

REVIEWS

Concise Churchill

Paul Addison: *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Given the spate of biographies (including the magisterial tome by the late Roy Jenkins) and other more specialised works on aspects of Churchill's life and career, one might well question the need for yet another, relatively short biography of the wartime leader. Any doubts, however, are immediately dispelled by a perusal of this immensely lucid, incisive and authoritative tome. The author is now the Director of the Centre for Second World War Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He is well known as the author of the authoritative and pioneering works, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (1975, revised edition 1994) and *Churchill on the Home Front 1900–1955* (1992).

The present book has its origins in a lengthy article (rather more than 30,000 words) written by Addison for the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. The present offering is more than twice that length and was published to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of Churchill's death in January 1965. It is a pleasure to turn its pages, savour the narrative account, and read the array of carefully selected pungent quotations taken from a rich haul of sources, many of them new or little-known. The author is impressively well read, displaying a complete mastery of the secondary sources at his disposal.

Professor Addison intertwines two themes: the story of Churchill's life and career, and the story of his subsequent reputation. Writing from the perspective of

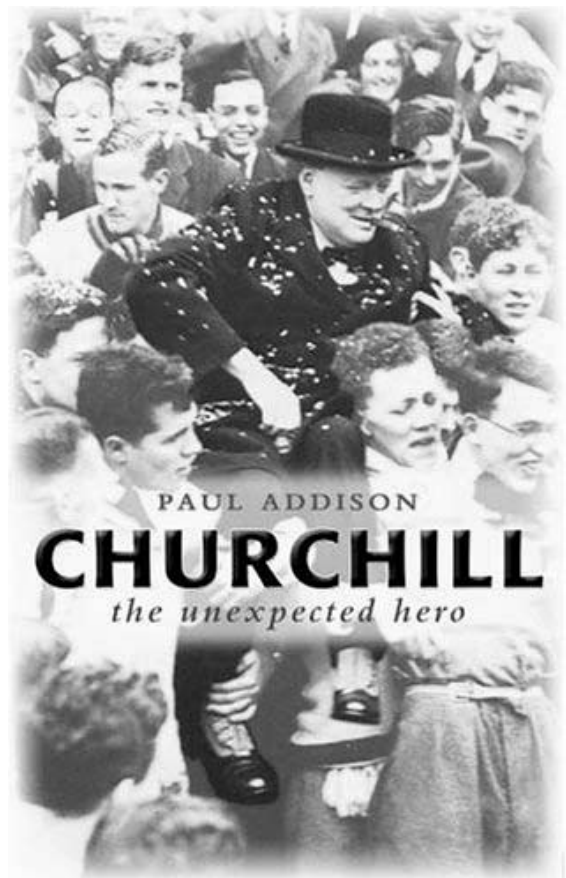
the start of the twenty-first century, he is able to stand back and analyse the reasons why the wartime premier was transformed into a national hero and the remarkable endurance of his status in spite of repeated attempts to demolish him. In a masterly, all too brief Chapter Eight, 'Churchill Past and Present' (pp. 246–54), the themes outlined in the book are conveniently summarised against the backdrop of the conclusions of a number of other historians. It may be hoped that the author will be able to expand the themes of this chapter into a further substantial scholarly article.

We are given masterly analyses of why Churchill 'crossed the line' to sit on the Liberal benches in the House of Commons, his heavy-handed response to the suffragette outrages and the strikes in south Wales before the First World War, and his role as First Lord of the Admiralty during the war. Later chapters survey his work as Chancellor of the Exchequer under Baldwin in the 1920s and his opposition to appeasement in the '30s. The war years are meticulously covered, followed by a briefer outline of the period after 1945.

The author draws most of his material from published works. Primary source materials cited in the references are relatively few, although it should be added that many of Churchill's own papers have been published in fourteen large volumes. Addison was no doubt constrained by considerations of space. The same reason no doubt accounts for a rather breathless air to the

narrative at times. In particular, I was surprised that more was not made of the Norway debate of May 1940 which dramatically propelled Churchill to the premiership. Also, the account of Churchill during the post-war Labour governments and indeed of his peace-time premiership of 1951–55 is perhaps a little cursory compared with the rest of the book. The general election campaigns of February 1950 and October 1951, when Churchill achieved his lifelong ambition of being *elected* prime minister by the British people for the first time at the relatively late age of 77, are given notably short shrift.

