The World Remembers
Commemorating Churchill’s Funeral
Fifty Years On

Sir Martin Gilbert
1936-2015

Churchill: The Nation’s Farewell reviewed | Lloyd Hand: An Unexpected Journey
The Churchill Centre was founded in 1968 to inspire leadership, statesmanship, vision and courage through the thoughts, words, works and deeds of Winston Spencer Churchill. The Churchill Centre sponsors international and national conferences and promotes republication of Churchill's long out-of-print books. Editors and staff of the Centre's website answer email research queries from students and scholars worldwide, guiding them to sources they need in their quest for knowledge of Winston Churchill's life and times.
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On the Cover
Great-great-grandchildren Iona Pite, John Winston Spencer Churchill, and Christabel Fraser having just laid flowers at the Sir Winston Churchill Memorial in Westminster Abbey, 30 January 2015

Fifty years to the moment of his great-grandfather’s death, Jack Churchill took this photograph in Parliament Square, 24 January 2015

Flowers lay at Sir Winston’s grave
The World Remembers

It took forty-seven years for The Churchill Centre to produce the first-ever special issue of *Finest Hour*. It took only six months for us to produce the second. The winter 2015 issue (#166) commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Churchill’s death was planned well in advance. Yet the level of international interest in the events marking the occasion this past January far exceeded anything anticipated. An appropriate record needed to be created, and so here it is.

Members of the Churchill family participated in events across Britain and North America. On the facing page Randolph Churchill introduces us to what took place in London and his astonishment at the number of people who turned out to watch. Edwina Sandys spoke about her grandfather at the National Churchill Museum of the United States in Fulton, Missouri, where along with the British ambassador a service of remembrance was held.

Upon the mighty Thames, to borrow President Eisenhower’s phrase, MV *Havengore* sailed once more as it did fifty years ago when it bore Churchill’s coffin up the river. Rodney Croft explains the special tribute that took place this time at Tower Bridge.

At the Houses of Parliament, a wreath-laying ceremony was held in the Members’ Lobby before the statue of Churchill by Oscar Nemon that flanks the entrance to the House of Commons. Prime Minister David Cameron expressed the gratitude of the nation. Another service followed in Westminster Abbey (see cover).

In Toronto, Canadians recreated the original order of service from Sir Winston’s State Funeral. The Churchill Centre of Australia met in Sydney and received a letter from Prime Minister Tony Abbot. Across the water in Auckland the Governor General of New Zealand hosted Fellows of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

The BBC produced both radio and television salutes that can still be enjoyed through the Internet and which are reviewed here-in. Yet this is only a beginning.

Sir David Cannadine, Chairman of Churchill 2015, explains for us that the events of January initiated what will be a year-long series of activities and exhibits. From Chartwell, Katherine Barnett describes the exhibition put together exclusively at Churchill’s beloved home.

Complementing the photographs of Bladon today published in *Finest Hour* 166, we reproduce in this issue some historic photos of the original gravesite. Finally, Robert Courts, Bladon resident and member of The Churchill Centre, captures for us the ambience of Churchill’s final resting place.

—David Freeman
On 30 January 1965 the world stood still for the State Funeral of Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill. It was the end of an era—an era that had seen two terrible world wars but also an era where the leadership and sacrifice of the good, the brave, and the valiant prevailed over evil and tyranny. The images broadcast that day showed the grief of ordinary men and women tinged with pride. Their respect for Churchill is humbling even today. My cousin Nicholas Soames reflected that the moment that “undid us all” was the unexpected dipping of the cranes along the Thames to salute the funeral barge Havengore.

Now, fifty years on, we who have not known the horrors of world war have our chance to reflect on the sacrifice and the legacy of those who gave their lives for our freedom.

The Churchill family has been overwhelmed by the support we have received over the past few weeks during the commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of Sir Winston’s death. Friday, 30 January 2015, was a particularly proud day. It began when my cousin Celia Sandys and I laid a beautiful wreath at the Churchill statue in Parliament Square. We saw photographs from around the country and were touched by the flowers that had been laid at the many other Churchill statues, as well as at his grave at Bladon.

The first formality of the day was a commemoration in the beautiful Chapel of St Mary Undercroft at the Palace of Westminster. The service was led by the Speaker’s Chaplain, Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin, and attended by the leaders of the three main parties: Prime Minister David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband. Afterwards, before the Churchill statue standing guard at the entrance to the Commons, the Speaker himself spoke about “Churchill the Parliamentarian.” The Prime Minister then reminded us that the wartime leader’s service to “humanity as a whole” should be celebrated and that Britain would always be grateful for his leadership.

It was fitting that so much of the Churchill legacy was also represented at this occasion. There were scholars from Churchill College, Cambridge, Fellows from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, and also seventeen-year-old Nathania Ewruje, the most recent winner of the English-Speaking Union’s Winston Churchill Cup for Public Speaking, who recited words from Churchill in great style.

From the Palace of Westminster we went to St Katharine Docks. Here accompanied by pipers the wreath, which was to be laid in the Thames from the Havengore, was delivered from the Tower of London by a ceremonial guard made up of Beefeaters, the Royal Navy Reserve, the United States Navy and an Officer of Churchill’s regiment, the Queen’s Royal Hussars.

With quiet dignity the Havengore proceeded up the Thames. Linking past and present, our group onboard included Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Mather, commander of the original Grenadier Guards bearer party in 1965, and Barry de Morgan, who commanded the second bearer party from the Royal Irish Hussars.

Most striking to behold was the sight of Tower Bridge fully raised in Churchill’s honour. All of us onboard Havengore were also struck by the extraordinary crowds that had come out on a freezing-cold January day to watch us pass and pay their own respects. Many thousands of onlookers lined the embankment and packed the bridges.

Although no cranes line the route today, people from offices waved Churchill posters and Union Jacks. The Havengore had once again played a memorable part in commemorating Churchill’s legacy.

In the evening we celebrated Evensong at Westminster Abbey with uplifting music from the Abbey’s choir. Thereafter, at the great memorial stone bearing the inscription “Remember Winston Churchill,” flowers were laid by three of Churchill’s great-great-grandchildren: Iona Pite, Christabel Fraser and John Winston Churchill.

What a day and what a magnificent commemoration! The Churchill 2015 team, led by the indefatigable Sir David Cannadine and with the leadership of Allen Packwood, truly gave us an occasion of which we can be proud. And 2015 has only just begun. We still have the seventieth anniversary of Victory in Europe, followed by the International Churchill Conference at Blenheim in May; and at the end of the year we have the opening of the National Churchill Library and Centre in Washington, DC.

The Churchill legacy is very much alive among all freedom-loving people.

Randolph Churchill is a Trustee of The Churchill Centre.
We are here to honour a great leader—and a great Briton.

