

Finest Hour



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Committee, which took some of the most sensitive decisions in 1940, including the decision not to open peace negotiations after the fall of France. For Churchill's biographer, the unforeseen opening of the official archives made possible a quite different, intricate and comprehensive narrative. It also demanded, if justice were to be done to Churchill's achievements, two volumes more than had been envisaged in the original scheme.

It now became possible to go far beyond even Churchill's own six-volume account of his war leadership; to see the actual arguments which were put forward at the time for and against every element of war policy, to see where Churchill prevailed and where he was overruled, and above all to trace the impact of ULTRA—the British eavesdropping on the most secret messages passing between German headquarters and the senior commanders on land, sea and air.

Also opened as a result of the thirty-year rule were the full, unedited transcripts of every meeting and telegraphic exchange between Churchill and Roosevelt, and between Churchill and Stalin. Churchill's opening remarks when he and Stalin met for the first time in 1942 were: "I would not have come to Moscow unless I felt sure that I would be able to discuss realities." The first of those realities was the Anglo-American inability to mount a Second Front in 1942, or even in 1943. The British interpreter jotted down on his note pad how, on hearing this bad news, "Stalin's face crumpled up into a frown." Patiently, Churchill set about explaining to the Soviet leader the reasons for the delay.

By combining Churchill's private papers with the government's archives, every episode of Churchill's stormy career can now be separated from the long and often bizarre accumulation of myth and half truth. It is possible to trace in detail, for example, Churchill's determined attempts to give the miners' grievances due weight during the Coal Strike in 1926, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, and his equal determination to end the Cold War by urging President Eisenhower to accept a new concept, that of a summit, to be held with Stalin's successors. "I have a strong belief that Soviet self-interest will be their guide," Churchill explained to Eisenhower in May 1953, over fifty-five years ago, and he added: "My hope is that it is their self-interest which will bring about an easier state of affairs."

Churchill's second premiership, portrayed by his doctor, Lord Moran, as a time of dotage, can now be seen, thanks to the opening of the government archives, as a period when he was very much alert to the many issues pressing in upon his fellow countrymen, from housing to the hydrogen bomb. His desire for a summit on the nuclear issue, and the care and precision with

which he argued his case, are hardly the marks of a senile Victorian.

Forty years ago it was my good fortune to have been given by Merton College, where I was a junior research fellow, an extended sabbatical, so that no teaching, lecturing, examining or administrative duties could come between me and the biography, the completion of which, at times, seemed very distant. Once, however, coming across a phrase by Churchill—"work, which is a joy"—I understood at once what he meant. I am lucky to have had an unbroken forty years of such joy. ☞

Remember the Liberal

CAMERON HAZLEHURST

Every morning when I am in Canberra, Australia's national capital, I step out from University House at the Australian National University to be greeted across the road by a massive charcoal metal figure, a standing surprise among eucalypts, wattle and native grass.

The improbable bronze presence of Winston Spencer Churchill is a metaphor of his influence in landscapes that he never saw, a perpetual reminder of a global impact more than one hundred years in the making.

The Churchill I know best was not yet the saviour of his nation. Rather he was a restless young politician, impatient with political parties that clung to obsolescent ideas, searching for new ways to make the country whose Liberal government he had joined a better place for all its citizens.

He was a man of emotion and empathy, of passion and purpose. He was eager to understand how to fight unemployment, poverty, and sickness. Formidable in advocacy, he was always willing to negotiate and compromise to achieve reform. Excoriated by some of those he left behind in the Conservative Party, his motives suspected by many of the Liberals with whom he served, Churchill frequently defied expectations. Full of ego he was indeed, yet capable of introspection and compassion.

Until war came to shatter their hopes, he searched for a path of political unity with like-minded opponents as well as his own party allies. More than any of his Cabinet colleagues other than his greatest contemporary, David Lloyd George, he faced the realities of the spiralling cost of modern government. He accepted the logic of new forms of revenue raising including land taxes that were anathema to many of his wealthy friends.

