaging, detailed and enthusiastic, this book slightly misses the mark for two reasons. First, Freeman tends to pull his punches in areas where sustained criticism is necessary. For example, one’s impression from the Dardanelles passage, which inevitably is the keystone of the book, is of the naval command’s extraordinary amateurishness; of Fisher dragging his heels, then childishly requiring reassurance in mid-operation; of Churchill and Kitchener pushing onwards; of Churchill not ordering a naval attack in the initial stages whilst de Roebeck, the on-scene commander, vacillated. The reader wants to scream: “Who is in command here?”

Alas, confusion of command is not a point Freeman drives home. H.H. Asquith, in allowing his ministers to run their own private fiefdoms without a unifying direction and command, was deeply culpable.

Second, in his enthusiasm for rehabilitating Churchill, Freeman sometimes brushes over areas where Churchill cannot escape all the blame. Freeman spends a lot of time, for example, denying the “popular mythology” that Churchill originated the Dardanelles campaign. But this is not the main question that should concern a pro-Churchill historian. The main question is: how much culpability attaches to the First Lord as part of an undoubtedly culpable command structure? For example, Churchill did not ensure that Fisher, who was initially supportive, remained with him over the operation; nor did he ensure or explain the inadequate numbers of monitors and minesweepers, and why they were crewed by civilian, not naval, personnel. Even Churchill’s ardent admirers do not believe, as Freeman does, that WSC was never really that keen over the Dardanelles.

While we welcome a pro-Churchill book, one cannot avoid the conclusion that this one is slightly underpowered, despite its enthusiasm, daring and panache. It is engaging and readable, a much needed start to reassessing Churchill’s First World War career during its centenary. But it doesn’t sit in the same league with Barry Gough or Christopher Bell. It’s not a bad book for the general reader: a good start to a complicated topic. But I couldn’t help feeling frustrated that it is more of a “monitor,” when what we need is a “dreadnought.”

Pudding without a Theme

CHRISTOPHER H. STERLING


Churchill once demanded, “Take this pudding away—it has no theme!” Such is the problem with this small book, which ostensibly assesses George VI and his prime minister during World War II. But it never rises above generalities that are already well known.

A crucial part of the author’s problem, of course, is that the core of their relationship was defined in conversations between his two subjects where no one else was present to record what took place. That situation forces him back to public source material used by many previous authors. He cites the papers of Alanbrooke, Dill, Churchill, Halifax, Ismay, Roosevelt and George VI’s diary out of Royal Archives, but the notes and citations are nearly all to secondary sources. As a result this is little more than another potted survey of Churchill in the war, where we lose mention of the King for pages on end—and hear much about other relationships.

Nor is there a lack of odd statements. Three examples will suffice: Churchill had few “real friends” (68)? Admiral Fisher was a “long-time nemesis” (72)? Churchill had an “antiquated fixation on wartime maneuver and mobility” (76)? Not much antiquated about that.

Writing parallel biography is a complex task, especially when the two figures are two decades apart in age. In this case, we only approach the cover topic a quarter of the way through the book. One gets the feeling an article-length paper was puffed up into a small book.

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Research and “Churchill Central”

To knit together the vast and diverse trove of Churchill material on the Internet, The Churchill Centre UK has combined with Bloomsbury Publishing to launch the Churchill Central website in 2015 on the 50th anniversary of Sir Winston’s death. Rather than another Churchill site, Churchill Central strives to concentrate and direct browsers to important sources of research from the various organizations. The Churchill Centre’s part in all this is largely based on Finest Hour, with some 800 articles and papers now in digital as well as .pdf form which constitute one of the broadest collections of Churchill material by leading scholars, published over the past thirty-five years. Here is a sampling of the article synopses we are preparing for Churchill Central, in Bloomsbury’s twelve chosen aspects of his life and times, with web pages you can access.

1. The Child


Robert Somervell, who instilled Churchill’s love of English, was born in Cumberland in 1851. He died in Kent, close to Chartwell, in 1933, shortly after being cited by his then-56-year-old former pupil, Winston Churchill, as the man who taught him the precious heritage of language. In My Early Life Churchill recalled this “most delightful man, to whom my debt is great…charged with the duty of teaching the stupidest boys the most disregarded thing, namely to write mere English. He knew how to do it. He took a fairly long sentence and broke it up into its components.”

In a 1935 biography of his father, Sir Donald Somervell wrote: “My father often spoke in after years of the remarkable English compositions Mr. Churchill showed to him, sometimes on subjects quite other than that which he had selected.” Winston’s imaginative essays included one in the style of John Gilpin on Rhamsinitus, hero of Philpot’s Herodotus in Attic Greek, and an elaborate essay complete with maps describing an imaginary battle in Russia. The latter closely prefigured what actually occurred on the Eastern Front between the Germans and Russians in The Great War (1914-18).

2. The Soldier


In his first book, The Story of the Malakand Field Force, Churchill poses questions as worth answering now as they were in 1898. Next, Ben MacIntyre looks at modern war in Afghanistan, and the lessons derived from reading Churchill’s book by former NATO commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal.

In 1898, Churchill wrote, “British power, having conquered the plains of India and subdued its sovereigns, paused at the foot of the Himalayas and turned its tireless energy to internal progress and development. The ‘line of the mountains’…was found to be an inadequate deterrent…. The priesthood, knowing that their authority would be weakened by civilisation, have used their religious influence on the people to foment a general rising….Only one real objection has been advanced against the plan. But it is a crushing one [and] it is this: we have neither the troops nor the money to carry it out.”

MacIntyre explains how young Churchill’s book influenced General...
McChrystal, who came to similar conclusions about the Afghanistan of a century later: “Churchill was a natural historian, and for all their imperial arrogance, his words carry unmistakable relevance to Afghanistan today.”