He was born in my constituency and is buried in my constituency.

A full fifty years since his funeral, when the cranes along the Thames dipped low and the streets were lined with vast silent crowds, the sheer brilliance of Winston Churchill remains undimmed.

I will never forget the first time I heard that voice. I was at my grandmother’s house, as a young boy, and looking through a box of dusty old things I found some vinyl records of his speeches. I put one on the record player and the phrases boomed out:

“Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be…”

“Let us to the task, to the battle, to the toil…”

And of course: “Some chicken, some neck.”

Churchill the orator made a big impression on me as a boy. And now that I am Prime Minister—there are so many Churchills to respect and admire.

There is Churchill the global statesman. Go to China and you remember it was he who first recognised the People’s Republic. Go to Israel and you remember he helped realise the dream of a Jewish homeland. Go to Pakistan and you imagine him fighting on the frontier with the Malakand Field Force. From the Battle of Omdurman to Britain’s acquisition of the H-bomb stretched nearly sixty years, and throughout it all he was right at the heart of events.

Then there is Churchill the bon vivant. The bottles of Pol Roger in Number 10, the practice of taking his Cabinet out for lunch at the Savoy Grill; sadly for my Cabinet, that is not quite the current regime.

And then—often overlooked—there is Churchill the reformer. This was the man who pushed for prison reform, championed old age pensions, and introduced labour exchanges for the unemployed. Churchill believed that a nation was made great not just by its military might but by how its poorest and frailest citizens were treated, and that is another important part of his legacy.

But if there is one aspect of this man I admire more than any other—it is Churchill the patriot.

He knew Britain was not just a place on the map but a force in the world, with a destiny to shape events and a duty to stand up for freedom. That is why in 1940—after France had fallen, before America or Russia had entered the war, he said this:

“Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him all Europe may be free—and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands.”

Churchill was confident that freedom and democracy would win out over barbarism and tyranny in the end—and it did. And with every affront to freedom in this century, we must remember that courage and resolve in the last century.

Fifty years ago, when Churchill was dying, my older brother was a tiny baby. My mother used to wrap him up each day, put him in his pram and wheel him along to Hyde Park Gate. There, along with crowds of people, they stood outside that red brick house as a mark of respect.

Such was the affection—and half a century on, such is the affection. History has been kind to Winston Churchill, not because he wrote it, but because he shaped it.

He left Britain more free, more secure, more brave and more proud—for that we will always be grateful to him. ✇

The Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP is Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Remarks published with permission from No. 10 Downing Street.
Planning for the official commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of Churchill’s death began four years ago. Historian Sir David Cannadine recalls how the coordinating body, Churchill 2015, came into being and what still remains to be done.

The idea for Churchill 2015 originated over a dinner at Brooks’s Club in London in the autumn of 2011. There were only two people present, Mary Soames and myself. Some time before, and with the encouragement of Mike Shaw, formerly of Curtis Brown, who was both Mary’s literary agent and also mine, I had sent Mary a letter, suggesting that, since the fiftieth anniversary of her father’s death was not all that far off, it might be a good idea to ponder how that anniversary would be marked, and how the many organizations that made up the international Churchill world might be involved.

She said she thought this a very good idea, and that she would do all she could to help get the family fully involved as well as the Churchill organizations with which she had especially close links. (It never occurred to me at the time, but perhaps Mary also wanted to ensure that all this would be in place because she might not be there to oversee things herself in the anniversary year.) She absolutely delivered on all her undertakings, and she also insisted that since I had proposed such an organization, then I had better chair it.

It was a request, indeed an injunction, that I could not possibly have gainsaid or refused. And so Churchill 2015 was born, a committee of oversight, with representatives from the three branches of Churchill’s descendants, and from all the major institutions that make up the international Churchill world: Churchill College Cambridge and the Churchill War Rooms; the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and the English-Speaking Union; Blenheim and Chartwell; the National Churchill Museum at Fulton, Missouri and the Winston Churchill Foundation of the United States; and finally The Churchill Centre, where the UK Trustees eagerly took on a hosting, coordinating and fundraising role.

As momentum for planning intensified, we were joined by representatives of many other groups and organizations with whom Churchill had been closely associated, or who had become more recently involved with aspects of his legacy, including the Universities of Bristol and Essex, the Science Museum, the Royal Mint, and Bloomsbury Publishing. We met at regular intervals, in part so that information could be exchanged as to what each organization was planning to do on its own, but also to focus on some flagship events and programmes to which everyone was willing to sign up. All the meetings have been constructive and good humoured. Special thanks are due to Allen Packwood, the Director of the Churchill Archives Centre, who worked extraordinarily hard to make these meetings succeed.

Early on we decided that for the flagship events and programmes, we would focus on three areas: commemoration, education and legacy, with the balance between the three evolving and changing as the year 2015 unfolded. We began with commemoration, for which the most significant day was 30 January, the fiftieth anniversary of Churchill’s state funeral.

For all of us lucky enough to be present, 30 January 2015 was an unforgettable day of commemoration and reflection, made all the more memorable and moving by the crowds of people who turned out, along the Thames Embankments and on its bridges, to see the Havengore pass by.

Much of 2015, as we now look forward beyond commemoration, is concerned with education, with the aim of engaging and inspiring young people. Several great exhibitions are appearing this year. The Science Museum hosts “Churchill’s Scientists,” which opened in late January to great critical acclaim. Chartwell is presenting “Death of a Hero,” which explores Churchill’s state funeral, while Blenheim has reinvigorated its Churchill display. And in Paris “Churchill and de Gaulle” will open at the Musée de l’Armée in April.

The third strand of Churchill 2015, which will become the most important as we move towards the end of the year, is legacy, where our aim is to highlight, develop and enhance the existing work of Churchill organizations in ways that will ensure a lasting impact. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust will increase the number of annual Churchill Fellowships, and is also overseeing a major programme looking at the challenges and opportunities facing global leaders in the early twenty first century.

Bloomsbury Publishing have created a website, Churchill Central, which is not only the first port of call
THE VISIONARY

By the Hon. Edwina Sandys

The National Churchill Museum of the United States on the campus of Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, held a Service of Remembrance for Winston Churchill on 24 January 2015. Churchill’s granddaughter Edwina delivered the following remarks.

My grandfather Winston Churchill died fifty years ago today. It was a long time ago—part of history. But history is never quite done and dusted. The seeds of the past keep sprouting out in new ways today.

When the Berlin Wall came down twenty-five years ago we all sighed with relief; the Cold War was over. Since my grandfather’s famous iron curtain speech here in Fulton so many years before, history had come full circle.

Or so we thought.

People ask, “what would your grandfather say about the events of today in 2015?” Well, we cannot say what he would have said or done. He was a law unto himself.

