



## *The Churchill Bookshelf*

*By John Plumpton*

It would require a long lifetime to read all the books about Winston Churchill but these books provide an overview of the diversity of a remarkable life.

A preferred reading list is a very personal thing but there can be much fun and edification in challenging some of these titles and inserting one's own choices.

Books are listed in alphabetical order by author with additions of other books that will enhance the chosen title.

**Addison, Paul: *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*, 1975.**

This book addresses the question so many people have asked: why was Winston Churchill's government defeated at the end of the Second World War? There is no doubt that he was seen by many as the 'saviour of his country' (historian A.J.P. Taylor) in 1940, but the war changed the values of the British people who did not believe that the Conservatives were the party to give them the future for which they had fought. It's a complex issue and much research has been done since the publication of this book but this book is a good place to start. Addison's ***Churchill on the Home Front, 1900-1955* (1992)** emphasizes the truth of the adage that "all politics is local" and explains how Churchill often took an independent path between the political parties. Addison's ***Churchill: The Unexpected Hero* (2005)** explores his reputation, nationally and internationally, both parallel to his 60+ year political career and up to the time the book was published.

**Blake, Robert and Wm. Roger Louis: *Churchill, A Major New Assessment of His Life in Peace and War*, 1993.**

There are several books based on collections of papers presented at conferences on Churchill. The advantage of this approach is that they explore many facets of his life and career; the disadvantage is that the papers are often shorter than one would like. This collection, from a conference at the University of Texas at Austin in March 1991, includes submissions from some of the most esteemed historians at the time, including not only the editors but also David Cannadine, Gordon Craig, Peter Clarke, Henry Pelling, Michael Howard, Philip Ziegler, David Reynolds, Warren Kimball, John Keegan, Stephen Ambrose, Roy Jenkins, Robert Rhodes James, and many others. Truly

an all-star team of historians. Topics covered include Churchill and ...Family, Germany, France, Social Reform, Economic Ideas, Lloyd George, Labour Movement, First World War, Zionism, British Empire, Monarchy, Appeasement, Radio and Cinema, in 1940, becoming Prime Minister, Japan and the Pacific, Roosevelt and Special Relationship, Stalin, Strategy, Defence Chiefs, Navy, Eisenhower and Second World War, Special Intelligence, Science, Europe, India, Egypt, Government 1951-1955, as Parliamentarian, Orator and Statesman. Every subsequent study has to have been built on the work of participants in this conference.

**Charmley, John: Churchill, The End of Glory, 1993.**

Many historians have been accused of merely furthering the 'Churchill school of history' which saw Churchill as "the saviour of his country," even to the point of hagiography. Notwithstanding the fact that Churchill was chosen as BBC's Greatest Briton of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, recent studies offer reappraisals of his achievements. Amongst the 'revisionists' Charmley created the greatest furor with this book, but it made many people discuss the 'costs' of the victory over Nazi Germany, including the post-war domination of Eastern Europe by Stalin's Soviet Union and the rapid contraction of the British Empire. In some ways Charmley extends Robert Rhodes James's thesis in **Churchill, A Study in Failure, 1900-1939 (1970)** to Churchill until 1965.

**Churchill, Winston S.: My Early Life, 1930.**

Although best known for his war leadership and his oratory, Churchill made his living by his pen because, although a child of the British aristocracy, he had to write to maintain his preferred life-style. He wrote over 50 books and hundreds of articles (for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953) so where to start? Begin with his autobiography which gives significant insights into the forces that developed his world-view, and it is also a joy just to experience his prose. Of his many other works, the best-known is his 6-volume history of **The Second World War (1948-1953)**. These volumes were the beginning of the Churchill interpretation of the war taken up by many historians, but they must now be read in conjunction with **David Reynolds: In Command of History, Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War (2007)**. As well as giving us a window into the world of publishing and post-war British politics, Reynolds does an incomparable job of assessing what Churchill wrote and why, and what he left out, and why. One reviewer said that Reynolds's book shows that Churchill's history is an example of what happens when "history is written by the victors." An abridgement of the six volumes, prepared by Denis Kelly and published as **Memoirs of the Second World War (1959)**, contains an Epilogue in which Churchill set forth his view of the postwar era from 1945 to 1957.