3. The Young Statesman


In 1915 the Western Allies attacked the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, hoping to force Turkey out of the war and aid the Russians. Failure of both operations haunted Churchill the rest of his life. Indeed some World War II historians believe his determination to avoid invading France until there was a near chance of success stemmed from his horror over losses on Gallipoli. (As Churchill confided to General Marshall in 1943: “I see the sea full of corpses.”)

Sir Martin Gilbert answers all the questions about the Dardanelles: When did Churchill first speak of this attack? Why did he think it vital? Why did he first advocate a naval operation? What was the effect of the initial bombardment of Turkish forts? Did Churchill underestimate Turkish resistance? Did he overrule his military advisers, or steamroll his demands past the War Cabinet? This is a definitive account of what actually happened.

4. Between the Wars


For better or worse, it was the Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill who chaired the 1921 Cairo Conference which created the Middle East borders we still know today. What was Churchill’s thinking? What mistakes did he make? How, if at all, have conditions changed in the near-century since?

Churchill’s task was not easy, writes Professor Freeman. He arrived in Cairo to shouts from an Arab crowd chanting, “Down with Churchill.” In Gaza, he and his wife found a different Arab crowd, divided between “Cheers for the Minister!” and “Down with the Jews.” Ever the optimist, Churchill believed Arabs and Zionists could learn to get along. But he became increasingly exasperated with the Iraqi king he had installed in Baghdad. “We are paying eight millions a year,” he wrote Lloyd George, “for the privilege of living on an ungrateful volcano out of which we are in no circumstances to get anything worth having.” Cynics might say that little has changed.

5. The War Leader


Often misunderstood or unappreciated, Churchill’s constant auditing of his military commanders was a vital contribution to World War II victory. Churchill held their calculations and assertions up to the standard of a massive common sense, informed by wide reading and his own war experience. In questioning the feasibility of an exercise that presumed a successful German invasion of the Norfolk coast, Churchill wrote: “I should be very glad if the same officers would work out a scheme for our landing an exactly similar force on the French coast at the same extreme range of our fighter protection and assuming that the Germans have naval superiority in the Channel.”

This is not to say that Churchill’s military judgment was invariably or even frequently superior to that of his subordinates, although on occasion it clearly was. But when his military could not come up with plausible answers to his harassing and inconvenient questions, they usually revised their views; when they could, Churchill revised his. In both cases, British strategy benefitted.


As France reeled in 1940 Churchill flew there five times to encourage his allies. “His words came in torrents, French and English phrases tumbling over each other…. No matter what happened, England would fight on and on and on, toujours, all the time, everywhere, partout, pas de grace, no mercy, puis la victoire.” They must fight in Paris, behind Paris—retreat to North Africa if need be. On his fifth visit, the French government was in Tours. “He disembarked and told a loiterer, in his appalling French, that his name was Churchill, that he was the Prime Minister of Great Britain, and that he would be grateful if they could provide him with ‘une voiture.’” When the French asked for an armistice he growled, “Another bloody country gone west.” Then he rescued Charles de Gaulle, who took with him into exile, as Churchill later wrote, “the honour of France.”

6. The Elder Statesman


In 1949, visiting his friend Lord Beaverbrook on the French Riviera, Churchill listened to the triumphant tones of Land of Hope and Glory. >>
In this intensely personal memoir from World War I to Churchill’s death, Mountbatten recalls the great man’s remarkable drive and pre-science, his humour and pathos, his eloquence and wit, his war leadership and his sad decline. To many who have read it, this is one of the most moving and revealing first-hand portraits of Winston Churchill. It may very well be the best of them all.

8. The Man of Words


“The orator is the embodiment of the passions of the multitude. Before he can inspire them with any emotion he must be swayed by it himself. Before he can move their tears his own must flow. To convince them he must himself believe.” Young Winston wrote but did not publish this piece in 1897 aged only 23. Yet in sixty-years of oratory, he never deviated from its precepts. The young Churchill established four principles that a speaker must follow which he adopted as maxims: Correctness of Diction (“knowledge of a language is measured by the nice and exact appreciation of words”); Rhythm (“the sentences of the orator when he appeals to his art become long, rolling and sonorous”); Accumulation of Argument (“the climax of oratory is reached by a rapid succession of waves of sound and vivid pictures”); and Analogy (“an apt analogy favours the belief that the unknown is only an extension of the known”). His formula for a good speech remains as sound now as ever. This essay was never formally published before its appearance here.

9. The Man of Leisure


“He rides in the game like heavy cavalry getting into position for the assault. He trots about, keenly watchful, biding his time, a master of tactics and strategy. Abruptly he sees his chance, and he gathers his pony and charges in, neither deft nor graceful, but full of tearing physical energy—and skillful with it too. He bears down opposition by the weight of his dash…. This is not a description of Churchill the war leader, but Churchill the polo player.WSC played his first chukka as a cavalry subaltern in 1895, and his last as a 52-year-old Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1926. He always played with his right arm strapped to his side to prevent it from ‘going out’ as a result of a dislocation in his youth. Even with his arm immobilized he was a serious threat on the field, and in 1897 he was key to his regiment, the 4th Hussars, winning the Inter-Regimental Championship.


“This is Winston Churchill speaking. I should like some butterflies to liberate in my garden. May I
come and see your butterfly farm and discuss a plan?” L.W. Newman, the “farmer,” was astonished. It was 1939. War was coming. Yet Churchill was thinking Lepidoptera.

Churchill had been enchanted by butterflies since boyhood, especially the exotic tropical species he found in India and South Africa. Newman and his son Hugh supplied chrysalises which he watched develop, careful not to disturb a single insect. War intervened, but in 1946 Churchill rang again, showing Hugh a small summer-house: “Take the roof off it, if you like, and put a glass one in its place…. Let me have your plan soon. And let it be a plan of action.” Ever since, Chartwell has been home to butterflies—peacocks, tortoise shells, red admirals, painted ladies, swallow-tails—and the plants that attract them. “I am certain,” Newman writes, that “there was a great resurgence of the butterfly population in that part of Kent—thanks to Mr. Churchill.”

