



In the Footsteps of Churchill

By Richard Holmes

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Richard Holmes' insightful new biography of one of Britain's greatest leaders is both a study in character and the story of an extraordinary career. Much has been written about Churchill's role as British prime minister during the crisis years of the Second World War, but in this book Holmes uses new material to investigate the influences that shaped the man: his troubled school days, his flamboyant politician father, Randolph, and his famously attractive American mother, Jennie. Holmes argues that the qualities that made Churchill great also led him to commit catastrophic blunders. The same recklessness that made him a hero when he was a young correspondent during the Boer War arguably cost thousands of Allied lives during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, and may also have contributed to the fall of Singapore in 1942. "In the Footsteps of Churchill" takes us on an exhilarating journey through Harrow School, the North-West Frontier, the Sudan, South Africa, 10 Downing Street and his beloved Chartwell; a journey that begins in the aristocratic splendor of Blenheim Palace and ends in the quiet of a country churchyard not far away - the compass of an extraordinary life in a few Oxfordshire acres. 'Richard Holmes provides a truly fresh interpretation of the great man...Holmes's mature and wise portrait is studded with facts about the period and episodes in Churchill's life that amuse, engage and entice. The author's eye for the telling detail, as well as his deep immersion in all the relevant archives, raises this book far above the common ruck of Churchilliana' - Andrew Roberts. 'This supremely skillful military historian achieves a freshness of approach that makes Churchill hard to put down' - Max Hastings, "Mail on Sunday".

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. A 2002 BBC poll established Churchill as history's greatest Briton. Leading British military historian Holmes offers not a biography but an interpretation of the man, one that highlights the ironic fact that the social and political order Churchill defended has virtually disappeared. His Churchill was an unquiet spirit; Holmes describes him as spinning from crisis to crisis for most of his life, gaining experience and wisdom the hard way: helping to commit an unprepared Britain to war in 1914; forging '20s economic policies that left later governments unable to undertake the military buildup Churchill then demanded; failing to maintain Britain's position as a great power after WWII. Both before and after that war, Churchill, Holmes shows, devoted his considerable talent as a historian to misrepresenting the historical record to his advantage. But in 1940 Winston Churchill was able to define his and Britain's century in battle against the Nazis, and, for Holmes, that has been enough to secure his greatness. Holmes has no use for the revisionist argument that Britain was best advised to compromise in the crucial summer of 1940. Instead he demonstrates that Churchill's eloquence, courage and honor left an unforgettable legacy to the British people, and to free men and women everywhere. Holmes similarly demolishes charges that Churchill was a racist and a warmonger. He presents a man truly larger than life. (*June*)

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From [Booklist](#)

As in Paul Addison's *Churchill* (2005), this analytic portrayal of Winston Churchill's personality assumes readers are familiar with the basic biography. Tackling Churchill's quip that he knew what history would say about him because he intended to write it, Holmes subjects Churchill's voluminous output to examination as part of his consideration of Churchill's traits and abilities, from his boyish egotism to his enduring eloquence. Holmes attaches the drama of Churchill's life to a framework of the two primary political trends that dominated British affairs during his career: the abandonment of imperial isolation as a foreign policy and the growth of a centralized welfare state. Weighing Churchill's start as a radical liberal and later movement to the right, Holmes turns over the criticisms accumulated by opponents (and later biographers) and adds more about Churchill's two performances as First Lord of the Admiralty. Fluent with Churchillian details, Holmes, despite manifest reservations, shapes them into a saliency that supports the case for Churchill's historical greatness. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

The greatest Briton-so a 2002 BBC poll declared Winston Churchill-comes in for scrutiny in this absorbing profile by military historian Holmes. Of the 20th-century's politicians, Churchill seemed ablest to swirl in the currents of controversy without drowning. He was eminently practical; he worked tremendously hard; he was unquestionably brave; and in almost everything he turned his hand to, he proved a "gifted amateur." He also nourished contradictions, among them an odd steadiness against what was almost certainly advanced alcoholism and a fondness for wearing uniforms; "apart from that foible," remarks Holmes of the latter, "he was the antithesis of a militarist." Yet for all his fine qualities, Churchill was not altogether admirable; as Holmes reveals, he was something of a bully toward his widowed (but by no means cowed) mother, and throughout his life he was an opportunist through and through. Early fame came to him, for instance, when Churchill escaped from a prison camp during the Boer War, leaving two fellow inmates behind; though Holmes believes that Churchill did not intend to abandon them, "I cannot imagine him waiting too long on the far side of that wall." Churchill, however, was plenty self-critical and self-aware. One of Holmes's discoveries in the course of this study of character is especially revealing: haunted by the needless deaths of

thousands of Commonwealth soldiers at Gallipoli, a WWI campaign he had championed, Churchill was near-paralyzed at the thought that the Normandy landings of WWII might fail. In the face of neocons who are now busily trying to claim Churchill as a forebear, Holmes reminds us that Churchill was a liberal whom opportunity, and opportunism, swept into the Conservative Party, "which only grudgingly accepted him." He reminds us, too, that Churchill was early on an advocate of a strong united Europe-in part as a way of containing American expansionism as well as Soviet ambitions. A nuanced portrait of leadership, and a fine complement to recent portraits of Churchill by, among others, John Keegan and John Lukacs. (Kirkus Reviews)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Margaret Calderon:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to often the Mall. How about open or even read a book eligible In the Footsteps of Churchill? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have other opinion?

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