I was rather surprised that Addison did not include a small selection of photographs and cartoons which would certainly have added to the appeal and interest of a very attractive book, a real credit to the Oxford University Press. In particular publication of the highly significant cartoons by David Low to which the author refers on pages 167 and 217 would have been a most welcome addition.



The book is an admirable introductory text for those unfamiliar with the course of Churchill's life and career. It will appeal immensely both to the general reader and to students in the sixth form and at colleges and universities. The volume is a powerful reminder of the fine line which can often separate an outcast from a hero. OUP is also

to be congratulated on selling the book for the bargain price of £12.99, well within the reach of the book lover, and contrary to their usual practice!

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A story of four Liberal Parties

Roy Douglas: *Liberals: A History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties* (Hambledon, 2005)

Reviewed by **William Wallace**

It's no easy task to capture the 150-year history of a party in 300 pages. The different elements of a party and its tradition, intellectual and social as well as party political and personality driven, shift over time. In such a compressed history the reader needs a convincing narrative: threads of continuity that link together the different leaders, the periods in power and periods in the wilderness. The underlying question, of course, must be how far the contemporary Liberal Democrat party stands for similar principles and policies, or represents similar interests, to those of its Edwardian and Victorian predecessors.

Roy Douglas has an encyclopaedic knowledge of twentieth-century British history. He fought five elections as a Liberal candidate, from 1950 to 1964, through the party's thinnest years. He published an earlier party history (covering the years from 1895 to 1970) thirty years ago, and has interviewed a great many leading Liberals over many years. The focus of this book, however, is not on the Liberal Party as he knew it best, staggering out of near-extinction to revival in the 1950s and 1960s. One hundred of the 300 pages are devoted to the twenty years between 1905 and 1924: the greatest years of

Liberal government, and the most catastrophic collapse. He argues that the Liberals were regaining the ground they had lost to the independent Labour Party in 1911–13; 'once the Liberal Government began to adopt a truly radical programme, and also arranged for the payment of MPs, the Labour Party began to wither away' (p. 149). This leaves him with some difficulty in explaining the rapid collapse of the Liberal Party over the following ten years; he attributes this firstly to the traumas of the war, and secondly to the deep rift between Asquith and Lloyd George.

He is much less confident in explaining how the disorganised and dispirited rabble that were the Liberals in Parliament by 1924 nevertheless managed to linger on for another generation, or to what extent the new members drawn in from the late 1950s onwards resembled the old. This is a pity, because he was himself one of those who kept the old faith, and fought in hopeless circumstances, in the post-war years. There are hints of his personal preferences – for free trade, against European integration – but no account of the rowdy Liberal Assemblies at which Oliver Smedley, Arthur Seldon and others defended

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traditional economic liberalism, before walking off to found the Institute of Economic Affairs. He was not a fan of Jo Grimond, who gets far too little credit here for his role in the revival; he is, however, a strong defender of Jeremy Thorpe. He holds, correctly, that but for David Owen the Alliance between the Liberals and the Social Democrats would have moved swiftly towards a merger after the 1983 election, and that the 1987 election campaign was a near-disaster. David Owen, he concludes, 'must stand with Joseph Chamberlain as one of the great wreckers of British politics' (p. 300).

The primary focus of the chapters which cover the seventy-five years after 1924 are on the leadership, the parliamentary party, its repeated struggles to rebuild – and finance – an organisation outside Westminster, and the occasional glories of by-election gains. There is very little on the evolution of policy, beyond an insistence that a commitment to liberty (if not always to free trade and free markets) has distinguished the party from Gladstone's tenure to the present day. There is surprisingly little on Liberal thought and Liberal thinkers. And there's sadly little on the importance of religious nonconformity to the party, which might have thrown some light on the difficulties many local parties had with working men as candidates at the end of the nineteenth century, when the pillars of the nonconformist churches were often their employers. There is evidence from other studies, and from the Butler–Stokes electoral studies of the 1960s, that nonconformist roots played a significant part in regenerating local parties in the 1960s, and in inclining hesitant voters towards Liberal support. Douglas also virtually ignores the importance of community politics, the rebuilding of Liberal support and organisation from the bottom up through local government over the past forty years.