10. The Painter


Churchill’s first commercial exhibition of his paintings, in 1921, was at the Galerie Druet, a Paris establishment specializing in post-Impressionists. It resulted in six sales—but under the name “Charles Morin,” Churchill’s pseudonym. It was an odd choice, because an artist by that name had actually lived. Charles Camille Morin (1846-1919) was a well-known French landscape painter with whose work Churchill may have been familiar. Why Churchill chose the name of an artist so recently deceased is a mystery, but there is no doubt that it was intentional. In 1941, Edward Bruce of the Smithsonian Institution asked President Roosevelt to forward an luncheon invitation to “Charles Marin”—a jocular allusion to Churchill. A series of telegrams ensued between Washington and London enquiring about “the Prime Minister’s nom de palette.” Churchill’s private secretary finally replied: “Correct name is CHARLES MORIN not repeat not MARIN.” This article, by the leading historian of Churchill’s work, illustrates eight paintings in colour.

11. The Family Man


Famed for her beauty and the “durable fire” of her marriage to Alfred Duff Cooper, Lady Diana Cooper was early admitted to a delightful friendship with Winston and Clementine Churchill, which she reflects upon here with her penetrating mind and capable pen. This obscure tribute to the Churchill marriage, published shortly after Sir Winston’s death, was unknown to her son, Viscount Norwich, who kindly gave us permission to republish. “Winston Churchill, not in his earliest youth, chose most wisely and most well,” she wrote. “His bride could have figured in a Homeric story, [suggesting] a goddess of the infant world. Blood coursed through the marble, flushing it with animation, warmth, sometimes rising to passionate heat in partisanship of a cause. She often knew the sheep from the goats better than Winston did…. “I often put myself in Clemmie’s shoes, and as often felt how they pinched and rubbed till I kicked them off, heroic soles and all, and begged my husband to rest and be careful. Fortunately, Clemmie was a mortal of another clay…”

12. The Legacy


Speaking at the 1988 Churchill Conference at Bretton Woods, site of the famous 1944 Monetary Conference, the well-known BBC correspondent traced his memories of Churchill from his own youth in Manchester to the 1930s, explaining why it was so difficult for Churchill to get his message across about the threat of Nazi Germany: “It is very hard now, thanks to television and the abolition of front line censorship, to imagine what those terrible events conveyed. Today we see a war on the nightly news and say, ‘What are we doing there?’ when we get a casualty list of 1000 in a week. It is today impossible to get used to the idea that we could lose 200,000 men in one week. Those years, especially, have been over-dramatized, because our knowledge of the tremendous drama to come makes us see Churchill in the 1930s as a rejected giant, a lonely, stubborn hero. Most of us here would like to think that, had we been in Britain in 1934-36 we should certainly have been on his side. In fact I don’t think ten percent of us would have been with him….We must remember that even by the 1930s the country was exhausted. There were two slogans going around: “Peace at any Price” and “Against War and Fascism”—surely two of the silliest slogans. One might as well be “Against Hospitals and Diseases.”
Winston Churchill and Religion

A Comfortable Relationship with the Almighty

“If you are the recipient of a message which cheers your heart and fortifies your soul, which promises you reunion with those you have loved in a world of larger opportunities and wider sympathies, why should you worry about the shape or colour of the travel-stained envelope; whether it is duly stamped, whether the date on the postcard is right or wrong...I adopted quite early in life a system of believing whatever I wanted to believe, while at the same time leaving reason to pursue unfettered whatever paths she was capable of treading.” —WSC

ANDREW ROBERTS

“I could hardly be called a pillar of the Church,” Winston Churchill once famously remarked, “I am more in the nature of a buttress, for I support it from the outside.”¹ The reasons why our greatest 20th century prime minister—indeed perhaps along with Elizabeth I our greatest ever national leader—was not a Christian are rather bizarre. They include a sectarian nursemaid, a long-forgotten Victorian explorer, and the officers’ mess of the 4th Hussars at Bangalore, India.

In My Early Life, published in 1930, Churchill wrote of how, at the Ascot prep school he loathed and where he was regularly beaten, “This form of correction was regularly reinforced by frequent religious services of a somewhat High Church character in the chapel.” His beloved nurse and confidante, Mrs. Everest, was Low Church, and had a profound dislike of the Pope, on the doubtful grounds that he was, “she said...behind the Fenians.”² Churchill thus conceived a strongly anti-Catholic view, an attitude which lasted well into his mid-twenties, telling his brother in 1898 that Oxford “has long been the home of bigotry and intolerance and has defended more damnable errors and wicked notions than any other institution, with the exception of the Catholic Church.”³

At Harrow Churchill attended three services every Sunday, besides morning and evening prayers throughout the week. He later remarked: “All this was very good. I accumulated in those years so fine a surplus in the Bank of Observance that I have been drawing confidently upon it ever since. Weddings, christenings and funerals have brought in

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a steady annual income, and I have never made too
close enquiries about the state of my account. It
might well even be that I should find an overdraft.”

Whether he was in credit or debit with the
Almighty, by the time that he was stationed with
the 4th Hussars at Bangalore in Southern India he
had begun first to doubt and then utterly to reject
Christianity. In between polo chukkas, Churchill
came a voracious reader, and three authors in
particular plunged him into the disbelief in
Christ’s divinity that was to stay with him for the
rest of his life.

Although William Lecky’s *The Rise and
Influence of Rationalism* and his *History of
European Morals*, as well as Gibbon’s *Decline and
Fall of the Roman Empire*, established in
Churchill’s mind what he later called “a predomi-
nantly secular view,” it was William Winwood
Reade’s *The Martyrdom of Man* that convinced
Churchill that Jesus was an inspired prophet but
not the Son of God.