But we can say that he knew his history and he knew his geography. He did not need to consult the map to name the countries of the Middle East or to find out where they were situated. Actually he situated quite a few of them himself.

But I am quite sure of one thing: he would have seen it all coming. In fact he did see it all coming a very long time ago and warned of the many coming problems. But, as with the build-up to World War II, no one was listening. When will we ever learn?

As Winston Churchill said, “The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you can see.”

Sir David Cannadine is Chairman of Churchill 2015 and Dodge Professor of History at Princeton. He will speak at the 32nd International Churchill Conference in May.

Edwina Sandys is an artist who lives in New York City.

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Death of a Hero

By Katherine Barnett

Chartwell, the much-loved home of Sir Winston Churchill for over forty years, is commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of his passing and state funeral with a dedicated exhibition entitled “Death of a Hero,” which in sixty objects tells the story of the latter years of his life, his passing, the state funeral and the legacy he has left us with today.

As House and Collections Manager of Chartwell, it was my job to curate this moving and poignant exhibition. We took our inspiration from the words of Clementine Churchill. According to their youngest daughter Mary Soames, on the evening of her father’s state funeral, her mother turned to her and said, “You know, Mary, it wasn’t a funeral—it was a Triumph.” It is this feeling of the awe of the occasion, and the spectacle which would undoubtedly have been approved of by the man himself, that we honour through this exhibition.

It is common knowledge that Sir Winston Churchill is buried at Bladon, surrounded by family and overlooked by his ancestral home of Blenheim, but this was only decided in the last few years of his life. For much of his time at Chartwell he intended to be laid to rest by having his ashes scattered over the lawn to the south of the house, looking out over the view of the Weald of Kent, which he had fallen in love with many years earlier. It is through documented evidence to this effect that we gain an insight into just how much Chartwell meant to him, beyond being the home he loved but where, for many years, he hoped to remain forevermore.

It is in this context that “Death of a Hero” explores why he changed his mind and why he was not at Chartwell when he died. We also look at the magnificent lying-in-state which he was afforded by HM The Queen, the Technicolor occasion of ceremony that was his state funeral (with lots of military bands, as Sir Winston himself requested) and how the world has been changed in innumerable ways as a result of his passions and interests, ranging from developments in science and his talents as an amateur painter.

Our exhibition, which has been extended due to popular demand until 1 November 2015 (having originally been intended to return to our regular biographical exhibition at the end of February 2015), is almost entirely made up of never-before-seen items, either from private collections, Chartwell’s stores or the archives of partner organisations. “Death of a Hero” is therefore a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the story of his passing, depicted through such gems as the last ever photograph taken of Sir Winston Churchill, the flag that flew over the Capitol on the day he died and was gifted to Clementine Churchill, personal family documents, and much more.

There are three objects in particular on display in “Death of a Hero” which, to me, are crucial to the story of his passing. Firstly, there is the Duke of Norfolk’s original working copy of “Operation Hope Not,” the aptly-named codename for the planning of Sir Winston’s state funeral. It is a unique piece of history and shows the incredible thought and detail applied to the planning for the day.

Then there is the large folio of newspaper cuttings, gifted to a then two-month-old Randolph Churchill from the editor of the New York Herald Tribune and kindly on loan from the Churchill family. Alongside the cuttings was a cover letter with the moving words: “We treasured him while he lived. And we tried to honor him in death. But all we really did was to give voice to the deep sense of personal grief each of us know in this time of tremendous loss. So that you can hear some of the voices which spoke at this tragic time, we have put them together for you in this book.”

The last of my three star objects, which has been selected to represent his legacy, is a signed photograph of Sir Winston Churchill alongside King George VI, Queen Elizabeth, Princess Elizabeth (later HM Queen Elizabeth II) and her sister Princess Margaret on the balcony at Buckingham Palace on 8 May 1945. The photograph was so dear to Churchill that during his time at Chartwell, the home he loved so much, it hung on his bedroom wall. It was in that moment that his status as a hero was cemented in history, and it is for everything that the moment represents that he should never be forgotten.

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Katherine Barnett is House and Collections Manager at Chartwell.

Chartwell Manor

FINEST HOUR 167 / 9
Last year, following the publication of my book about the State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill, a newspaper article about the book caught the eye of an employee of The Corporation of London who then showed it to his superior. They soon discovered that I am a Liveryman in the City of London of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries as well as a Freeman of The City who previously served as a Surgeon-Lieutenant Commander aboard HMS President, London Division Royal Naval Reserve. This convinced Corporation leaders to phone and say that I was wanted to halt some of London’s traffic on 30 January 2015. I thought they were alluding to the age-old tradition, now frowned upon by the Metropolitan Police, of herding a flock of sheep over London Bridge! I was, however, informed that The Corporation wished me to clear Tower Bridge and raise it to allow MV Havengore to pass through in salute to Sir Winston Churchill. Hearing this, I nearly dropped the telephone.

On the big day, accompanied by my wife and family, I arrived at the North East Control Room of Tower Bridge, where I was briefed on procedure by the Bridgemaster. At 12:40 pm Havengore cast off from HMS President downstream from Tower Bridge. The bridge raising procedure then began. Using the Tannoy system I made the announcement to clear the bridge, after which the road and pedestrian gates were closed. The four pumps, one at each base of the Towers, were switched on. A soft humming sound was discernible, but the remainder of the forthcoming manoeuvre was silent. Following the order of the Bridgemaster, I pulled back the black lever on the control panel, and the 1100-ton bascules began to move slowly upwards.

When the lever was fully depressed and the bascules elevated to the normal position of 45°, I enquired when were the bascules ever taken to full elevation and was informed that this honour was
Winston Churchill is one of the most important leaders of the twentieth century. His legacy looms large in the British national psyche and commands reverence from all quarters of the globe. The fiftieth anniversary of his state funeral offers the world a chance to commemorate his memory and celebrate his life.

In fact, this year sees a number of significant anniversaries linked to Churchill, including the sixtieth anniversary of his retirement as prime minister in 1955 and the seventieth anniversary of when he stood as an architect of victory over Nazism, followed by his defeat in the General Election. This year also marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of Churchill becoming prime minister and facing down the Blitz in the skies over London. It has been eighty years since the passage of the Government of India Act, which saw the defeat of Churchill’s antiquated and misplaced campaign to deny home rule to South Asia. Ninety years ago saw Churchill’s still controversial decision, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to return Britain to the gold standard. And, finally, this year marks the hundredth anniversary of Churchill’s unsuccessful but daring campaign to force the Dardanelles Straits during the First World War.