Historian J.H. Plumb said that unless you understand Churchill's feeling for history, you cannot understand Churchill. That feeling is expressed in his 4-volume **History of the English Speaking Peoples (1956-1958)**. He began his story in 1937 with a promise to deliver in 1939 but he had to set it aside until his final retirement in 1955. Historian Henry Steele Commager arranged a one-volume abridgement published as **Churchill's History of the English-Speaking Peoples (1965)**. Churchill's History should be read along with Peter Clarke's **Mr. Churchill's Profession (2012)**. Clarke shows that this history was written by many hands, not just Churchill's, but it also provides evidence to the truth of Churchill's belief that "words last forever."

A former research assistant to Churchill, (Sir) Maurice Ashley described his experiences working for him in the 1930s and provided insights into Churchill's writing of history in **Churchill the Historian, 1968.**

**Dobbs, Michael: The Churchill Novels, 2002-2010.**

If you like your history in fiction, this is the 4-volume series for you: **Churchill's War, Never Surrender, Churchill's Hour, and Churchill's Triumph.** Best known for his **House of Cards** series of books, Dobbs does an admirable job of mixing fact and fiction. He knows his Churchill stuff (although he puts famous quotes totally out-of-context) and he also knows how to tell a compelling tale.

Michael and Patrick McMenamin are writing a series of Churchill fiction: **The Winston Churchill Thrillers**, all based on the pre-war years. Thus far published (from 2010-2012) are **The DeValera Deception** (Ireland in 1929), **The Parsifal Pursuit** (Germany in 1931), and **The Gemini Agenda** (USA in 1932). More volumes are forthcoming and all are enjoyable reads.

Also working in the 'Churchill field' and worth reading is Susan Elia Macneal. **Mr. Churchill's Secretary (2012)** was the first in a mystery series that has the Prime Minister play a significant role

**Gilbert, Martin: Winston S. Churchill, The Official Biography, 1874-1965, 1966-1988.**

This 8-volume biography is an essential reference for anyone who wishes to know a lot about Churchill. Begun by Churchill's son, Randolph, it was taken over in volume 3 by one of his research assistants, (now Sir) Martin Gilbert. Randolph and Martin had exclusive access to Winston's papers until the biography was completed. Companion volumes of documents, letters, memoranda, etc accompany the volumes. The Companion volumes have now reached 1942 but health issues have prevented Gilbert from completing them. Others have taken over that task. Some historians have criticized the biography for being more of a chronicle of events than a true interpretive biography. Gilbert also published a one-volume **Churchill: A Life (1992)** that included material not in the multi-volume series. Gilbert wrote two short works that are certainly worth attention. **Continue to Pester, Nag and Bite, Churchill's War Leadership (2004)** is the complete text of the 2004 Barbara Frum Lecture given at the University of Toronto and broadcast by the CBC. **The Will of the People, Winston Churchill and Parliamentary Democracy (2006)** was published with the assistance of the 'Churchill Society for the Advancement of Parliamentary Democracy'. Gilbert's **In Search of Churchill (1997)** tells the story of how he did the research for the biography, including his meetings and interviews with many people who knew and worked with Churchill. It is of interest not only to students of Churchill's life but also to anyone interested in the field of historiography.

**Jenkins, Roy: Churchill: A Biography, 2001.**

There are many one-volume biographies of Churchill and it is difficult to recommend one as being the best. That decision often depends on the emphasis preferred by the reader. Jenkins puts his emphasis on Churchill's political career, a good decision because Jenkins had a significant political career himself. He provides little new evidence about Churchill but has some entertaining, if biting, anecdotes and assessments of people. Jenkins also

wrote a biography of Gladstone but he concludes his Churchill book with the assessment that he once thought Gladstone the greatest British prime minister. Now he gives the top prize to Churchill. Jenkins is a big book and sometimes heavy going so for concise and balanced accounts see **Ashley Jackson: Churchill (2014)** or **Geoffrey Best: Churchill, A Study in Greatness, (2002)**. On Churchill's the war leadership in World War II consult **Max Hastings: Finest Years, Churchill as Warlord, 1940-1945 (2005)**. Like Jenkins, Hastings pulls no punches in his assessments of people and events. Both should be read in conjunction with Gilbert on whom they depended for much of their information.