Reade was a Victorian explorer, novelist and
war correspondent whose two-volume book went
into eight editions over the twelve years after its
publication in 1872. It employed quasi-Darwinian
terms to explain the rise and fall of empires such as
those of the Persians, Carthaginians, Phoenicians,
Greeks, Macedonians and of course the Romans.
Reade was particularly scathing about all forms of
religion, which he dismissed as worthless supersti-
tion. Along with Churchill, the book influenced
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—who has Sherlock
Holmes mention it in one story—as well as H.G.
Wells and George Orwell. According to Reade:

> The prophet of Nazareth did not differ in tempera-
ment and character from the noble prophets of the
ancient period. He preached, as they did, the reli-
gion of the heart; he attacked, as they did, the
ceremonial laws; he offered, as they did, consola-
tion to the poor; he poured forth, as they did,
invectives against the rulers and the rich….The
current fancies respecting the approaching destruc-
tion of the world, the conquest of the Evil Power,
and the reign of God had fermented in [Christ’s]
mind, and had made him the subject of a remark-
able hallucination. He believed he was the
promised Messiah or Son of Man.

Although this was, of course, Reade rather than
Churchill writing, Churchill was then stationed in
India, a sub-continent full of holy men, seers,
mystics and prophets—of people such as he was
years later notoriously to describe Mahatma
Gandhi, “a fakir of a type well known in the
East.” Did Churchill see Jesus as another one of
these, and did he—the young imperialist
paladin—instinctively sympathize with the prob-
lems of the Romans in Judea rather than with its
native population?

In the *Morning Post* Churchill wrote:

> Year after year and stretching back to an indefinite
horizon, we see the figures of odd and bizarre
potentates against whom the British arms are con-
tinually turned. They pass in a long procession. The
Akhund of Swat, Cetewayo brandishing an
assegai as naked as himself, Kruger singing a Psalm
of Victory, Osman Digna the Immortal and
Irrpressible, Theebaw with his umbrella, the
Mahdi with his banner, Lobengula gazing fondly at
the pages of Truth, Prempeh abasing himself in the
dust, the mad Mullah on his white ass and, last of
all, the Khalifa in his Coach of State. It is like a
pantomime scene at Drury Lane.

Yet if this “long procession” were to stretch
back over Churchill’s indefinite historical horizon,
might it not also include the prophet of Nazareth,
riding into Jerusalem on his donkey, threatening
the imperium of the hard-working Roman admin-
istrator, Pontius Pilate?

Historians and biographers of Churchill, who
concur on little else about him, all agree that it was
at the still impressionable age of his early-to-mid-
twenties that Churchill rejected Christianity alto-
gether. His own testimony in *My Early Life* is
unequivocal, where he writes:

> Of course if I had been at a University my difficul-
ties might have been resolved by the eminent
professors and divines who are gathered there. At
any rate, they would have shown me equally con-
vincing books showing the opposite point of view.
As it was, I passed through a violent and aggressive
anti-religious phase which, had it lasted, might
easily have made me a nuisance.

What is certain, therefore, is that when Chaim
Weizmann, the founder of the state of Israel, said
that “Men like Balfour, Churchill, and Lloyd
George, were deeply religious, and believed in the
Bible,” he could not have been more wrong as far
as Churchill was concerned.

During Churchill’s service in India he wrote to
his former Harrow headmaster, the Reverend (later
Bishop) James Welldon, attacking Christian ++
missionary work there, and saying that “Had I lived in the days when the influence of Buddha—or Christ—or of Mahomet began to disturb these primitive forms of worship I should probably have opposed the great movement they initiated.” This was because although he readily acknowledged that all three religions “were in every case more worthy of God and Man than those they superseded,” nonetheless the deluge of blood over the hundreds of years necessary to establish the new religions would have “appreciably diminished” the “sum of human happiness and prosperity.”

In his novel Savrola, written in 1898 while he was also in India, Churchill has the hero tell the heroine:

I have always admired the audacity of man in thinking that a Supreme Power should placard the skies with the details of his squalid future, and that his marriage, his misfortunes, and his crimes should be written in letters of suns on the background of limitless space. We are inconsequential atoms.…I realise my own insignificance, but I am a philosophic microbe, and it rather adds to my own amusement than otherwise.

As Churchill put it elsewhere, we are all worms, but he liked to think of himself as a glow-worm.

Churchill’s letter of March 1898 from Camp Peshawar to his mother, in which he states, “I expect annihilation at death. I am a materialist to the tips of my fingers”; and a similar one to her from the Sudan six months later, where he foresees the battle of Omdurman and says, “I can assure you I do not flinch—though I do not accept the Christian or any other form of religious belief,” leave his religious views at this period impossible to mistake.

Yet it would certainly not be true to say that Churchill had no moral value system. He did; it was just one based more than anything upon conversations amongst the officers of the 4th Hussars stationed in India. As he was to write in 1930:

In the regiment we sometimes used to argue questions like ‘Whether we should live again in another world after this was over?’ ‘Whether we have ever lived before?’ ‘Whether we remember and meet each other after Death, or merely start again like the Buddhists?’ ‘Whether some high intelligence is looking after the world or whether things are just drifting on anyhow?’ There was general agreement that if you tried your best to live an honourable life and did your duty and were faithful to friends and not unkind to the weak and poor, it did not matter much what you believed or disbelieved. All would come out right. This is what would nowadays I suppose be called ‘The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness.’

Astonishing as it might seem, it was this rather adolescent and almost holistic “Religion of Healthy-Mindedness” that formed the basis for Churchill’s value system for the rest of his life. Divines can judge whether it is more in the character of a cult or a genuine religion, but it remained for him the closest he had to a code of ethics or a sense of spirituality. Whatever it was—and its underlying ethics did not seem to differ much from Christianity—it did not acknowledge Christ as Our Lord.