Given Churchill’s lengthy political career, it is no surprise that 2015 will also feature much debate on his legacy. Major historical figures often have positive and negative effects that reverberate through history. In Churchill’s case, these effects can at times appear paradoxical. Some of the contradictions in Churchill’s legacy, like his absolute belief in liberty and his steadfast imperialism, might be explained by his long career of public service. His deeply rooted belief in the virtues of imperialism (perhaps unsurprising for a man born in the Victorian Age) became anachronistic in the context of the post-war world. Of course, this mirrors the legacy of British imperialism altogether, to which Churchill’s own is inexorably linked.

During the ceremonies this year on 30 January, the BBC invited me to come to HMS Belfast, from where they were broadcasting the Havengore making its way up the Thames. I was asked to offer my thoughts on Churchill’s legacy as a Churchill scholar and as an American. I explained that I thought his legacy was complex, blessed with moments of acute insight and knowledge but equally littered with moments of bad judgment and failure. Yet, ultimately, despite his failings, the world is a much better place for him having played a part in shaping its destiny. I concluded with the reflections which President Eisenhower offered fifty years before, words which I think accurately portray Churchill:

“Among the things so written or spoken [of him] there will ring out through all the centuries one incontestable refrain: Here was a champion of freedom.”

Rodney J. Croft is a semi-retired general and vascular surgeon living in Essex. His book Churchill’s Final Farewell: The State and Private Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill was excerpted and reviewed in Finest Hour 166.

Left: A reproduction of the program aboard the MV Havengore (pages 4-5)
Frank Hall, now 91, was a verger at the parish Church of St. Martin’s, Bladon. He was responsible for looking after the gravesite of Sir Winston Churchill, including the flowers left by mourners. These photographs are from his private collection.

Shortly after the burial, some of the hundreds of thousands of those who came to pay their respects file down from the lichgate of St Martin’s churchyard.

Senator Robert F. Kennedy pays his respects at Sir Winston’s still-pristine grave. Behind the place where he stands there is now a tribute to Sir Winston erected by the Danish Resistance.
Dear Mr Hall,

Thank you for your letter. I am most grateful to you for looking after my Husband's grave in the past and would like the new Verger to do this for me if you could be kind enough to arrange this.

Yours sincerely,

Clementine Spencer-Churchill

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Lady Churchill writes to Frank Hall to thank him for his service

The original gravestone that was replaced when Lady Churchill died and was buried with her husband

The gravesite in preparation for the day of the funeral
30 January 2015, the fiftieth anniversary of Sir Winston Churchill’s funeral, saw numerous commemorative ceremonies on three continents. From Prime Ministers to young children, thousands paid tribute. Photos clockwise from top:

**Above:** (Left to right holding wreaths) Sir Nicholas Soames MP, Nathania Ewruje, Labour Leader Ed Miliband, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, Prime Minister David Cameron, Lord Speaker Baroness D'Souza and Commons Speaker John Bercow MP

**Right:** Program cover from the ceremony at the Houses of Parliament

**Below right:** Westminster Abbey

**Below left:** Inside Westminster Abbey, three of Churchill’s great-great-grandchildren lay flowers at his memorial stone in the nave
Remarks delivered by President Eisenhower on the BBC as MV Havengore bore Churchill's body up the Thames

Upon the mighty Thames, a great avenue of history, move at this moment to their final resting place the mortal remains of Sir Winston Churchill. He was a great maker of history, but his work done, the record closed, we can almost hear him with the poet [Tennyson], say:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!...
Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark.

As I, like all other free men, pause to pay a personal tribute to the giant who now passes from among us, I have no charter to speak for my countrymen—only for myself. But, if in memory, we journey back two decades to the time when America and Britain stood shoulder to shoulder in global conflict against tyranny, then I can presume—with propriety I think—to act as a spokesman for the millions of Americans who served with me and their British comrades during three years of war in this sector of the earth.

To those men Winston Churchill was Britain—he was the embodiment of British defiance to threat, her courage in adversity, her calmness in danger, her moderation in success. Among the Allies his name was spoken with respect, and admiration and affection. Although they loved to chuckle at his foibles, they knew he was a staunch friend. They felt his inspirational leadership. They counted him a fighter in their ranks.

The loyalty that the fighting forces, of many nations here serving, gave to him during that war was no less strong, nor less freely given, than he had, in such full measure, from his own countrymen.

An American, I was one of those Allies. During those dramatic months, I was privileged to meet, to talk, to plan and to work with him for common goals.

Out of that association an abiding—and to me precious—friendship was forged; it withstood the trials and frictions inescapable among men of strong convictions, living in the atmosphere of war.

The war ended, our friendship flowered in the later and more subtle tests imposed by international politics.

Then each of us, holding high official post in his own nation, strove together so to concert the strength of our two peoples that liberty might be preserved among men and the security of the free world wholly sustained.

Through a career during which personal victories alternated with defeats, glittering praise with bitter criticism, intense public activity with periods of semi-retirement, Winston Churchill lived out his four score and ten years.

With no thought of the length of the time he might be permitted on earth, he was concerned only with the quality of the service he could render to this nation and to humanity. Though he had no fear of death, he coveted always the opportunity to continue that service.

At this moment, as our hearts stand at attention, we say our affectionate, though sad, goodbye to the leader to whom the entire body of free men owes so much.

In the coming years, many, in countless words will strive to interpret the motives, describe the accomplishments and extol the virtues of Winston Churchill—soldier, statesman, and citizen that two great countries were proud to claim as their own. Among the things so written or spoken, there will ring out through all the centuries one incontestable refrain: here was a champion of freedom.

May God grant that we—and the generations who will remember him—heed the lessons taught us; in his deeds, in his words, in his life.

May we carry on his work until no nation lies in captivity; no man is denied opportunity for fulfillment.

And now, to you Sir Winston—my old friend—farewell! 🎊

Here was a Champion of Freedom

By Dwight D. Eisenhower

Remarks delivered by President Eisenhower on the BBC as MV Havengore bore Churchill’s body up the Thames

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Out of that association an abiding—and to me precious—friendship was forged; it withstood the trials and frictions inescapable among men of strong convictions, living in the atmosphere of war.

The war ended, our friendship flowered in the later and more subtle tests imposed by international politics.

Then each of us, holding high official post in his own nation, strove together so to concert the strength of our two peoples that liberty might be preserved among men and the security of the free world wholly sustained.

Through a career during which personal victories alternated with defeats, glittering praise with bitter criticism, intense public activity with periods of semi-retirement, Winston Churchill lived out his four score and ten years.

With no thought of the length of the time he might be permitted on earth, he was concerned only with the quality of the service he could render to this nation and to humanity. Though he had no fear of death, he coveted always the opportunity to continue that service.

At this moment, as our hearts stand at attention, we say our affectionate, though sad, goodbye to the leader to whom the entire body of free men owes so much.