When defence needs could no longer be subordinated to the social reform agenda, he risked his career in standing >>

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HAZLEHURST, *continued...*

up to those who thought his demands for naval expansion were themselves inflammatory.

With his intimate involvement in the machinery of politics, and a practised hand in harnessing the press to his causes, Churchill was already in 1908 one of the first politicians of the modern era. He should be remembered in 2008 for his youthful policy innovation and political courage—as a man of manifold and enviable achievement long before he led the world against the Nazi tyranny. Everyone knows the rest of the story. ✂

It All Depends on Us

WARREN F. KIMBALL

Who cares about the ultimate DWM (dead white male)? Yes, he was present during the greatest threat posed to civilization since... I know of no greater threat than a Europe and perhaps a world owned and operated by Adolf Hitler and the pathological sociopaths who surrounded him. Of course that explains and excuses nothing.

OK. He is fun to study. Unlike his contemporary, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill is less a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma than robust and overwhelming. And he wrote everything down! He was always where the action was, and frequently part of the action, which makes for significant reading. By the time the Second World War began, he led (or would soon lead) a nation that had lost its edge, the empire he loved beginning to collapse around him as nationalism took its toll. But that hardly makes him irrelevant.

People love inspiration. It is a curse and a blessing. Choose the wrong inspirational, charismatic figure and you slide down the path to perdition. Choose the right one and you move yourself, and perhaps the world, in the right direction. Winston Churchill inspired people. Historians, contemporaries, casual observers are all moved by his words, his actions, his indomitable courage.

Did he make mistakes? Of course. Who doesn't? Did he contradict himself? Routinely: witness his strikingly dif-

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ferent reactions to the Soviet Union in and out of a leadership office. His emotions often (thankfully) took him to places he (and his advisers) wished to avoid. He had one foot of clay, but the other was, for better and for worse, plopped firmly in the world of realpolitik. Emerson said, "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds...." Certainly Churchill did not have a little mind.

But this is the fortieth anniversary of *Finest Hour*, not Sir Winston Churchill, and *Finest Hour* deserves a word or two. For one thing, *FH* will never catch up. Assuming we grow wiser as we grow older, then Churchill is far wiser than we.

Finest Hour has come a long way from its cozy origins as a newsy little trivia sheet, replete with Churchill hagiography and anecdotes, before it moved toward analytical yet entertaining looks at Churchill and what he did. Then, over the last decade, *FH* has become a serious (and still entertaining) journal, earning the sobriquet "The Journal of Winston Churchill." *FH* has taken our man from the clutches of the worshipful and given him over to the appreciative—those who can look at him, warts and all.

But the shift has so far been on *FH*'s terms, not on the terms of a bunch of wanna-be academic scholars. That forces the editor to walk a very fine line between nostalgia and history, which he has done with acrobatic skill. Articles remain focused on and around Churchill, as they should be. Letters to the editor continue to offer a stimulating and amusingly candid dialogue.

To accusations and dismissals that *FH* is parochial and narrowly conceived, I ask: How can serious study of the extraordinarily broad and international "life and times" of Winston Churchill be too narrow? The most prestigious scholarly journal in the United States, *The Journal of American History*, publishes articles about only U.S. history—talk about parochial and narrow. Sometimes it seems that the only people interested in high politics and politicians are students and the people who buy books.

Yet, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain a quality journal based on a single person, however fascinating and important. We (The Churchill Centre) are unabashedly geopolitical (with occasional domestic excursions). So was Sir Winston. But there remain legitimate and important social and cultural issues of context (going well beyond his paintings and brickwork) that set a powerful and sometimes overriding context, one that more than occasionally frustrated his own geopolitical maneuverings.

"Keeping the memory green and the record accurate" will be fun...and worthwhile. Making Churchill an inspiration to future generations is a challenge; whether or not that happens depends heavily, perhaps primarily, on the reach and persuasiveness of *Finest Hour*. Happy fortieth! ✂