The historian Paul Addison has summed up Churchill’s beliefs as follows:

For orthodox religion, Churchill substituted a secular belief in historical progress, with a strong emphasis on the civilising mission of the British and the British Empire. This was accompanied by a mystical faith, alternating with cynicism and depression, in the workings of Providence.

One of the primary duties of the Providential Being in whom Churchill did believe, but to whom he paid little overt obeisance, seems to have been to watch over the physical safety of Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill. Few people in history could have brushed against the cloak of the Angel of Death as often as Churchill, yet he survived until his 91st year. “I did not hesitate to ask for special protection when about to come under the fire of the enemy,” he wrote, “nor to feel sincerely grateful when I came home safe to tea.”

So often did he survive near-misses that he began to believe himself specially chosen for great things. “Over me beat invisible wings,” he later wrote. Once, during the Great War, when his dugout was destroyed by a German high-explosive shell moments after he had left it, decapitating his batman, he said that he had “the strong sensation that a hand had been stretched out to move me in the nick of time from a fatal spot.”

After Churchill was run over by the driver of a car crossing Fifth Avenue in 1931 he said: “There was a moment...of a world aglare, of a man aghast.
"I do not understand why I was not broken like an eggshell or squashed like a gooseberry." 

The conclusion that he came to was that Fate had especially marked him out to save his country. In many other people this might be thought a prima facie case of incipient lunacy, but in the man whom A.J.P. Taylor described, in a famous footnote, as “the saviour of his country” it cannot be lightly dismissed. The sole time that the late Lord Hailsham could detect the direct hand of the Almighty in human affairs was when Churchill succeeded to the premiership on exactly the same day that Hitler unleashed Blitzkrieg in the West.

Churchill was obviously not entirely joking when he wrote to his mother after a skirmish on the North-West Frontier: “I am so conceited, I do not believe the Gods would create so potent a being as myself for so prosaic an ending.”

With a difficult birth, childhood pneumonia, a near-drowning, hunting falls, a cavalry charge, a prison escape, a plane crash, and service in the trenches, it was astonishing that Churchill reached the great age he did. Indeed the absence of an assassination attempt on him seems a curious omission in an otherwise busy life.

Of course Churchill the practicing politician was well aware of the problems it might cause him were his religious views to become well known, even notorious, in the Conservative Party that he had joined. In the days of Lord Salisbury at the turn of the century, when the Anglican Church was the Tory Party at prayer, it would not have done to have had atheistic or agnostic candidates standing for Parliament. As it was, in the Oldham by-election of July 1899, Churchill had promised not to vote for Salisbury’s pro-Anglican Clerical Tithes Bill, intended to help Church schools and clergy revenues, prompting Arthur Balfour’s scornful retort: “I thought he was a young man of promise, but it appears he is a young man of promises.”

In his Religion and Public Doctrine in England, Professor Maurice Cowling shows how Churchill “played down his evolutionary materialism” while he was a member of a pro-Church party that was under the influence of the devout Anglican Lord Hugh Cecil. Yet, as Cowling notes, in his Liberal period Churchill “was a good deal more explicit than before about the desirability of secular education.” He even found positive things to say about the work of Nonconformist missionaries. Yet as Cowling sums up: “Though he was a conforming Anglican, Churchill did little to suggest that Christianity was of special significance.” Indeed, when Churchill did refer to Christianity it was sometimes in an absurdly
magniloquent way, such as when he marked the arrival of the millionth American soldier in Europe during the Great War with the words: “No event since the beginning of the Christian era is more likely to strengthen and restore Man’s faith in the moral governance of the universe.”

Churchill had a strong appreciation of the value of harnessing religion to politics. In January 1920, in a speech defending British intervention in the Russian Civil War, he said: “We defend freedom of conscience and religious equality. They seek to exterminate every form of religious belief that has given comfort and inspiration to the soul of man.” Similarly, in June 1934, he attacked the Nazi regime for the way in which “Religion must be read from the drill book.” Yet this was not hypocrisy; Churchill genuinely believed in the rights of freedom of religion and the duties of complete religious toleration. As he once told his last private secretary, Sir Anthony Montague Browne: “Whether you believe or disbelieve, it is a wretched thing to take away Man’s hope,” which is what he earlier than anyone else in politics believed the Nazis were doing.

It was of course during the Second World War that Churchill drew deepest on religious vernacular and imagery, despite not being a believer himself. Dr. Margaret Mein of Westfield College, University of London, has argued that because Churchill’s wartime speeches used plenty of biblical and liturgical phrases, he was inspired by Christianity—when, for example, he offered common citizenship to France in June 1940.

In fact, although it is quite true that Churchill regularly employed language suffused with powerful religious overtones—words like “salvation,” “sacrifice,” “faith” and “zeal” abound in his wartime speeches—in fact they were more often used in common parlance and in the political idiom of the day than they are today. And anyhow, Churchill’s offer to France was simply a desperate and doomed device to try to keep that country in the war. “Destiny,” “Providence” and “Fate” appear as often as “God” in Churchill’s wartime speeches.

The Almighty occasionally gets a mention in sub-phrases, such as in Churchill’s January 1940 speech at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, “There never was a war which seems so likely to carry its terrors at once into every home, and there never was a war to which the whole people entered with the same united conviction that, God helping, they could do no other.”

On Trinity Sunday 1940 he read the collect from the Book of Maccabees which ends, “As the will of God is in Heaven, even so let it be.” But that was only really chosen for the splendidly martial opening line: “Arm yourselves and be ye men of valour.” As Lord Moran, Churchill’s doctor and friend, once put it: “King and country, in that order, that’s about the only religion Winston has.”