In the coming years, many, in countless words will strive to interpret the motives, describe the accomplishments and extol the virtues of Winston Churchill—soldier, statesman, and citizen that two great countries were proud to claim as their own. Among the things so written or spoken, there will ring out through all the centuries one incontestable refrain: here was a champion of freedom.

May God grant that we—and the generations who will remember him—heed the lessons taught us; in his deeds, in his words, in his life.

May we carry on his work until no nation lies in captivity; no man is denied opportunity for fulfillment.

And now, to you Sir Winston—my old friend—farewell! 🎊
AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

By Lloyd Hand

Lloyd Hand was the United States Chief of Protocol for President Lyndon Johnson. In January 1965 he unexpectedly found himself part of the official US delegation attending the State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill. Fifty years later Ambassador Hand took the time to recall for Finest Hour how this turn of events transpired.

Following the election of 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as President of the United States in his own right on 20 January 1965, a bitterly cold day in Washington. Consequently, the President contracted pneumonia and was hospitalized at the time of Churchill’s death four days later.

President Johnson was a great admirer of Churchill and very much wanted to attend the State Funeral in London on 30 January, but his condition even after his release from the hospital was more serious than could be made public. His doctors advised him not to go. The President himself told me his situation was “dicey.” Postponing an immediate decision, President Johnson followed events closely and asked me to travel to London to investigate the feasibility of his making the trip himself.

The President asked me to report to him each night by telephone. In London I spoke with our Ambassador, David Bruce, and those responsible for arranging the funeral. Everyone agreed that it was best that the President not attend. Temperatures in London were as cold as those in Washington. When the normally closed great doors of St. Paul’s were opened on the day of the funeral, conditions inside the cathedral would be equally chilly. Regrettably, the risk to the President’s health would be too great.

With the President in poor health and the war escalating in Vietnam, it was thought best for Vice President Hubert Humphrey to remain in Washington as well. Thus, the American delegation was put together at the last minute. Along with France and the USSR, the United States was one of only three countries allowed to send an official delegation of three mourners. Former Presidents Truman and Eisenhower both received personal invitations to attend as family friends. Unfortunately, President Truman was also incapacitated by illness. Altogether, though, the United States would be well represented.

Chief Justice Earl Warren, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Ambassador Bruce were chosen to make up the official delegation. Once in London, however, Secretary Rusk was also struck down by illness and forced to bow out. And that is how I became a last-minute addition to the mourners on that historic day. I vividly remember seeing President Charles de Gaulle and being surrounded by so many other famous leaders. All of us in the American delegation were impressed by the events.

President Johnson sent his airplane to bring home President Eisenhower and the rest of us. On the flight I was introduced to Pamela Hayward, who later became Pamela Harriman but, of course, had once been Churchill’s daughter-in-law and was the mother of his grandson Winston. President Eisenhower asked me to join him at Bridge, but I did not know the game. A Secret Service agent had to complete the foursome, and I have forever since regretted that I never learned to play Bridge!
To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Churchill’s death, two members of the United States House of Representatives addressed the chamber. Here are their remarks as recorded in the Congressional Record for 22 January 2015.

Hon. George E.B. Holding of North Carolina

Mr. Speaker, this Saturday, January 24, marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Winston Churchill. Over the past half century, he has passed from memory into history, yet stands unchallenged as one of the greatest figures of modern times.

Born of an American mother and a British father, his life and career symbolized the fellowship of the English-speaking peoples.

Just outside this very Chamber, Mr. Speaker, stands an enduring tribute to the “British Bulldog” in the Freedom Foyer. The placement of Churchill’s bust inside the U.S. Capitol [donated in 2013 by The Churchill Centre] serves as a testament to our special relationship with the United Kingdom and to the values our two nations have fought so dearly to defend: democracy and freedom.

Rep. Holding then entered into the Congressional Record “My Grandfather’s Final Days” by Celia Sandys, published in Finest Hour 166.

Hon. Mac Thornberry of Texas

Mr. Speaker, this Saturday, January 24, marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Sir Winston Churchill. Few leaders in history made such a mark during their lives, and very few have attracted such study and admiration after their deaths.

Even now, 50 years after his passing at age 90 and 75 years after his “finest hour” when Britain and Churchill stood alone against the Nazi menace, new books and articles about his life and leadership pour forth.

The Churchill Centre is a growing international organization with a mission to “foster leadership, statesmanship, vision, courage and boldness among democratic and freedom loving peoples worldwide, through the thoughts, words, works and deeds of Winston Spencer Churchill.”

The Churchill Centre and the George Washington University here in Washington are building a National Churchill Library and Center. Hillsdale College is publishing all remaining volumes of The Churchill Documents.

The list of activities related to Churchill is long, even 50 years after his death. And, as one measure of popular interest, there are few historical figures who are more regularly misquoted or falsely quoted on the Internet than he.

I think there are many reasons that Sir Winston continues to fascinate and inspire.

In part, there are his monumental achievements, for few statesmen did as much to shape the world in which we live. Were it not for his vision and his willingness to stand up to the conventional wisdom of his day, history could have had a far different outcome.

In part, it is his oratory. Just as his words inspired his nation and the world to stand up to evil then, they still inspire us today.

In part, there are his writings, which continue to be studied and referenced as Churchill the politician was a leading figure throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and Churchill the author helped shape our understanding of those momentous times.

I also believe that the continuing interest in Winston Churchill stems in substantial measure from the many ups and downs of his career. We all draw inspiration from someone who perseveres through higher accolades and lower derision than [any of] us will ever experience.

Finally, Churchill the person remains a dazzling personality, full of humor and eccentricities adding to the interest of new admirers.

The qualities that he exhibited are timeless qualities such as courage, patriotism, hard work, loyalty, and love of family.

And, many of the principles for which he stood and fought are timeless as well, such as the need to recognize and confront evil and to nurture and protect freedom.

He believed that the values of Western civilization are a force for good and that the English-speaking peoples had unique contributions to offer the rest of the world on freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

As one who was half-American by blood, he appreciated America. That appreciation has been returned by millions of Americans over the generations.

His bust has been added to the U.S. Capitol’s Freedom Foyer, where it continues to inspire visitors and those of us who work here, thereby continuing to serve as a major link in the “special relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom.

The lives of great leaders are always worth remembering and studying, and as long as freedom is cherished, I am confident that Sir Winston Churchill will be studied long into the future.

Rep. Thornberry is Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.
Winston Churchill Will Never Be Forgotten. That was the message reverberating through the hallowed halls of the historic Trinity College Chapel at the University of Toronto on 24 January 2015. To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Sir Winston Churchill’s death, The Churchill Society for the Advancement of Parliamentary Democracy and the John W. Graham Library at Trinity College hosted a commemorative ceremony based on the original Order of Service for Sir Winston’s funeral in St Paul’s Cathedral.