**Langworth, Richard: Churchill By Himself, 2008.**

This book is subtitled **The Definitive Collection of Quotations** (by Churchill), and it is indeed just that. There is so much misinformation out there about what Churchill said, especially across the internet, that no one should quote Churchill on any topic without first consulting this book. Of particular interest is the chapter on 'Red Herrings: False Attributions', what Churchill did not say (although he wished he had said some of them.) Langworth is the editor of **Finest Hour, The Journal of Winston Churchill**, published by The Churchill Centre. The Foreword was written by Lady Soames and the Introduction by Sir Martin Gilbert.

**Manchester, William: The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, 1983-2012.**

This biography has 3 volumes: **Visions of Glory, 1874-1932 (1983), Alone, 1932-1940 (1988), and Defender of the Realm (2012)**. Manchester was unable to complete the trilogy and the final volume was written by Paul Reid using some of the notes made by Manchester. The volumes have been criticized for being too long and have some historical errors, but there is no doubt that both Manchester and Reid were outstanding writers and these volumes are a pleasure to read. If well over 2,000 pages are too many then much can be gained by reading the Preamble of each: **The Lion at Bay, The Lion Caged, and The Lion Hunted**.

**Ramsden, John: Man of the Century, Winston Churchill and His Legend Since 1945, 2002.**

A giant in his time, Churchill's influence has continued to grow since his death in 1965. Churchill societies abound around the world and books continue to pile up on the shelves (and in computers) of not only professional historians but also the general public. One can understand why the Churchill Archive, Chartwell and even the Churchill War Rooms exist in England but why the interest elsewhere? This book is a unique study of how and why that happened in so many countries, particularly Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. Ramsden said his aim was "to understand how [Churchill's] fame was created, perceived, marketed, spun and in some cases even fabricated."

**Roberts, Andrew: Masters and Commanders, How Roosevelt, Churchill, Marshall and Alanbrooke Won the War in the West, 2008.**

Churchill believed that Britain could be victorious on World War II only if the United States entered the war and he unceasingly courted the Americans before and after their entry. Central to the alliance was his relationship with Franklin Roosevelt, but both political leaders were dependent on their chief military

advisers, George Marshall and Alan Brooke. This book explores the stresses and strains of four strong-willed men who had to pull together to get that victory, even when they had quite different views on how to do it.

For the story on how the partnership of West and East had even greater strains, consult **Jonathan Fenby: Alliance: The Inside Story of How Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill Won One War and Began Another, (2008).**

**Soames, Mary: Winston Churchill: His Life as a Painter, A Memoir by His Daughter, 1990.**

In 1915 Churchill thought his political career was over because of the Dardanelles fiasco. For a highly-ambitious politician, only 40 years old, this could have been a soul-destroying disaster. He was saved from his ‘black dog’ (depression) by taking up painting and it became a life-long release from stress as well as an outlet for his restless creative juices. Lady Soames’s (Mary Churchill) account puts her father’s painting development in the context of his political and personal life.

Mary inherited her father’s writing skills and authored several wonderful books about her family, including a biography of her mother, **Clementine Churchill (1979, revised 2002)**. She told the story of her own remarkable life in **A Daughter’s Tale, The Memoir of Churchill’s Youngest Child (2012)**.

Another authoritative account of the paintings is **David Coombs and Minnie Churchill: Sir Winston Churchill: His Life and His Paintings, (2004, revised 2011)**. Mary Soames wrote a Foreword for that book. Minnie Churchill was married to Churchill’s grandson, Winston Churchill.

**Toye, Richard: The Roar of the Lion: The Untold Story of Churchill’s World War II Speeches, 2013.**

It was once said that “Churchill marshaled the English language and sent it into battle.” It has become gospel that a major factor in the Allied victory was the inspiration provided by Churchill’s speeches. Toye offers new insights into how the speeches were created, delivered and received at home, by the Allies and neutrals, and within enemy and occupied countries.

Toye has also written **Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness. (2007)** and **Churchill’s Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made, (2010)**. Toye’s work is an example of how many young historians, born after Churchill died, view the life and achievements of “The Greatest Briton of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”