As one might have expected from a reactionary Tory and a lover of the English language, Winston Churchill was ultra-conservative over the liturgy. “As for the Revised Version of the Bible and the alterations in the Prayer Book and especially the marriage service,” he wrote, “they are grievous.” Very few of Churchill’s friends were religious, except his best man, Lord Hugh Cecil. Otherwise cronies like Max Beaverbrook, F.E. Smith, and Brendan Bracken were about as far removed from men of the cloth as it was possible to get. One of his friends, Bob Boothby, complained of how with Churchill “‘Thou shalt have no other gods but me’ has always been the first, and the most significant, of the Commandments.”

Churchill’s wife Clementine had been religiously inclined and a regular churchgoer as a young girl, but her observances fell off during their marriage. After her husband’s death she began to attend services again, at Holy Trinity, Brompton, where she was taken by her children and grandchildren. Although Churchill’s daughter Mary Soames has correctly written that he “had a strong underlying belief in a Providential God,” she has also pointed out that he “was not religious in a conventional sense—and certainly no regular church-goer.” He went for ceremonial occasions and for family christenings, weddings and funerals, but that was about it.

Churchill wrote much about death, considering it to be “black velvet—eternal sleep,” and as he wrote in Thoughts and Adventures in 1932, it held no terrors for him. “Let us accept the natural order in which we move,” he wrote.

Churchill and Religion...
This dovetails remarkably closely with his “Religion of Healthy-Mindedness.”

Asked whether he believed in life after death, he replied that there might very well be two worlds, but he preferred to take them one at a time. He made plenty of references to God in his speeches, but very often in a rather jocular way, as in the House of Commons in December 1942, when he stated that “The Almighty in His infinite wisdom did not see fit to make Frenchmen in the image of Englishmen.”

Not everyone approved; the devout Jan Christian Smuts, his dear friend from South Africa, was irritated by Churchill’s flippancy, and once complained to him that he never appealed to “religious motives.” Churchill waved the criticism aside, answering somewhat irrelevantly: “I have made more bishops than anyone since St Augustine.”

While that is not quite statistically true—Gladstone and Salisbury created more bishops in their much longer times in office—Churchill did appoint two Archbishops of Canterbury during the Second World War, William Temple and Geoffrey Fisher.

The death of William Temple in 1944, according to Churchill’s private secretary and Boswell, Jock Colville, “caused the PM no sorrow. In fact he was quite ribald about it.” Indeed Colville recalled how “as far as clerics were concerned, [Churchill] had a touch of Henry II about him.” Churchill’s ribaldry derived from the fact that although the ascetic Temple, who had only been Archbishop of Canterbury for two years after the retirement of Cosmo Gordon Lang, had died at sixty-three—yet for all his drinking of alcohol, smoking of cigars and overeating of fattening foods, Churchill was feeling fine at seventy.

Churchill tended to leave all but the most important ecclesiastical appointments up to Tony Bevir, the Appointments Secretary at Number Ten. “He’s covered in snuff,” Montague Browne was told on joining the staff and trying to locate Bevir, “and looks as if he had slept in his wastepaper basket.” Bevir’s encyclopaedic knowledge of the clergy had won him the nickname “Heaven’s talent scout.” Churchill trusted Bevir’s recommendations and appreciated his tact. He once advanced on him at a party with a glass in one hand and a bottle of Pol Roger in the other, saying: “Treat these like bishops, Bevir—bloody carefully.”
like the dog that didn’t bark in the Sherlock Holmes story, the almost complete absence of Jesus Christ from Churchill’s recorded writings, provides a strong clue to his beliefs. Yet he held a high regard for Jesus. As his friend Sir Desmond Morton said, while Churchill “did not believe that Christ was God, he recognised him as the finest character who ever lived.”

This is supported by some remarks Churchill made at Chequers to Field Marshal Montgomery on 28 May 1952, as they walked along the monument hill above the house, making their way amongst the picnickers. How did the prime minister define a great man, asked the Field Marshal (probably fishing for a compliment): “Was Hitler great?” “No,” answered Churchill, “he made too many mistakes.” They went on to discuss whether great religious leaders were the truly great men. According to Colville: “The PM said their greatness was indisputable but it was of a different kind. Christ’s story was unequalled and his death to save sinners unsurpassed; moreover the Sermon on the Mount was the last word in ethics.”

The way a man held himself at the moment of his death always mattered greatly to Churchill. He even commended Adolf Hitler for fighting to the last in Berlin, until he found out that the Führer had not in fact died like that at all. Christ’s courage at the Crucifixion commended itself to him as a noble death.

Before we leave the Sermon on the Mount it is perhaps worth noting that it was surely from the beatitudes that Churchill took the inspiration for his famous moral for his memoirs of the Second World War: “In War; Resolution. In Defeat; Defiance. In Victory; Magnanimity. In Peace; Goodwill.”

To Sir Anthony Montague Browne were vouchsafed a number of Churchill’s thoughts regarding religion, including the view that “The Benedictions are of God-given eloquence and beauty.” On many occasions he told Sir Anthony, “I believe that man is an immortal spirit,” which is as close to a reference to the Soul as we get from Churchill, who Sir Anthony considered “an optimistic agnostic.” At one Cabinet meeting in the 1950s Churchill referred to “the Old Man,” who his colleagues took to mean God, and from that and much else we can assume that he was a Deist as opposed to an atheist.

On the question of suicide, which Churchill is thought briefly to have considered for himself in 1915 after his resignation over the Gallipoli debacle, he believed that it was only acceptable in the three cases: intolerable, incurable pain, the aversion of a great evil to others, and under certain circumstances in war, whereupon he quoted the lines from Kipling about being “lying out wounded on Afghan plains” as “the women come out to cut up what remains.” In an article rather morbidly entitled “Shall We All Commit Suicide?” in 1924, Churchill argues that we should not. The sole—in the light of subsequent events discouraging—reason that he gave then was the existence of the League of Nations.