The idea originated with Linda Corman, Head Librarian at Trinity College and a director of the Society. Trinity College is home to one of the world’s largest collections of books by and about Churchill, acquired over thirty years from generous donors and fundraising efforts. So it was natural that the service be held in the same college where the Churchill Collection has been preserved and maintained. As with Churchill’s actual funeral, planning for this event required much time. The response was overwhelming. With Churchillians from far and wide coming to pay their respects, registration had to be closed off early.

When the day came John Plumpton, former Chairman of The Churchill Centre, set the stage by recalling the plans for and details of the funeral. After these opening remarks, the pomp and ceremony of the original order of the funeral service was recreated in the Trinity College chapel, which was the last work of British architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, who also designed Liverpool Cathedral and the famous British red telephone booths. The Archbishop of Toronto, the Most Reverend Colin Johnson, presided at the ceremony, which included recitation of the original readings, prayers, psalms and hymns with accompaniment by organ, full choir, and bugler.

Rousing renditions of The Battle Hymn of the Republic, O God Our Help In Ages Past and the National Anthems of Great Britain and Canada stirred all in attendance in the same way that mourners at St Paul’s Cathedral were moved fifty years ago. Corporal Jonathan Elliotson, Bugler of The Governor-General’s Horse Guards, pierced hearts with The Last Post and Reveille.

At the reception that followed, Linda Corman proudly showed some of the treasures from the Churchill Collection, and Chairman Joel Watson officially toasted the memory of Sir Winston. For those who remembered the events of 1965, it was a poignant return to the past. For the many young people in attendance born after 1965, including Ontario Legislative Interns sponsored by the Society, it brought an important part of history to life. Sir Winston and his legacy live in the hearts and minds of Canadians into the twenty-first century.

Robert O’Brien

Robert O’Brien practices law in Toronto.
THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING OF
THE RT HON SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

Fifty years have passed since the death of democracy's greatest lion, Sir Winston Churchill.

When human civilisation hung in the balance, Sir Winston Churchill gave the world courage and hope.

He warned the world of the Nazi menace. Later, after the Nazis were defeated, he warned of the threat of the 'iron curtain'.

Churchill taught us that appeasement is never the answer to aggression.

He also taught us that individuals and nations have a duty to speak up for freedom and to stand against tyranny.

Churchill was a complex man. He was not perfect, far from it.

He failed many times during his life. Fortunately he was a man who learned from his failures. As Churchill reflected when he was commissioned as Prime Minister in 1940: "My past life has been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial".

In the world’s darkest hour, Churchill and Britain stood resolute against Hitler’s tyranny.

Half a century ago, Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies paid tribute to the wartime service of Churchill:

“In the whole of recorded modern history, this was, I believe, the one occasion when one man, with one soaring imagination, with one fire burning in him, and with one unrivalled capacity for conveying it to others, won a crucial victory not only for the forces…but for the very spirit of human freedom.”

On this 50th anniversary of Sir Winston Churchill’s passing, we pay tribute to his legacy.

Churchill served his parliament for 55 years and his fingerprints were on everything – including the introduction of the aged pension and the minimum wage.

We draw strength from the memory of a man who taught the world that freedom, liberty and democracy must always be defended. We also draw strength from the power of his words, which serve as a reminder of the essential truths that still hold fast today.

Today, we remember Sir Winston Churchill’s life and honour his service to the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and our world.

The Hon Tony Abbott
Prime Minister of Australia

15 January 2015
Some day, some year, there will be old men and women whose pride it will be to say, “I lived in Churchill’s time.” Some will be able to say, “I saw him, and I heard him—the unforgettable voice and the immortal words.” And some will be able to say, “I knew him, and talked with him, and was his friend.”

This I can, with a mixture of pride and humility, say for myself. The memory of this moves me deeply now that he is dead, but is gloriously remembered by me as he goes to his burial amid the sorrow, and pride, and thanks, of all of you who stand and feel for yourselves and for so many millions.

Many of you will not need to be reminded, but some, the younger among you, the inheritors of his master-strokes for freedom, may be glad to be told your country, and mine, and all the free countries of the world, stood at the very gates of destiny in 1940 and 1941 when the Nazi tyranny threatened to engulf us, and when there was no “second front” except our own….

There were, in 1940, defeatists, who felt that prudence required submission or such terms as might be had. There were others who, while not accepting the inevitability of defeat, thought that victory was impossible.

Winston Churchill scorned to fall into either category, and he was right. With courage, and matchless eloquence, and human understanding, he inspired us and led us to victory.
On the fiftieth anniversary of the State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill, the Governor General of New Zealand, Sir Jerry Mateparae, spoke at Government House Auckland to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

On 30 January 1965—fifty years ago today—the world paused for a moment as the great statesman Winston Churchill was laid to rest. It was a day of mourning on a scale not often seen. Unusually, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II attended Churchill’s funeral, in what was a gathering of Presidents, Princes and Prime Ministers like no other. Footage of that day, even fifty years on, still holds enormous emotional power.

Amongst the pageantry, the gun salutes and the marching soldiers, it is perhaps the simplest tribute that stands out the most. As Churchill’s coffin passes up the Thames, carried by MV Havengore, London’s dockers one by one lower their crane-jibs in a final, moving salute.

It is an unexpected and very human moment. It is a reminder of the huge affection ordinary people had for that extraordinary man. A journalist, soldier and politician, he became Prime Minister not once but twice, and led Great Britain with steely determination through the darkest days of the Second World War. He was a man of great achievement, but someone who knew failure as well. Cast into the political wilderness on more than one occasion, his ability to overcome adversity only enhanced his reputation and the people’s admiration for him.

Some people have said the death of Winston Churchill marked the day the British Empire died. Indeed, Churchill was under no illusions that the post-war world was going to be a very different place. As he said in 1943, in a speech at Harvard University promoting Anglo-American unity, “The empires of the future are the empires of the mind.”

How appropriate, then, his life and name should continue to be commemorated with fellowships that encourage the transfer of ideas for the enrichment of others. Under the auspices of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, over 800 New Zealanders have been able to travel overseas to investigate areas of interest, bringing back with them fresh ideas and new ways of thinking and doing.

What is also noteworthy is the egalitarian nature of the fellowships. The Trust Board’s message to give “ordinary New Zealanders extraordinary opportunities” befits Churchill’s “man of the people” status.