In 1949, when celebrating his 75th birthday, Churchill said “I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter.” When they did finally meet in January 1965, Churchill characteristically chose fighting hymns for his State funeral, namely The Battle Hymn of the Republic, Fight the Good Fight and O God Our Help in Ages Past. Heaven, he feared, might be an egalitarian place rather like the Welfare State, “and therefore no place for me,” although he relished the opportunity of meeting the great men of the past such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon.

It is a little-known fact that Churchill is today worshipped as a saint by the Cao Dai religion in Tay Ninh, a town about sixty miles north of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Founded in the 1920s, it also worships Moses and Victor Hugo. Churchill would have liked that, except perhaps having to share the worship with Victor Hugo. Or Moses, come to that.

I will end with Churchill’s admonition from My Early Life not to take things too literally:

I have always been surprised to see some of our bishops and clergy making such heavy weather about reconciling the Bible story with modern scientific and historical knowledge. Why do they want to reconcile them? If you are the recipient of a message which cheers your heart and fortifies your soul, which promises you reunion with those you have loved in a world of larger opportunities and wider sympathies, why should you worry about the shape or colour of the travel-stained envelope; whether it is duly stamped, whether the date on the postcard is right or wrong?...I adopted
quite early in life a system of believing whatever I wanted to believe, while at the same time leaving reason to pursue unfettered whatever paths she was capable of treading.41

This is a message as wise as it is tolerant, and totally consistent with his “Religion of Healthy-Mindedness.” Churchill might have not believed that he had an immortal soul, but if he did, it was undoubtedly a great one.

Endnotes
10. Gilbert, Churchill’s Political Philosophy, 18.
22. Ibid., 93.
25. Churchill broadcast, 19 May 1940, ibid., 334.
33. Churchill to Smuts, 7 August 1942, ibid., 461.
39. Langworth, Churchill in His Own Words, 463.
40. Rose, Unruly Life, 200.
Winston Churchill experienced eleven American presidents—as many as the Queen. He did not personally meet them all, as she has; but each contributed to his outlook and policies. His relations with the seven presidents from McKinley to Hoover are only stage-setters to the main events: FDR, Truman, Eisenhower. But one of them, Theodore Roosevelt, offers interesting insights.

Churchill, aged 26, and TR, aged 42, got off to a thoroughly bad start. When Churchill met the hero who had charged up San Juan Hill two months before the Englishman had charged at Omdurman, he professed vast approval of then-Governor Roosevelt. But TR, doubtless aware of young Winston’s reputation as a publicity seeker, did not return the compliment.

“I saw the Englishman, Winston Churchill... he is not an attractive fellow,” Roosevelt confided to a friend after the meeting. The negative impression proved as enduring as their parallel careers—both were to shift party allegiance; both were to achieve the highest political office; both were awarded a Nobel Prize. TR was, incidentally, the only president who profusely wrote books: eighteen, against Churchill’s fifty-one—mostly about hunting and outdoor life, though it is noteworthy that both he and Churchill wrote about the War of 1812.

When Churchill published his filial biography Lord Randolph Churchill in 1906, TR was hostile: “I dislike the father and dislike the son, so I may be prejudiced,” he told his friend Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. “Still, I feel that, while the biographer and his subject possess some real far-sightedness... both possess or possessed such levity, lack of sobriety, lack of permanent principle, and an inordinate thirst for that cheap form of admiration which is given to notoriety, as to make them poor public servants.”

To the English statesman and author George Otto Trevelyan, the President wrote of young Winston’s “clever, forceful, rather cheap and vulgar life of that clever, forceful, rather cheap and vulgar egoist, his father.” To his son, Roosevelt said: “I can’t help feeling about both of them that the older one was a rather cheap character, and the younger one is a rather cheap character.”

But Churchill did not dislike TR, and went out of his way to smooth Anglo-American relations. In December 1906 Sir Alexander Swettenham, Governor of Jamaica, tried to stop the U.S. from recruiting Jamaican workers for the Panama Canal. The following month, after an earthquake had destroyed Kingston and killed 800, an American admiral landed armed sailors from his anchored warship to assist in clearing the rubble. Swettenham wrote him a scathing open letter, saying that the recent ransacking of a New York millionaire’s home would not have justified a British admiral landing an armed party to assist the police.

President Roosevelt complained of both inci-
Churchill’s reply to this singularly restrained encomium, if he wrote one, is not preserved. And TR remained unmollified. To Lodge from his African safari he referred to their friend the American novelist of the same name: “I mean, of course, our Winston Churchill, Winston Churchill the gentleman.” Representing the U.S. at the funeral of Edward VII in 1910, he wrote pettily: “I have refused to meet Winston Churchill, being able to avoid any scandal by doing so. All the other public men, on both sides, I was glad to meet.”

Churchill was slightly rehabilitated when World War I began in 1914. “I have never liked Winston Churchill,” TR wrote to an English friend, “but in view of what you tell me as to his admirable conduct and nerve in mobilizing the fleet, I do wish that if it comes your way you would extend to him my congratulations on his action.”

In April 1918, Churchill paid TR a final, and almost unbelievable, return compliment. Lenin, in power in Moscow, had taken Russia out of the war. So Churchill proposed that the Allies send a plenipotentiary to Moscow—a “commissar” as he called him—and nominated Theodore Roosevelt. Then, in exchange for Lenin reentering the war, the Allies would “safeguard the permanent fruits of the Revolution!” “Let us never forget,” Churchill argued, “that Lenin and Trotsky are fighting with ropes round their necks. They will leave office for the grave. Show them any real chance of consolidate their power…and they would be non-human not to embrace it.”

Churchill’s biographer Sir Martin Gilbert told me that he first broke this astounding revelation in a Moscow lecture to an audience of high-ranking Soviet officers. “You could have heard a pin drop,” he smiled.