As we celebrate 175 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and think about what nationhood means, we can see the value of these interactions. Through the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, New Zealanders have travelled and learned from other nations and cultures, while at the same time giving other nations and cultures the opportunity to glimpse things through Kiwi eyes. The Fellowships, with their link to Churchill and the twin purposes of enabling international understanding and bettering our communities and country, are where our past and future intersect.
REST IN PEACE
THE RT. HON. SIR MARTIN GILBERT
1936-2015

On Tuesday, 3 February, Sir Martin Gilbert passed away peacefully in London at the age of 78 after a long and serious illness. In addition to being the official biographer of Winston Churchill, he was a leading historian of the twentieth century, who produced more than eighty books on topics that included the two World Wars, Jewish studies and the Holocaust.

Sir Martin was a longtime honorary member of The Churchill Centre who spoke at numerous Centre events through the years and contributed many scholarly articles to this journal. The autumn 2014 edition of Finest Hour celebrated his career with tributes from his numerous friends, including former Prime Ministers Sir John Major and Gordon Brown.

Laurence Geller CBE, Chairman of The Churchill Centre, released the following statement:

The world has lost one of its greatest historians. The Churchill Centre and all those who have been touched by the life and times of Sir Winston Churchill mourn the one man who did more than all others to keep the memory of Britain’s finest son green. Sir Martin Gilbert’s vast and wide-ranging contributions to history have left us an eternal legacy that vividly and brilliantly links the past to the future. We are blessed to have had this great man in our lives.

Martin’s life was deeply enriched by his ever-encouraging, supporting and wonderful wife, Esther. We are so thankful to her and pray that soon her pain will recede and be replaced by happy and loving memories of an all-too-short life spent together.

On a personal note, Martin lit the flame of my interest in Churchill, nurtured and fed the fire within me and encouraged my lifelong passion for Sir Winston. He was a great friend and mentor to me, and my life was much richer for his being an important part of it. I am so very sad and will miss my friend.

Just this past Saturday I spent much of the day with Esther at Highgate Synagogue, where she and Martin prayed. I gave some remarks to the congregation about Churchill, his relationship with Israel and the Jewish people, and the relevance of his life and lessons to matters facing all freedom-loving people everywhere. Obviously Martin’s work formed the backbone of my comments. With hindsight, I feel so very lucky and indeed privileged to have had the opportunity not only to thank Martin publicly but also to have spent so much time with Esther.

This sad news, the deaths last year of our Patron, Mary Soames, and longtime honorary member the Eleventh Duke of Marlborough, combined with last week’s celebrations of Churchill’s incredible life, remind us of the all-too-quickly-diminishing close links we have with Sir Winston. It stresses the importance of the work we all do in keeping his memory green and his lessons so very relevant.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Esther.

A full obituary and final statements from those whose lives he touched will appear in the spring issue of Finest Hour.
Craning for Attention

DAVID FREEMAN

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill, BBC One produced a one-hour documentary presented by Jeremy Paxman. Using archival footage and interviews with survivors who took part in the ceremonies, the results are splendid—but for one not-so-small detail.

First, though, the good: Paxman speaks with London Mayor Boris Johnson, author of The Churchill Factor (reviewed in FH 166) about the relevancy of Churchill’s legacy. The ever-effusive Johnson will have no part of Paxman’s suggestion that Churchill may not be part of the consciousness of today’s youth.

Churchill’s grandchildren Sir Nicholas Soames and Celia Sandys provide personal memories from the family, while Lady Williams (formerly Jane Portal, personal secretary from 1949-55) illustrates the level of devotion among those who worked for Sir Winston.

Paxman visits the Churchill Archives Centre, where Director Allen Packwood shows him the original draft of Operation Hope Not, the official plans for the funeral. Martin Bell, who reported on events in 1965 for the BBC, recalls that revisionist historians had not yet got at Churchill at that time, and the crowds that turned out showed the genuine affection of those who had lived in Britain during the war.

Especially interesting are the memories of Anthony Mather, who was the Officer-in-Charge of the Bearer Party, and Lincoln Perkins, one of the bearers. They recall the moment when Lord Attlee, an honorary pall bearer though a frail 82, stumbled slightly going up the steps of St. Paul’s, causing the actual bearers behind him to falter—just—before successfully recovering.

Also touching are the interviews with Peter Wilson and Basil King, the trumpeters who played “The Last Post” and “Reveille” respectively from high in the dome of St. Paul’s at the end of funeral.

Where Paxman goes awry, however, is when he reaches the description of the coffin’s journey up the Thames on MV Havengore, a launch belonging to the Port of London. The dipping of the dock cranes along Hay’s Wharf as the boat passed carrying Churchill’s remains has gone down in legend as a “spontaneous” gesture, the moment Sir Nicholas recalls that “undid us all.”

It is more correct, though, to say that the tribute was “unexpected,” since it was not part of the official plans known to the family and released to the media. The idea originated with Sir David Burnett, the managing director of Hay’s Wharf Limited: “We thought we should add our own little tribute to Sir Winston,” he told the Daily Mail on 1 February 1965.

In an article prepared for the Radio Times to promote his documentary, Paxman explains that the crane salute also required a good deal of planning in advance, since extra generators needed to be brought in to operate all thirty-six cranes simultaneously, not a normal occurrence. Additionally, since the funeral took place on a Saturday, dockers would have to come in on a day off to handle the cranes.

Paxman alleges that the dockers were induced to cooperate only when they were promised payment for overtime. But in the Daily Mail story from 1965, Sir David is quoted as saying, “The dock workers concerned immediately agreed to give up their time off....Our men have not asked for any overtime. They will be paid something to cover their expenses.”

More egregious, however, is Paxman’s general assertion that most dockers disliked Churchill, implying that the crane salute only transpired by money changing hands. He interviews a man identified as a docker from 1965 who states, “I think I can speak for most of them,” when he asserts, “they didn’t like Churchill” and would not have operated the cranes during the funeral but for payment.
After the broadcast, The Churchill Centre received a letter from Julie Costin who expressed her anger by writing, “I was so annoyed by the dock worker in that programme saying that all the Dockers hated Sir Winston.” “I come from a long line of Dockers,” Julie continued, “including my two grandfathers, my father, several uncles and cousins….I only remember them speaking very highly of Sir Winston, even though they were lifelong Labour supporters as was most of the old working class.”

The tone of the documentary recovers, however, when Paxman interviews the fireman from the funeral train that bore the coffin from Waterloo to Hanborough, the station nearest to Bladon. Jim Lester remembers the thousands who lined the route, including the many old soldiers wearing their medals.

Finally, Paxman meets with Frank Hall, who was the Verger of the Parish Church of St. Martin’s when Churchill was finally laid to rest. Though the committal was a private ceremony, some villagers in Bladon took photographs of the coffin’s arrival, which Hall is now able to share half a century on.

Do watch this documentary now posted on YouTube, but also bear in mind the words of Sir David Burnett and Julie Costin when you do. ☻

The editor is grateful to Mr. Rodney Croft for assistance in researching this article.