Alas, Churchill’s radical proposal was too imaginative for his colleagues, and he soon concluded that the Bolsheviks actually were non-human after all. (“Baboons” was his preferred expression.) But the incident serves to display, in the First as in the Second World War, how singleminded he was about defeating the enemy at hand—and the depth of his regard for Theodore Roosevelt.

It is an intriguing question whether the then-former president ever heard of Churchill’s Russian initiative and surprise nominee for “commissar.” Perhaps he would have been unimpressed. The historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. once asked Alice Roosevelt Longworth why her father harbored such permanent dislike for Churchill. “Because,” she quipped, “they were so much alike.”

Endnotes

5. Pilpel, Churchill in America, 53.
9. Sir Martin Gilbert to the author; private correspondence.
10. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., letter to the editor, Finest Hour 102, Spring 1999, 4.
part in its development. I remember when 500,000 Hollander emigrated to Australia, Canada and New Zealand in the Fifties. After the war there was little opportunity in housing or jobs in Holland. My godfather left for Australia in 1954 and we did not see him for fifteen years. Some never returned.

A coincidence: as I was reading the issue in January, our daughter Jennifer was in New Zealand with her boyfriend for a four-week vacation. She loved the island and the people, everything being a little more slow-paced.

JACK MENS, FREDERICK, MD.

LECTURES IN AMERICA 1931-32

Thank-you for the latest edition, wonderful as usual. Was there ever and could there ever be again such a great person as Churchill? I write to ask for the compilation of “everything the Complete Speeches contains” from Churchill’s 1931-32 lecture tour of America (page 10). Keep up your super work, won’t you?

SANDRA LEWIN, NORTHWOOD, LONDON

Editor’s Response: Thank-you. A reminder to readers: We laboriously copied out everything reported by the Complete Speeches that Churchill said in 1931-32 about the destiny of the English-speaking peoples—not a lot, most of it excerpts. We will gladly email this to anyone else who asks.

WAR OF 1812

Peter Russell (FH 160:36) gives a thoughtful account of Churchill’s analysis of the War of 1812, yet both Russell and Churchill seemed to omit a classic written some seventy years earlier by an author quite familiar to Churchill: the young Theodore Roosevelt. Indeed the continuing historical importance of Roosevelt’s work in influencing later authors is the subject of a recent review: Michael J. Crawford, “The Lasting Influence of Theodore Roosevelt’s Naval War of 1812” (International Journal of Naval History, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002).

GENE KOPELSON, PRESIDENT NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER, THEODORE ROOSEVELT ASSOCIATION, BOSTON

RALPH AND AVA WIGRAM

Writing about Ralph Wigram, who informed Churchill on German rearmament (FH 159:9), I mentioned that his parents did not attend his funeral, and that some speculated this was because of the possibility of suicide. Both Churchill in The Second World War and William Manchester in The Last Lion hinted that Wigram might have taken his life.

I now learn from the North Devon Journal of 7 January 1937 that on January 4th, the morning of his funeral at Cuckfield, Sussex, Wigram’s parents were attending a memorial service for him at Landkey Parish Church near Barnstaple, Devon. Ralph was brought up in the area and many family friends attended who could not have journeyed to Sussex and returned home at short notice in winter. This explains the absence of the Wigrams at Cuckfield.

On 31 October 1941 the Aberdeen Journal, reporting Sir John Anderson’s and Ava Wigram’s marriage (mistakenly referring to her as Rose Wigram), mentioned her descent from Sir Thomas Bodley, founder of the Bodleian Library, where her papers are housed. The report adds that “the wedding took place less than half an hour after an important cabinet meeting. Winston Churchill could not attend.” I am sure the Prime Minister would have attended if he could and the mention of his name in the notice associates him with them. I have not seen that reference to Sir Thomas Bodley elsewhere.

HUGH AXTON, WALMER, KENT

PAMELA HARRIMAN AT FULTON

In Pamela Harriman’s “The True Meaning of the Iron Curtain Speech (FH 58, Winter 1987-88, on the web at http://bit.ly/1ZKZtur), you note that two lines were updated in accordance with the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Agreement of 1987. Does this mean the speech is not 100% that which was given? Why was this alteration made?

MEEOY CAMPBELL, VIA EMAIL

Editor’s response: Yes. Mrs. Harriman said President Reagan was following only half of Churchill’s 1946 prescriptions in his Iron Curtain speech at Fulton: military strength but not diplomatic “supleness.” She said: “Did they expect, by military intimidation or economic exhaustion, to bring the Soviet system down—something that Churchill, one of the original anti-Bolsheviks, considered foolhardy in the atomic age? If so, did they expect the Soviets to go gently into the twilight of their diminishing power, or abjectly accept an internal collapse? These are not realistic hopes, but danger fantasies, and we should pray that no one in office really has such irrational views.”

Mrs. Harriman also predicted that Reagan would be unable to negotiate a reduction in U.S.-Soviet intermediate and short range missiles. But by the time Finest Hour published her speech, Reagan and Gorbachev had done just that. The INF Treaty was signed in Washington on 8 December 1987, about four years before the Soviet Union expired out of military intimidation or economic exhaustion and went gently into the twilight.

We try to stick up for our authors, and in view of these developments I cheekily decided to omit the obsolete lines of her speech. Thus the explanatory note at the head of the article. (I know what you are going to say, and you have a point—but there it is.)

Mrs. Harriman published her remarks in the Congressional Record (www.gpo.gov), where you can find the original. The 1986 CR index lists under Addresses the Anniversary of Winston Churchill’s Iron Curtain Speech: Pamela C. Harriman, 13727-29 [13N]. Finest Hour 58 can be read as a .pdf document on our website; our comments on her speech are on page 3. See this website: http://bit.ly/1rWpPw4.

SUMMING UP

You have written a great deal about Sir Winston Churchill, his life and legacy. Would you care to sum him up in a space I can easily digest, say the size of a single page of email?

JAMES CONRAD, RYE, N.Y.

Editor’s response: No. ☢
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