Quietness and Peace: Churchill’s Grave

With Richard Dimbleby’s peerless commentary on the State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill ringing in our ears, reporter William Crawley conducts us on a radio tour that starts in London and leads to Bladon, where he explores the simple setting of Churchill’s grave.

After a symbolic railway journey, we arrive at the station of Hanborough and are picked up by local taxi driver Nicky, who points out that some visitors to close-by Blenheim Palace do not even realise that Churchill is buried so near. Arriving at the Parish Church of St. Martin’s, Churchwarden Mollie Hance notes how Churchill lies with his family next to his father, mother and brother, as “all of us would like to rest.” John Anson, who lives just outside the graveyard, explains how the villagers feel that they are the protectors of an important local tradition.

No one is more aware of this than the Rector, Canon Adrian Daffern, who guides the listener through the simple and peaceful Church and sees the people who come inside to reflect. Their names fill the visitors book. People travel not only from Britain but from Winnipeg, Detroit, Oklahoma, Kansas, California, and Alabama.

Daffern points out that villagers at the time of the burial downplayed their famous charge for fear of being overwhelmed. The graveside remains a place to be discovered by those who really wish to come. As a result the village has changed so little that visitors will sometimes ask, “Is that really THE Winston Churchill?”

This continuity of scene is underlined by a visit with John Forster, the archivist at Blenheim Palace, Churchill’s birthplace, which provides a ducal counterpoint to the simplicity of Bladon. Forster reads Churchill’s own words from 1895, on visiting his father’s grave:

“The service in the little Church was going on, and the voices of the children added to the beauty and restfulness of the spot. The hot sun of the last few days has dried up the grass a little—but the rose bushes are in full bloom and make the churchyard very bright. I was so struck by the sense of quietness and peace, as well as by the old world air of the place—that my sadness was not unmixed with solace. It is the spot of all the others he would have chosen.”

As it was then, so it is now.

Crawley observes that the grave is “inconspicuous, quiet, understated”—everything Sir Winston Churchill was not. Long-distance visitors are not merely tourists but participants in a commemoration initiated five decades ago with a slow funeral march in London.

Of Churchill, Crawley concludes, “he is buried not amongst kings, but with his family, not in splendid isolation, but sharing a grave with the woman he loved, the commoner with a common touch was not in the end just ‘a Great Man,’ he was also—a man.” ☻

Churchill’s Grave can be found on BBC iPlayer at bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04yjv7j, which is part of the Churchill season at bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02gx4g5

Robert Courts is a barrister living within sight of Churchill’s grave. He is a committee member of The Churchill Centre (UK) and sits on the Parish Council of St Martin’s.
It takes a big event to shake Bladon from its stride. The sun climbs slowly to illuminate the village in the shallow valley, as it has for a thousand years. A red kite floats lazily over the Church tower. The River Glyme flows through Blenheim Park round past the yellow sandstone cottages. The children walk to school and enthusiastically play in the schoolyard, as they did when Lord Randolph was buried and as they did through the whole of Winston Churchill’s long life. The Bladon Home Guard has come and gone; pubs, shops and dukes of Marlborough too. Yet, Bladon remains much the same: a small, quiet country village, the last resting place of a very great man.

Churchill’s burial in 1965 was Bladon’s day of days. Best estimates suggest that 900 policemen were on guard the day of the funeral—probably more than the village population then. Upwards of 125,000 people visited in the days and weeks after the funeral. The village had seen nothing like it before, and never will again.

And so while inevitably kindling “with pale gleams the passion of former days,” Bladon revisits its moment in the spotlight from fifty years ago. Once again there have been BBC journalists in the village, radio interviews, and television cameras at the Church. Frank Hall, then the verger, published some previously unseen photographs of the gravesite in the Daily Mail. The commemorations started at the beginning of January with steady media coverage of the Memorial Window appeal [See FH 166.] A private service of remembrance for the Churchill family took place on the twenty-fourth, the day of Sir Winston’s passing. But most memorable was the anniversary of the funeral on the thirtieth.

There are always a few visitors to the grave each day, even in winter, but on this fiftieth anniversary, there came a steady stream. They came from all over the world, from Tennessee to Tasmania, and from China to Denmark. As in 1965, whilst the Havengore made her way up the Thames, the BBC reported live from the graveyard, and as Richard Dimbleby noted then, there was a disproportionate number of young people present to pay their respects. Fittingly, in 2015 the primary school displayed a collection of children’s work illustrating their visions of Churchill. This was not a remembrance of the old and dusty for yesterday’s forgotten man. This was a living remembrance of a great man.

The most striking gestures have been the floral tributes in thanksgiving for Churchill’s life and service. There was not a small mound of flowers as there was in 1965, but the grave has been well-covered, and the writing difficult to read. To complete the week of commemoration, on Saturday the thirty-first the Church bell ringers repeated the ringing tribute from a half-century before “in 2 hours and 40 minutes, a peal of 5040 Plain Bob Minor.” It has been a fitting and striking remembrance of the village’s role in what Lady Churchill called not a funeral but a “triumph.”

But when the crowds have gone and the Churchwardens move the flowers from the grave, the river will still flow, the children still play, and Bladon will continue to watch, remember and quietly guard the memory and last resting place of Sir Winston Churchill.

Robert Courts

On the day of the funeral, the coffin, carried by members of the Queen’s Royal Irish Hussars, approaches the lychgate, where the public aspect of the funeral came to an end and gave way to the private family interment.
Above: St. Martin's Church, Bladon

Below: The Churchill family gravesite
The Churchill Centre’s 32nd International Conference will take place in Oxfordshire May 26–29, 2015. Blenheim Palace, Churchill’s birthplace and ancestral home, will host many of the events. The impressive array of speakers will include Sir David Cannadine, Celia Sandys, Jonathan Dimbleby, Robert Hardy and Lord Dobbs. The nearby Heythrop Park Crowne Plaza Hotel will serve as conference headquarters and co-host of events.

**Tuesday, May 26**
An exclusive dinner at Ditchley Park for conference benefactors

**Wednesday, May 27**
Attendees have the option of a garden party with special tours and activities followed by the opening dinner at the Heythrop Crowne Plaza that night.

**Thursday, May 28**
Conference sessions begin at the Heythrop Park Hotel featuring Celia Sandys, Sir David Cannadine and Jonathan Dimbleby. A black tie Gala Dinner in the Orangery at Blenheim Palace caps off the evening.

**Friday, May 29**
Conference sessions are held at Blenheim Palace and will conclude in the afternoon. Transportation will be provided between the Heythrop Crowne Plaza and Blenheim Palace.

To register online and for more information please go to:
www.bitly.com/BlenheimConferenceUS